United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Julian Bussgang
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PREFACE

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JULIAN BUSSGANG
December 17, 2002

Beginning Tape One

Question: Good morning, Julian.

Answer: Good morning.

Q: Nice to have you in Washington.

A: Nice to be here.

Q: Tell me when you were born.

A: I was born on March 26, 1925.

Q: And where were you born?

A: I was born in Lwów, Poland, now it's called Lviv, U-Ukraine.

Q: And what was your name at birth?

A: My name at birth was Julian and actually my middle name Jacob, and my father and mother decided to call me Julian because they wanted an international name and they thought Julian, if I ever went -- were to travel, would work well.

Q: And your last name was Bussgang?

A: Exactly.

Q: Yes.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And the same spelling. It's really important to get a sense of what your family was like, so let's talk about your mother and father and sister, and your memories of that early time in Lwów.

A: My father was a very serious man. He was born in Rohatyn, which is town south of Lwów, and he started his schooling in [indecipherable] but decided to leave it and went to regular public

school. And then he went to an educational seminary to become a teacher and then he became inspector of schools, and then he went into business and moved to Lwów. And my mother's -- her maiden name w-was Philip, and she was from Lwów, and her mother was from Kraków. And my parents married, my father was already a little older, I think, and he was like nine years older than my mother, and -- and they had two children, my sister Janina, or Janine as you would say in English, and myself. My sister was born in 1923, I was born in 1925. There was only like a year and a half difference between us, so we were very close. And we were a very close family. My father worked in an office downstairs in the same house where we lived, and actually my mother worked with him, and we had help, domestic help in the apartment. And we were a close family mostly, with my mother's sisters, my aunts and uncles. And I had a very warm and nice childhood. I grew up very secure.

Q: Tell me what did your father do? What sort of business was it?

A: He was representing a number of large companies in the region like Lever Brothers and some companies from Holland. And it was mostly products that didn't require refrigeration, was like starch and -- and soap powders, things like this. And so a -- and he was in business of selling to retailers, so that actually he was quite -- we weren't overly rich, but we were very well-to-so.

Q: So when -- when you were born, he was already fairly successful?

A: He was fairly successful, yes.

Q: Right. So you -- you grew up in a fairly privileged environment, I guess.

A: Right, right, and my mother's family, one of my uncles was a very prominent physician and another uncle was a banker and --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- and had his own bank. And he was the one who arranged the marriage betwe -- my father had been his client -- between my mother my father.

Q: I see.

A: He got them acquainted.

Q: Tell me about the per -- your relationship to your father and your relationship to your mother. Were you closer to one than to the other?

A: I may have been a little bit closer to my mother, and my father may have been a little closer to my sister.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But actually we were all pretty close because we were all in the same house.

Q: House, right.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you ever work with your father? Did you ever --

A: No.

Q: -- go into the [indecipherable]? No, you didn't.

A: Never. I was a very good student as a child, and -- and because my sister was a year and a half older than myself, I f-followed her very closely and I went to school early, because once she went to school, I wanted to go to school.

Q: Right.

A: So I was always the youngest in my class.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And I also had private tutoring in German and private tutoring in mathematics because I was particularly interested in mathematics.

Q: Mathematics.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Were you also close with your sister?

A: I was very close with my sister. We actually shared a room for a long time.

Q: Really?

A: Yes.

Q: And was she good to you as an older sister?

A: Ah, sh -- well, we were a little jealous of each other sometimes, but she was good to me, yes.

Q: And what were you jealous about?

A: Because she was a year older, so she was doing things a little bit ahead of me, but -- but we became even closer when we became refugees.

Q: Right.

A: Because then the family got really close.

Q: Did you ever do things alone with your father or alone with your mother, going for walks, or going to -- I don't know if there were cultural things in the city, or to a museum?

A: Mostly I was doing things with my sister with the people who were taking care of us. But we s -- seldom -- my father was very serious, he was seldom playful with us.

Q: He was seldom playful?

A: Yes.

Q: Uh-huh. And your mother was more so?

A: My mother a little more so, but she also was very busy working and looking after things in the house, yeah.

Q: Uh-huh. So did you -- did you have a lot of help in the house? Did you ha --

A: We had somebody who cooked, and somebody who cleaned.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And then as babies we had -- once we had a fräulein, a German lady, and once we had a mademoiselle, a French mademoiselle, so -- who took us for walks, yeah.

Q: So did you learn both languages? How many languages?

A: I -- I learned Fr-French and German. Of course, we spoke Polish at home, and -- and then during the war I learned a little Hebrew and Italian because I was in Italy.

Q: Right, right.

A: So when I met my wife I told her I knew five languages, and she was impressed.

Q: And did she test you on that? No.

A: Tested my French and she's pretty good at French herself.

Q: Were you in an environment where Polish Jews and Polish Christians were mixing, that you yourself were within a very integrated kind of setting, or not?

A: Yes. Socially, a-and family-wise, the family was Jewish and most of our close friends were Jewish, but -- but we were an assimilated family and we were in quite an integrated environment and I went to a school where majority of the kids were not Jewish and -- both in the elementary school and in the high school. I went to public high school.

Q: Okay.

A: I went to a private elementary school because I was too young to go to the public high school, and the private school took me in.

Q: And was this a comfortable environment? When you say that you were assimilated as Jews, did this also mean that you celebrated Jewish holidays and went to the synagogue, or you didn't?

A: Oh yes.

Q: You did?

A: We definitely -- my parents belonged to what was called the temple, which is the -- was the largest synagogue in the city, and it was called Progressive Judaism, which is similar to American Conservative Judaism. And -- and my father had a seat, you had to buy seats and my father had a seat downstairs and my mother had a seat on the balcony, in the --

Q: Where the women sat.

A: Yeah. And I sat with my dad, yeah.

Q: And your sister sat upstairs, or with you?

A: Yes, upstairs, yes, yes.

Q: Upstairs. So did you go during the holidays, or did you go every Shabbat, or --

A: No, no, we went just during holidays.

Q: Holidays.

A: Yeah, right. My parents were not very religious.

Q: Right.

A: But they definitely were Jewish, but not extremely religious.

Q: Not -- right. So I could -- should I assume that you were not kosher in the house?

A: We were not kosher.

Q: Yes. Or anywhere, actually.

A: No.

Q: Yes.

A: No.

Q: And how was it for you to be in a --

A: We ate matzoh on Passover --

Q: Yes.

A: -- but sometimes I had ham on the matzoh.

Q: On the -- [laughs]. Did you experience anti-Semitism as you were growing up?

A: As I was growing up there was anti-Semitism growing in Poland, beginning around 1934, and it was particularly evident at universities, and -- because Jewish students were not -- were told to sit in back benches and were not allowed sometimes to -- to even attempt classes [indecipherable]. And -- and some of the -- interestingly enough, the university students were what was called open index. N -- N.D. stands for National Democracy which is -- was the sort of right wing party, which was very anti-Semitic, and they sometimes would make -- not pogroms in the sense that somebody was completely bludgeoned to death, but they would beat up J-Jews in the street occasionally. And I learned to avoid big gangs of students, and -- and sometimes there were just stupid people who were anti-Semitic, but most of the people in the city were very well integrated because the -- the city itself had been under Austrian occupation and had a lot of Jew -- 30 percent of the residents were Jews, and -- and in addition Polish Catholics, there were Greek Orthodox, and there were Ukrainians and there were Armenians, so it was kind of cosmopolitan [indecipherable]

Q: Right. And your close friends? You had Jewish friends, and Polish friends?

A: I had Jewish friends and Polish friends, but in terms of going to homes of kids, I was closest to the Jewish boys.

Q: And did you notice that that was because there was a kind of division, or you think it was just happenstance?

A: Mostly because sometimes -- it was partly because there was a little division, yeah. But I was very friendly with many of non-Jewish --

Q: Right.

A: -- people.

Q: Let -- let me go back a little bit. Were you interested in mathematics as a very tiny kid? And --

A: I was very interested in mathematics, yes.

Q: Wa -- were -- was this coming from your parents, I mean is there some way to trace it, or it just -- do you know?

A: No, it's just a natural interest. Some kids are interested in music.

Q: Right.

A: I was never very musical.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I liked just playing chess and doing mathematics.

Q: I see. Were there any other subject matters that were of interest to you, or was this your real passion [indecipherable]

A: This --

Q: Mm?

A: -- this was the real passion. I was somewhat interested in history.

Q: Did you go to the movies as a kid? This is before the war, I mean [indecipherable]

A: Yes. I went to movies, and I also went to -- we had in Lwów an opera house, and occasionally I went to performances, both opera and theater.

Q: Did you like that?

A: I liked it, yes.

Q: Yes.

A: The opera house in Lwów is beautiful.

Q: And do you [indecipherable]

A: It has survived, and is --

Q: Really?

A: -- and it's been re-remodeled and is just like it used to be.

Q: A-And do you remember any particular opera?

A: Not really.

Q: No.

A: Got more interested in opera in that way then.

Q: Uh-huh. And theater? Do you remember any theater that you went to?

A: I remember going to theater, but -- but I don't remember --

Q: Right.

A: -- s-specific performances.

Q: And when you went to the movies, did you go with your sister, or you went with a bunch of kids? Do you have any recollection, or you don't --

A: I don't recollect.

Q: Did you have a favorite food when you were a kid?

A: Not really. I -- I never paid much attention to food.

Q: And when you ate dinner at the house, or ate --

A: I -- I liked -- my mother made carp Jewish style, sometimes.

Q: Yeah?

A: In jelly, I liked that.

Q: Gefilte fish?

A: Gefilte fish, yes.

Q: Uh-huh. And she cooked that?

A: She cooked that, yes.

Q: Huh. And when -- when you all were home and eating lunch and dinner, did you all eat together? Your father came in, and you ate together?

A: Yes. We ate together in the dining room --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- and we were served.

Q: You were served dinner, uh-huh.

A: Yes. [indecipherable]

Q: Now, was this a very quiet meal, or was there discussion about what was going on? It was a very serious kind of occasion?

A: Mostly was serious, yes.

Q: It was serious. Was there discussion -- once Hitler took power in Germany --

A: Yi --

Q: -- was there discussion around the table about what was going on in Germany?

A: Ah.

Q: Do you remember?

A: We did discuss it, yes, a little bit.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Not terribly much --

Q: Right.

A: -- but a little bit, yes. I was 14 years old when the war broke out --

Q: Yes, yes -- so you were --

A: -- so I was still a young fellow.

Q: -- yeah, right. Now you were barmit -- Bar Mitzvahed in --

A: Right.

Q: -- 1938, am I correct?

A: Right, correct.

Q: And how long did you study for that?

A: Oh, I had lessons for a --

Q: For the Bar Mitzvah.

A: For the Bar Mitzvah at home. In school ra -- we had religion as a mandatory subject, and Jewish children would step out and go to a separate classroom --

Q: Yes.

A: -- where we had a teacher, but we were usually taught Jewish history more than religion.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And -- and at home I was taking preparations for the Bar Mitzvah.

Q: And did you like doing that? You didn't -- is this something you did?

A: I did it, yes, yeah.

Q: And do you remember that day? Do you remember --

A: Yes, I remember beca -- I --

Q: Was there a lot of family there from both sides?

A: All the family --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- came, and -- and also I gave a little speech.

Q: And what did you talk about?

A: That I don't know.

Q: You don't remember.

A: It had to do with a section of the Torah --

Q: Right.

A: -- I had read, yeah, but I don't remember.

Q: You don't remember. Was there a party afterwards, at the house?

A: There was a party at our house, yes, a big party, yes.

Q: And did you feel proud? Do you remember that --

A: Yes.

Q: -- as a re -- a really important day for you?

A: It was an important day.

Q: And did you feel something changed once -- once you got to be Bar Mitzvahed and they claimed that you were a man now?

A: Well, I -- yeah, I was also interested because I discovered in the process my father was very proud that his family was Levites, and that is sort of not common, but you know, the three categories, the [indecipherable], the priests, the Levites and [indecipherable] people and I was impressed that I was --

Q: A Levi.

A: -- a Levi.

Q: Right.

A: And I must tell you when I was a child, I sometimes had impressions that I will become a prophet. I was very -- I sort of thought always that I was chosen -- a chosen child to do something, so --

Q: And was that connected to being a Levi, or did this happen before?

A: No, this was before.

Q: That was before.

A: Right.

Q: And did you have a particular kind of idea of what you were chosen to do?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No.

Q: But you felt chosen?

A: I felt chosen. I felt I was somehow inspired and privileged.

Q: Did you ever tell anybody about this when you were a kid?

A: I told my parents, yes.

Q: Yes? And -- and did they respond in a way that was okay?

A: Yes.

Q: Did they encourage you?

A: No, they --

Q: No.

A: -- they were a little surprised.

Q: They were surprised. Do you think that -- in 1939 you were 14?

A: Right.

Q: Right, when the war comes. Is there any expectation that there's going to be a war?

A: Yes, there was expectation --

Q: So you expected --

A: -- there was tension in the air because Germany had post ultimatums demanding that Poland give up the corridor between East Prussia and Germany, and -- and they were threatening, and -- and of course, before that was the invasion of Austria by the Germans, so there was a lot of tension. People expected war.

Q: And how did that affect you and the household? Was there talk of what you would do if there was a war, or was that not yet --

A: It was not yet -- there was talk before the war --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- that I might have to go to study at a foreign university because Polish universities were becoming dangerous.

Q: Right.

A: But we had not talked about leaving Poland before the war broke out.

Q: And were you -- you may not know what your parents were aware of, but were you in some sense by this time aware of what was going on in Germany?

A: Oh, absolutely.

Q: And in Austria --

A: Absolutely.

Q: -- with respect to Jews?

A: Yes, absolutely.

Q: You were.

A: We were -- definitely were, yes.

Q: So did this make war that much more frightening to you?

A: Yes --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- it definitely made war more frightening.

Q: Right.

A: We knew Germans had bad intentions towards Jews.

Q: Towards Jews.

A: Yes. And a lot of Germans were -- a lot of Jews were either deported by the Germans into Poland, or were escaping Germany to come to Poland, so that it was common knowledge that things in Germany were just terrible.

Q: And were people coming to your house?

A: Not anybody.

Q: Not anybody.

A: That we knew.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: So, on September first, 1939, when the war broke out and bombs start falling, this must have been, even though you expected it, still a shock because the experience was --

A: It was still a shock, yes.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: It was just before the school year started and we were still at home expecting to start school, and suddenly the bombs started falling, and -- and there was -- radios were very primitive in

those days, they had crystal radios and you had to sort of tune them up with whiskers. And we listened. I used to take a radio to -- to bed to listen.

Q: And do you remember the first time you heard a bomb?

A: Sure I do, yes.

Q: Can you explain what that was like?

A: Well, the -- the bombs number -- they -- they explode and they make a lot of noise, and they, you know --

Q: Were you sleeping, or was this during the day? Do you re --

A: Well, we had si -- to -- w-we had blackouts.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: We had to cover the windows, and we taped windows with s-stripes, sort of criss-cross --

Q: Right.

A: -- so that the glass wouldn't fall and hurt people, so -- and we knew -- it was both at night and in the daytime, yes. And actually, people stood watch in the neighborhood, on the streets, you know, there were sort of like citizen patrols and it was clearly war time.

Q: Yeah. And was there an expectation that the Polish army could actually fight well against the Germans, or wasn't that sure?

A: Well, at -- at first there was, but it soon became clear that the army was losing ground, and -- and my father remembered from the first World War that when a si -- [indecipherable] that sort of advance into central Poland was crossed, that that would mean that the Germans could advance without stopping, and -- and that's when they started talking about leaving. And first we talked about just my father and I leaving because men were supposed to be in more danger than women, but then they -- my parents conferred and decided that we all should go. And there was

discussion whether we should go east or south, and my parents weren't that keen on going towards Russia, so we decided to go south. And we had a car and -- but our car was requisitioned, because the military were requisitioning all the cars. And my uncle had a car, and his car was sort of requisitioned, but he was friendly with the provincial governor in Lwów, and he got the pass to keep the car to take the trip south, but to return it later. So my mother, my aunt conferred and they decided we could go with them. So my aunt and uncle left some suitcases and took us instead.

Q: Le-Let me ask you a little bit before. Do you remember the discussions about whether to leave?

A: Yes, I d -- remember.

Q: You do? You were sitting there.

A: I was sitting there because there was the big question whether we were all going, or whether --

Q: Or just the two of you?

A: -- just the two of us.

Q: And if it was the two of you, was there talk of your going on a bicycle? Is that right?

A: That was definitely a talk of going on a bicycle because we didn't have a car, and my father wasn't so good on the bicycle and I wasn't so good either, so --

Q: Uh-huh. Now, it seems to me unusual that people would decide so quickly to leave. A lot of people didn't.

A: Right.

Q: Right?

A: During first of all the war, my -- independently, my father and my mother's family went to Vienna to leave the city because it was dangerous to stay in the city, and Vienna was in Austria, so -- so they were used to the notion that --

Q: I see.

A: -- if war came, it's sometimes important to leave [indecipherable]. It was very dramatic to leave, yes.

Q: We're going to have to stop for a moment --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- to change the tape.

End of Tape One

Beginning Tape Two

Q: Julian, you -- you ended by saying that it's very dramatic -- it was a very dramatic time. Would -- could you describe what you -- what happened, and how you packed? If you packed very much, and what you packed?

A: Well, it was very dramatic thinking about leaving, and we had number of conferences, and we were ask by my aunt and uncle, since there was very little room in the car for -- there were four of us and my aunt and uncle, that's six people, and we had a driver because neither my father nor my uncle could drive. And so it's seven people, and so we were asked to take, basically knapsacks, and -- back then, it was, and my mother packed a small suitcase and my father packed a small suitcase. And my sister, very fortunately took pictures, album of pictures, so that was very lucky, and we enjoyed that afterwards. Years later, it was nice to look back and have the photos. But we were -- it wasn't yet full winter, so it was just September, so --

Q: Right.

A: -- we didn't have to pack very heavy clothes up.

Q: You also had a dog, didn't you?

A: We had a little dog, and it was very tough for us to leave the dog, yes.

Q: What was the dog's name?

A: It was Gigi.

Q: Gigi?

A: Which is like a bell ringing in Polish.

Q: And what sort of a -- what sort of a dog was this?

A: It was a -- don't -- don't know the English word for it.

Q: What was the Polish?

A: In Polish it's called yarmnic.

Q: Was it a big dog, little dog?

A: No, it's a little dog, and it was very brown and I'm -- I ju -- the name just -- English word --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- slipped out from my mind.

Q: And who -- did you give the dog to somebody?

A: Well, we left somebody in the house.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Yeah.

Q: To take care of the dog.

A: To -- well, no, the -- the lady who lived in with us --

Q: I see.

A: -- was taking care of the dog. And then we had janitor downstairs, which -- I'm sorry.

Q: It’s okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: What -- what was the hardest part of leaving for you?

A: Not knowing what will become of us and where we were going. That was the hardest.

Q: Were you frightened?

A: Well, we were frightened, partly that we might get into German hands and partly what will become of us when we are away from home.

Q: Right. Well, let me ask you, it’s going to sound like a bit of a strange question. Your uncle has a car, you have a ca -- your father has a car, but neither of them drove. Was this typical of people who had a bit of money?

A: Yes, it wa --

Q: That they have a car with -- without knowing how to drive?

A: Right, it was typical if you had a car, you could afford the driver, yes.

Q: Did your father want to learn how to drive or he didn't care?

A: He wasn’t --

Q: He wasn’t interested.

A: -- interested, no.

Q: Huh. It’s so odd given how in America we’re so car conscious that the notion of having a car without being able to drive is odd, isn’t it.

A: Not [indecipherable]

Q: So this must have been a pretty big car if you had seven people sitting.

A: Right, it was a Buick --

Q: Right.

A: -- with folding seats, so the two kids sit then -- sat in the folding seats, and my aunt -- my mother and my father sat in the back, and my uncle sat in front with the driver.

Q: So these were two -- like two little folding seats in the back?

A: Yes.

Q: I see. Facing --

A: Facing the adults who were in the rear, yes.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: No, they weren't facing the adults.

Q: They weren't?

A: I think they -- they folded --

Q: Frontwise?

A: Frontwise, yes.

Q: Huh. So, you leave your house. Did your -- did -- your father must have taken money with him, or something that he could use as --

A: Right, my father took with him all the cash he could get his hands on, and he also had four bars of gold, and he was -- and he put them in a little suitcase and carried them with him.

Q: Uh-huh. So he took Polish zlotys?

A: Yes. But most of the money was Polish z-zlotys, I think. He may have had a little bit of dollars, or something --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- but not very much.

Q: So how long a trip was this? You're heading south to Romania.

A: Right.

Q: Yes?

A: Well, we didn't know yet we were going to Romania. We partly were leaving to get out of the city because it was being bombed.

Q: Right.

A: But on the roads we saw a lot of people who were displaced and moving and going different places, and occasionally there were German so called stuka bombers who -- which were dropping -- strafing people on the roads. And we would get out and get in the ditch and then get up. And sometimes along the road Polish soldiers would stop us and want the car. And my f -- uncle would flash the papers he had, that he was allowed to have the car. So we finally made our way to a little town which was south, close to the Romanian border, and my parents must have thought already about going to Romania, but I wasn't quite --

Q: You weren't quite aware of that.

A: -- quite aware of that.

Q: Right. So you were actually leaving and the Germans have yet to occupy.

A: Right.

Q: So you were really ahead of ever -- most people were not doing this.

A: Right. And we stopped along the way in my father's hometown, Rohatyn to say good-bye, so to speak, to his relatives, yeah.

Q: Do you think he tried to convince his relatives --

A: No.

Q: -- they should leave too?

A: I don't think so.

Q: You don't think so.

A: No, because we had no way to help them with transportation and they -- I don't think they discussed leaving.

Q: And do you remember people saying to you, why are you leaving? I mean, this is -- the people thought this would be --

A: Well --

Q: -- a kind of madness on your part.

A: -- at that time, there were a lot of people who already had left western Poland, and for example, in our city, in Lwów, my mother's family had escaped from Kraków, which is more south central Poland, so people were all used to the notion that some people are leaving and going, and roads were full of people. And people were moving all over the place. And it was clear that the Germans were going to occupy all of Poland, yes. But in the end they didn't because they had the agreement with the Russians, which was at first a secret agreement, it was not known. So, when we got to [indecipherable] which is a town close to the border, we suddenly realized that the Polish government was evacuating.

Q: And you saw them evacuating.

A: We saw them.

Q: Yeah.

A: Absolutely. And actually, we saw -- they were like buses which were -- had Polish gold on them, and the bank of Poland was evacuating the gold. And we saw foreign embassies evacuating, and -- and we saw the provincial governor with a horn, giving the orders or directions regulating the traffic and -- and saying now ministry of foreign affairs, and there would be a bunch of limousines going and there was a bridge and they would go across that bridge to Romania. So we saw the whole Polish government evacuating.

Q: And you had to wait, of course, until the whole Polish government --

A: Right. And we weren't sure we would be allowed to cross, because there were still both Polish border guards and Romanian border guards. And we didn't have a Romanian passport. But on the 17th of September, the news came on the radio that the Russians had marched in, and many people thought that they were coming to help Poland, and -- attack Hitler, because nobody knew that Stalin and Hitler had a pact. And -- and there was a lot of discussion whether we should go back.

Q: Right.

A: And my father thought that we should not go back and come back after we see the situation is quiet, peaceful and friendly. So we -- we decided to cross and -- and we basically -- my father had to bribe a Romanian guard to let us cross, yeah.

Q: Did you agree with that? Did you remember thinking about it? Did you agree with [indecipherable]

A: Well, I --

Q: -- or you know?

A: -- I want to go home.

Q: You want to go home.

A: Go home, yeah. I was not that smart, and my -- I -- I think it was a wonderful decision my parents made, yes.

Q: Clearly saved your life, probably.

A: Absolutely.

Q: Yeah.

A: No question about it, yeah.

Q: Mm --

A: [indecipherable]

Q: So you do cross into Romania, but your -- the car, the person who was driving your car --

A: Yes.

Q: -- left you a bit earlier than you expected, I gather.

A: Right. No, he left because he want to go back to his family and that was the deal with him before he drove us, that he would be able to go back and he was supposed to take the car back to the provincial governor, who wanted it, and so my uncle and aunt had passports, and had visas, so they were able to cross earlier, and we crossed later. And I had also a cousin, their son, who had his own car, and he drove his car with his girlfriend, and he had a passport and a visa, so he was able to cross earlier one.

Q: So they had a visa to go -- get into Romania?

A: Right.

Q: So clearly, all the while, they knew that this was going to be where they --

A: They must have --

Q: They must have known, right.

A: -- been better prepared, yeah.

Q: So, did your parents --

A: But we didn't have a visa.

Q: Right. But you got into Romania, then did you have to get yourself a visa in order to --

A: Then we had to register ourselves to stay in Romania, but there were a lot of Polish refugees, and some of them were being put in camps. But n-not all. Mostly the military that -- that crossed, were put in camps, yeah.

Q: Put in the camps.

A: But we first went to what's in Polish called [indecipherable] and [indecipherable] I think, in Romania, and we stayed there for a couple nights, and then we went to Bucharest.

Q: And by then you had a -- I mean, you registered, so you were oka -- you were see --

A: I think we registered really in Bucharest.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Because we were afraid on the train that we might get stopped, but we weren't.

Q: Were you welcomed in some way in Romania, that it was -- was it difficult when you came?

A: Well, it was very difficult --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- because we didn't have that much money and -- and at first we weren't official, and -- but then in Bucharest somehow, they were registering Polish refugees and -- and of course Polish government had brought the gold with them, so they must have paid something to the Romanians to allow the Poles who escaped to stay there.

Q: Uh-huh, right. And where did you stay in Bucharest?

A: Well, at first we stayed in a hotel. It was called Hotel Victoria then it was too expensive. Then we moved to another hotel, called well, I don't remember the name exactly, but we lived in one room in the hotel, and we had a hot plate and cooked our meals secretly because you were not supposed to use the hot plate in the hotel room.

Q: So this is an extremely different situation than what your whole life had been.

A: Definitely.

Q: Right?

A: Yes.

Q: So were there problems between all of you, or were -- were -- did you all remain very calm and -- cause here you are all in one room now.

A: Yeah. Well, ah -- there were no problems between us, my mother, my father, my sister and I, but my mother my aunt had a problem, so --

Q: And what was that about?

A: I'm not sure, but somehow they --

Q: Now that they were in the same room with you?

A: No, they were in a different --

Q: They were in another --

A: -- hotel.

Q: I see.

A: They stayed in the first hotel.

Q: Uh-huh. So -- but you don't know what the problem was between your mother and her?

A: No, no.

Q: Yeah. And whose side -- whose -- whose side of the family was the uncle and aunt on, your mother's side, or your father --

A: My mother and the aunt were sisters.

Q: Ah.

A: My aunt ma -- was my mother's oldest sister, and she --

Q: I see, I see.

A: -- she was kind of a little bossy and -- to my mother, because --

Q: Uh-huh, because she was an older sister.

A: Yes.

Q: Yes.

A: She was quite a bit older, yeah. There were four sisters, and she was the oldest, and my mother was the youngest.

Q: Uh-huh. Well, one can imagine the difficulties. Now, did you expect to stay in Romania, or was there always --

A: No, no, we started immediately -- my parents started going, and my father in particular, to different consulates, looking for a visa to go either to France or to the United States or -- and -- and of course you had to take a train through Italy to get to France, if you didn't want to go through Germany.

Q: Yes.

A: So it -- and Italy was already allied with Germany, so it was quite complicated. And I started attending school in Bucharest, first French school, because I didn't know Romanian, of course. And in the French school I traded mathematics for French, so -- with other kids, so --

Q: So that [indecipherable]

A: -- I was managing.

Q: I see.

A: No, in doing homework.

Q: Right, right.

A: But then -- but then a Polish school was formed in Romania, and actually the Polish government registered all the refugees, and may have paid even a small stipend to the refugees so that -- and also the Romanians who were willing to exchange Polish zlotys for Romanian currency at the -- at the beginning, so --

Q: Right, right.

A: So I started going to Polish school, and all the kids in the school, most of them were children of Polish government officials. And they -- they were the ones who escaped, evacuated.

Q: Right. And the person who was principal of the school was the wife of the head of the Polish bank, I gather, huh?

A: Well, one of the Polish banks.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Not the main Polish bank, yeah.

Q: I see. And what was her name?

A: Her name was Barrish -- bani -- Mrs. Barrish bani -- Barishowa in Polish, Helena Barishowa. And -- and she was a very wonderful lady, and made children all feel good. So I t -- I transferred from the French school to --

Q: French school to the Polish --

A: -- the Polish school, yes, Polish high school.

Q: Now did that make you feel a bit more comfortable, because you were with people who came from Poland?

A: Right, and people who were in the same situation, pretty much.

Q: Right, right.

A: And -- and --

Q: Now, are you still one of the few Jews in this group?

A: I was one of the few Jews in that school, yes. There were a few, I wasn't the only one.

Q: There were a few, right. And did this make any difference? I mean, did -- did --

A: No.

Q: No.

A: Not at all.

Q: No.

A: We were all very good friends.

Q: Uh-huh. And was everybody interested in getting out of Romania, as far as you could tell?

A: Everybody was interest in getting out of Romania, particularly because Romania was itself about to be taken over by the Germans and the king of Romania was basically deposed by the Germans, eventually. So -- and the Romanians said something was [speaks foreign language here] which is -- was kind of like an Iron Guard, I think, in English, that --

Q: You mean the Iron Cross?

A: Pardon?

Q: The Iron Cross was it? Or the Iron Guard [indecipherable]

A: Iron Guard, and they were very anti-Semitic, so that was a bit of a problem, but it wasn't very -- it didn't affect my life too much, except we knew we had to get out of Romania. So my parents succeeded in getting a visa to Palestine.

Q: They couldn't get a visa --

A: Which was very difficult.

Q: It was difficult. They couldn't get one to the United States, right?

A: No. My uncle and aunt left for the United States, they got a visa because their son had a visa to the United States. He was supposed to go to the world -- world exhibition, oh what do you call it? World --

Q: Now I'm forgetting what the name [indecipherable] too. The World Fair.

A: World Fair.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah. To the World Fair in New York.

Q: Yes.

A: Which was in 1939.

Q: Right.

A: And he -- and they an-and their son went and then the son helped them. They didn't come to the United States right away, they went to France, and then from France to Portugal, and from Portugal to Cuba. And then from Cuba they came to the United States.

Q: Huh.

A: So -- but they left for France, and we left for Palestine.

Q: For Palestine.

A: Right. And my father -- we were lucky because that gold that my father had qualified us for what was called a capitalist visa. In other words, we had enough capital to enter, because Palestine immigration was very limited, and you couldn't really enter Palestine as an ordinary refugee.

Q: But you could qualify if you had enough money.

A: If you had a certain amount of money, it's the same nowadays in Canada, if you have enough money you can become a resident of Canada, so a lot of people from Hong Kong --

Q: Right.

A: -- establish bank accounts and then return to Hong Kong. Well, this was a similar situation and we were lucky we got --

Q: Do you have any idea how much money it was that your father could afford?

A: No, I don't.

Q: You don't have any idea?

A: No.

Q: And it was only the money that he had with him, and especially the gold.

A: Yeah, it was the gold.

Q: Yeah.

A: It was all he had, yeah.

Q: Hm. So you have -- well, tell me something, was it difficult to leave Romania because you've now been there from March until September, yes? [indecipherable]

A: Right. It was -- it was difficult, we didn't know what to expect at else --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- elsewhere. But we went by boat from Constanza, which is a -- a harbor in Romania, t -- and actually it was kind of a dream trip because we stopped in Istanbul and in Athens, and I got to see sort of beautiful sights of the world, and then we arrived in Haifa.

Q: Well tell me a little bit about the trip. Who's -- who is on the boat? A bunch of refugees like you, or not?

A: Some refugees, and some people we didn't know.

Q: Right. Is this a -- a r -- a regular --

A: It was a --

Q: A cruise -- not a cruise boat.

A: Not a --

Q: But a regular boat, was a --

A: A regular boat.

Q: -- passenger boat.

A: Yes, a passenger boat.

Q: And what class did you --

A: Oh, the lowest class.

Q: The lowest class, yes.

A: Yeah.

Q: Now, had you -- had you bought clothes in Romania, because you came with so little, so did you now have more?

A: Yes, we -- we had a little bit more clothes --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- yes, we have a few more suitcases, yeah.

Q: Than you had before?

A: Yes.

Q: When you stopped in Istanbul and Athens, was it for a few days, did you --

A: No, just for the day.

Q: Just for the day?

A: Yeah, but it was very meaningful and something --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- I remember s -- d-doing sightseeing, yeah.

Q: And what did you see in Istanbul, do you remember?

A: I saw the big mosque, and -- and I saw the -- you know, the -- we saw the waters [indecipherable] you know, the city is very beautiful city, yeah.

Q: Right, right. And the same with Athens, you walked around and you --

A: In Athens I saw Acropolis, and -- and I just was impressed to see Athens, you know.

Q: Yes. So you arrived in March of 1940 to Palestine in Haifa.

A: In Haifa, yes.

Q: Do you remember what that was like? Do you remember that arrival?

A: Well, I remember, and we were -- we stayed in the place that was on the hill, so we had a beautiful view of the harbor and Haifa is a rather attractive city, and -- and it was a good climate, it was warm, and we felt safe and comfortable with the British controlled territory. The British were allies of -- of -- I mean, they were fighting the Germans, so that was a different world for us.

Q: Right. Did you happen to have family in Palestine or not?

A: Yes, my father's cousin -- brother -- brother, and his two daughters -- actually, three daughters had emigrated to Palestine before the war.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So that two of them lived on a kibbutz, and one of them lived in Tel Aviv, so we saw them, they were not very affluent, and they were some distance from Haifa, but we saw them and we enjoyed having the family there.

Q: So had you intended to go to Tel Aviv? Did you stay in Haifa for very long, or was that just first few days?

A: For -- maybe for a couple of months, something.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And then we moved to Tel Aviv.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah.

Q: And were you taught some Hebrew in -- during these couple of months? Was there a kind of school or anything?

A: No, not -- not -- no, no special education in Hebrew and no school til we got to Tel Aviv.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And when we got to Tel Aviv, I first started taking courses in English.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Because we thought of going either to United States or to England.

Q: To England.

A: Yeah.

Q: I see.

A: And -- yeah.

Q: We're going to have to stop the tape [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, I -- that's what I was wondering, yeah.

End of Tape Two

Beginning Tape Three

Q: Julian, you s -- you went to a Polish high school again when you got to Tel Aviv.

A: Right. I didn't go to a Polish high school right away, first I took a course in English. Polish high school --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- didn't get established til later, because Polish refugees in Romania were evacuated from Romania to Palestine by the British, but we left, of course, on a visa being Jewish, we left on the visa to Palestine. And -- and when I first arrived there was no school, so I start taking course for what was called English matriculation. It was University of London matriculation. And you can matriculate when you are 16 years old, and -- and I was then ma -- 1940 I was 15. So I started preparing for the matriculation. And I was taking these courses and then we learned about the Polish high school being formed, because the refugees arrived, and some of them were our friends from Bucharest.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So I went to the Polish school, but I was still studying English to finish the matriculation. So, when I was 16, I matriculated, which was also equivalent to admission to University of London. In other words, I could later, when the war ended, become qualified to go -- go to University of London because I had matriculated.

Q: So were you fluent in English by then?

A: I was -- my mother actually knew a little English and she bought a book and started teaching me English and I wasn't -- I knew no English when we arrived in Romania, but I started learning a little English from my mother. And then when I came to Palestine I took the courses and I also

went -- there was something called British council and -- and they were giving lessons in English in Jaffa. I used to go to Jaffa, take lessons.

Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh, right.

A: And I became not so fluent, but pretty good, you know, good enough to take the exams.

Q: Right. Now, where were you living in Tel Aviv?

A: In Tel Aviv we lived at 40 Dizingof Street.

Q: Really?

A: At first we lived another place, and then we moved, and actually we moved ourselves with -- my father rented a little cart and we loaded the cart and I pulled it along with my father and we moved to Dizingof Street, yeah.

Q: And did you --

A: And we had the little apartment there.

Q: And how many rooms, do you remember?

A: Two room -- two rooms.

Q: Two rooms?

A: Yeah. Two -- three rooms maybe, yeah.

Q: And what was -- did your father start working at this point?

A: He was trying to do some business, but mostly my mother started sewing, and she --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- wa -- became a seamstress, basically.

Q: Really?

A: [indecipherable] try and make money this way.

Q: So your life --

A: And then later she started giving sewing lessons.

Q: Huh. So your life transforms, not only are you going from country to country, from place to place, but everything about your life turns upside down in a way.

A: Right.

Q: So does this teach you something? Does this change your character in some way?

A: It made me be very adjustable, and not really pay much attention to amenities and -- and -- and -- and sort of made me view people all equally, not be very concerned.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And I always felt that I will get educated, I -- I sort of felt the inner drive to get a good education.

Q: Did you lose your idea that you were going to be a prophet?

A: Yes, oh yeah, by then I did.

Q: And does your sister go to the Polish high school as well as you?

A: Yes, definitely, my sister went to Polish high school, but she did not take the English courses.

Q: She didn't.

A: She was more interested in French, and she went to Polish high school. She was a year ahead of me, yeah.

Q: So did you now see your future in what was then Palestine?

A: No, I always thought that I would go to America.

Q: You did.

A: Yes.

Q: And did your parents think that, too?

A: I think they did. They didn't feel completely comfortable. They didn't know Hebrew.

Q: Right.

A: And my father grew up speaking Yiddish actually, and he knew Yiddish. He always laughed that my mother didn't speak very good Yiddish. I mean, we all understood a little bit of Yiddish --

Q: Right.

A: -- but my father knew it well.

Q: Right.

A: But -- but Hebrew was a little different and -- and my father was at that time thinking more of the future for the children than for himself, and he thought the kids would be better off in America, yes.

Q: Do you -- can you give me some idea of how old your parents were at this time? Is your father in his 50's maybe?

A: My father. I -- I'm not very good at ages.

Q: Right.

A: My father was 40 or so when I was born, maybe 40 --

Q: Okay, so he's --

A: -- 42 maybe.

Q: Right.

A: So --

Q: So he's in his mid to late 50's.

A: Late fifties --

Q: Right. And your mother is nine years younger.

A: Yeah, or so.

Q: Okay. Now, are you learning Hebrew, is your sister learning Hebrew? Is --

A: Well, my sister was not particularly interested in Hebrew.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And I am -- learned a little bit, but I had no formal lessons, so I learned just by myself.

Q: Right. So what was it like living there in Tel Aviv then?

A: Ah, well --

Q: What do you remember?

A: Tel Aviv was, of course, next to Haifa. Haifa was Arab, and Tel Aviv was Jewish, and there were a lot of people from different parts of the world speaking different languages.

Q: In Tel Aviv, yeah.

A: In Tel Aviv. And Hebrew was not yet such an official language, you know, so the younger people all spoke it, but the older people spoke usually the European languages they had come with. So -- and it was very hot in the summer, that's one problem with living in Tel Aviv.

Q: Right. It's very humid, isn't it?

A: And -- and -- and the climate -- I mean, it doesn't get so cold, but it -- but it gets very hot, yeah. And I never really liked the sun so much, so that was one of the problems.

Q: Did you go swimming in the sea?

A: Yes, I did, yes. Went swimming in the sea --

Q: Right.

A: -- went swimming in pools. And we -- in the Polish high school we sometimes went in groups as friends to the beach. And we -- but you know, the war was going on --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- and we were getting terrible news from Poland already by then, and --

Q: And are you getting news of the killings, or are you getting news of both?

A: We were getting news of the killings, also.

Q: Uh-huh, you were.

A: Yes, yes. Because some people were escaping from Romania, sometimes letters were coming, and we were beginning to get bad news. And -- and in the Polish high school, m-many of the colleagues in my class had already -- were already soldiers in uniform who were on leave to finish school. So we were all thinking of going back to war to fight Hitler at that point.

Q: Right. And what was it like politically in -- in Palestine at this time? Were you aware of the kinds of --

A: Well, politically I was very aware of Jewish effort to make Palestine into a Jewish state, and actually I had some more distant relatives, and one of them was in Haganah, which is -- was the Jewish underground [indecipherable] organization, and he tried to recruit me, and I went to a secret meeting, and -- but I decided I really didn't want to fight the British, I wanted to fight the Germans.

Q: And did you have a sense that there ought to be a Jewish state, or this was [indecipherable]

A: Oh yes, I definitely --

Q: You did.

A: -- had a sense that there ought to be a Jewish state, yes.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I think all Jews had that.

Q: But at -- at this very young age, you did not want to stay there and fight the British in order to get a Jewish state.

A: Right. [indecipherable]

Q: Yeah. So what --

A: Well my -- my priority was to fight the Germans. I was -- I was more interested in ending the war in Europe, yeah.

Q: You're studying at -- in the high school, but you've already attended some high school, so what class do you start in when you're in Tel Aviv?

A: I --

Q: And is high school four years the way it is here? It's not.

A: Well, in Polish -- in the Polish system just before the war and even now, it is six years of elementary school, and then four years of high school, and two years of something called lycee -- Lyceum or Lyceum in Polish, and -- but the -- th-the six years altogether were sort of called high school because it was one unit.

Q: Right.

A: And in Poland they were separate, but here they were one. Some in Poland were together, but some were separate. But I basically was in the last two years of high school.

Q: Right.

A: [indecipherable] Palestine, yeah.

Q: So did you start in 1940 or 1941?

A: And mind you, I didn't lose a single year of education, of school.

Q: Really?

A: Re -- during the war, because my parents were sending me to school, and in Romania --

Q: In Romania.

A: -- and in Tel Aviv, so that when I was 16 I got the British matriculation, when I was 17, I got the Polish m-matriculation. So I had sort of two high schools.

Q: Huh. So you graduated from this high school, when is that, in ’43?

A: In ’42, actually, yes.

Q: Two, uh-huh.

A: And -- and I didn -- had the choice of either going to a university in Palestine, and Polytechnic at Haifa, or -- or -- or -- or joining the Palestinian brigade, or joining the Polish army. Now the military -- there was no conscription because the Poles had no right to conscript anybody in Palestine, and -- and the British were not constrict -- conscripting Jews to go into the brigade, that was all voluntary, and I decided to go along with all my friends to the Polish army, and my parents weren’t completely happy but respected my choice, but they asked me to wait til I was 18, so I waited a few months and I joined the army in ’43.

Q: Did they try to dissuade you from doing this?

A: Not completely, they just wanted me to wait a few months til I was a little older.

Q: Now, from what I understand from the history, it’s very unusual at that time for Jews who were living in Palestine to join Anders army rather than the Jewish brigade or the British, or to leave altogether and join Haganah [indecipherable] one of the other groups --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- fighting the British. So you are an unusual Jewish person, doing this at this time, no?

A: Well, actually, all my Jewish colleagues in the Polish high school, we had maybe one-third of the students were Jewish.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: All of -- just about all of them joined the Polish army.

Q: They did?

A: Yeah. And -- and some of the Jews who came with General Anders from the Soviet Union, stayed in Palestine --

Q: Right.

A: -- partly because they had had enough and they wanted to settle after being deported to Russia. But some of us thought it was important for Jews to -- to fight, you know, and -- and to compensate for those who stayed behind, so --

Q: Right.

A: -- most -- most of my Jewish colleagues went to the arm -- to the Polish army.

Q: But did you consider going into the Jewish brigade that th-the rit -- British government was forming with --

A: I considered it, yes, because I had a Polish friend --

Q: Who did.

A: -- who was the son of my mother's close friend, who did, but I decided against it.

Q: And what -- do you remember the reasoning that you used to decide one way rather than another?

A: I sort of didn't identify at that time, completely my future with Palestine, completely.

Q: And with the Jew -- with whatever the Jewish interest was particularly. So you felt both Jewish and Polish?

A: Right.

Q: And so you wanted to be able to express --

A: And I was interested in -- in s -- we thought that we might still return to Poland at that point, you know, who -- who -- who knows?

Q: Right. So you actually thought it was possible?

A: We thought it might be possible.

Q: To return to Poland with the army?

A: No, no, n --

Q: Or as a -- as a civilian?

A: -- no, possibly to live there, although United States was more likely. But my father still had the key from the house, that he --

Q: He did.

A: -- treasured, and he thought someday he was going back.

Q: That's interesting. Now, were your parents also okay with your going into Anders army as opposed to with the Jewish brigade, or were they also not quite so identified?

A: They were okay with my --

Q: With that. Yes.

A: -- with that, yes they -- they -- most of their friends were Polish Jewish refugees, or Polish refugees living in Palestine. There was a large group of Polish refugees in Palestine. Many people don't know it --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- but the British evacuated the Poles from Romania.

Q: Right.

A: Through Cyprus to Palestine.

Q: You're a young person at this time, who wants to go to school, who may have given up your dreams about being a prophet, but you clearly had ideas about a real future, but now you're going to go into an army where you could very well get killed.

A: Right, but I never thought of getting killed.

Q: You didn't?

A: No.

Q: You thought you would be protected, somehow.

A: Right, yes.

Q: So, how do you go into this army? Do you go to an office and you sign up? What do you do?

A: Well, you go to the Polish consulate and you say you want to volunteer for the army, and -- and they say well, thank you, and we will call upon you and you will have a medical examination --

Q: Right.

A: -- and we'll enlist you. And then a few months later, they did that.

Q: And was -- was there an issue because you were Jewish, or they --

A: No, no, not at all.

Q: No issue.

A: No issue.

Q: So did you wait a few months?

A: Well, I waited til they called me.

Q: Til they called you.

A: Yeah.

Q: And then you got called, and then you [indecipherable]

A: And then '43, I wa -- early in '43 I think --

Q: Right.

A: -- in February or so, I was called, and I first received the training as a recruit and that was -- my training was in Egypt on the northern side of Suez Canal on the -- in Kasasim.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Which is close to the Suez Canal, but on -- not on the Egyptian side, but on the Palestinian side. And I trained in tanks and it was quite difficult because when an officer moved his hand, you had to climb into the tank and he moved his hand again you had to climb out and I was bruised all over from the metal, climbing in and out. But -- and you know, he closed the flap over your head, and you're in a pretty closed environment and -- and I learned to drive a tank, I always say, before I learned to drive a car. And tank you drive by pulling with your hands. If you want turn left, you br-brake on the left and the tank rotates left.

Q: Really?

A: And [indecipherable] you want to turn to the right, you brake with your right hand and tank moves the other way, so -- and -- and we also had gun, and when the gun was firing it made a lot of noise over -- we were right there. So I then had an opportunity to go to officer's school, and I was very happy to leave the tanks, and go to the artillery officer's school. And I became what's known in Polish as officer cadet, or [speaks Polish] in Polish. When you graduate you -- you get qualified to become an officer, but you have to get promoted through different ranks, and -- and I was assigned to light anti-aircraft artillery, which was fifth regiment, or -- which was part of the Fifth Infantry division. And I was assigned to go to Italy, because Polish army right then had participated -- was entering the Italian campaign.

Q: Mm-hm, right.

A: And I was -- after I had, by the way, toured Cairo and seen the Sphinx and the pyramids, I ended up going to Port Said and -- and we took a boat to go to Italy.

Q: Wait, let me stop you for a moment. You said a while back that you were not very athletic.

A: Right.

Q: So I'm wondering how all of this training was, that you were training in the tank, not only did you get black and blue, but how difficult was this for you?

A: Well, I wasn't very athletic with bicycles or with running, but I was -- I did play soccer a little bit --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- and I wasn't that bad. [indecipherable]

Q: Oh, okay.

A: No.

Q: But nevertheless, it was very different from what you were used to.

A: Right.

Q: That kind of training, yes?

A: Right, right, it was.

Q: And it wasn't intellectual, it was -- it was --

A: Right.

Q: -- very physical, and --

A: Very physical in the -- and -- and -- but there was -- it wasn't -- it wasn't a problem really.

Q: It wasn't.

A: No.

Q: And when you went to officer's school, what does that mean, officer's training? Cause you were a kid, right?

A: Right. Well, I was -- but at same time I was a good student, so I wasn't so bad.

Q: Right. Actually you're not a kid, you were 18 years old.

A: Eight -- 18, yeah. And some of the others had more experience. I was one of the youngest that --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- that in -- one of the youngest in the army, and one of the youngest in the officer's school.

Q: And most of the boys that you --

A: But I was used to that.

Q: You -- you were used to that [indecipherable]

A: To being young, yes.

Q: Yes. But now, were many of the boys in your unit, if there was a particular unit that you were with, had they had experience fighting? Or had some training before and you were unusual in that as well?

A: Well, most of the other soldiers and officers had been in Russia.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: All they had experience was being in Russian forced labor camps --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- in Siberia.

Q: I see.

A: So they were actually also very sort of used to not -- not being at home for several years.

Q: Right, right.

A: And -- and I w -- I was -- I was one of the few -- I mean, in Palestine not that many Poles joined the army in Palestine.

Q: Right.

A: You know? Never mind Jews even, Poles, there were very few.

Q: Yes, Poles, right.

A: So that most of them were veterans and most of them were older.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Most of the Polish soldiers at that point were older than we who c-came from the Palestinian detachment.

Q: And how did -- uh-huh -- and how did they treat you? Were they nice? Were they okay?

A: They were nice. I-I was treated like everybody else.

Q: Right.

A: And -- and we then took the ship to go from Port Said to taran -- Taranto --

Q: Right.

A: -- which is at the foot of Italy. And being light anti-aircraft artillery, I was assigned to be in the anti-aircraft artillery or the [indecipherable] so, because the Germans were strafing allied ships that were going through the Mediterranean, so --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- so was four hours on and four hours off, was our routine on the ship -- aboard ship. So --

Q: Did you shoot down any planes?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: Not at that point.

Q: No?

A: Later, yes.

Q: Yes?

A: But not at that point, no.

Q: And how many of you would be manning a -- the guns [indecipherable]

A: It typically would be three or four of us, yeah.

Q: Uh-uh.

A: Because the guns had one person cranking up vertically, one person cranking up the gun horizontally, so that's two people --

Q: Right.

A: -- in the seats, and one person loading the gun, and one person passing the ammunitions, there was at least four.

Q: And what was your job usually?

A: Well, I usually was cranking and --

Q: Yeah?

A: -- aiming, yes.

Q: So you would aim? That's how you would do it, I see.

A: Yes.

Q: So the people who were cranking were actually aiming?

A: Aiming, yes.

Q: Huh. Was that tough, on the boat?

A: It was tough, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: But -- but we didn't want the airplanes to shoot us.

Q: To shoot you, right. Were you able to -- to communicate with your parents, were you able to write home?

A: Yes, I was able to write letters to my parents.

Q: Uh-huh. And were you --

A: But I -- we were asked -- one reason I later didn't keep a diary in Italy is we were asked not to describe where we are and what we were doing, so -- because of military --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- sort of secrecy, so -- which I regret to a certain extent [indecipherable]

Q: Did you keep a diary when you were training?

A: No.

Q: No, you didn't do that either.

A: No. I did write notes after we left Poland and some of my memories were refreshed by these notes very much, yeah, how we left Lwów and how we got to -- yeah, to Romania.

Q: Romania.

A: -- yes --

Q: Right.

A: -- yes, I did write that up very early on, but the military service I wasn't writing.

Q: All right, I think we'll have to stop the tape.

End of Tape Three

Beginning Tape Four

Q: Julian, I wanted -- before we go -- we get really into Italy and what happened there, I want to ask you a couple of questions about Palestine. One is, you were in the boy scouts, am I right? Your sister was in the girl scouts, or some kind of scouting?

A: Right, she --

Q: Can you explain what that was?

A: Also in -- in Poland, too, a little bit.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Well, we had -- we had excursions with our friends and we would dress in khaki little uniforms, and go out and -- and stay in tents and -- and practice shooting and practice I don't know, running and doing things together.

Q: Shooting? Now, isn't that unusual for scouts to be doing, or is this something in Europe that happens as well as -- or was this unusual in Israel? I mean in Palestine, I'm sorry.

A: Mm, it was, I think in Poland too, there was -- people liked markmanships, and I got to enjoy --

Q: You liked that?

A: -- sh -- trying to hit the bulls-eye, yeah.

Q: Did your sister do that as well? Did the girls do that as well?

A: Girls also had auxiliary girl's training, but I don't think they were shooting.

Q: Now, was there a relationship between the scouting groups and becoming part of the military? Was there a relationship in any way?

A: N-No.

Q: There wasn't.

A: There was not. I mean, it just was natural that one might prepare one for the other.

Q: Right.

A: But separate organizations.

Q: Right. And how often would you meet?

A: You know, I don't remember, but --

Q: You don't remember.

A: -- no, but mostly I remember the trips we took as kids.

Q: And would they -- these trips would be for a few days at a time --

A: Yes, exactly.

Q: -- I gather, right?

A: Yeah.

Q: Right.

A: Overnight, yeah.

Q: Now, tell me about your relationships with the other students. I gather you were all quite close with each other, am I right?

A: Yes. We were -- we -- some of us have been together in Bucharest already and we were pleased to rediscover each other in Tel Aviv.

Q: Right.

A: And some of us just met in Tel Aviv, but we were all very good friends. We had the s-sense that we were all very lucky to be -- it was like a -- an oasis of peaceful living while our relatives were in Europe, or in the middle of the war.

Q: Right.

A: And we used to go swimming together, and we -- we all became very good friends, whether we were Jewish or Catholic or whatever.

Q: Right.

A: And -- and some of our mothers and fathers would almost adopt the kids who didn't have mothers or fathers, or who particularly didn't have fathers, because the father might have already been in the army or might have been in England.

Q: Right.

A: So it was -- it was like an extended family, and we were all away from our normal surroundings, so we --

Q: Right, right. Was this true of other national groups, that -- that --

A: I don't know of any other national groups. There was -- I don't know that there were other large national groups.

Q: Uh-huh. As much as Polish.

A: This Polish group was quite unique.

Q: But now Palestine was not altogether peaceful either, at that time, right?

A: It was reasonably peaceful. There were, you know, there were bombings in a hotel --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- I remember, but in general, it was fairly orderly. It was --

Q: Were you ever --

A: -- good police organization.

Q: Uh-huh. I know you were approached by -- with your cousin in the Haganah.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did anybody for the -- from the Irgun try to enlist you in what they were doing?

A: No, no.

Q: No.

A: And Irgun started quite a bit later. There were rumors that Irgun was being helped with weapons from the Polish army because a lot of the -- a lot of the leaders of Irgun had come with Anders --

Q: Right.

A: -- you know, like Menachem Begin, and -- and there's actually -- somebody wrote a play called Begin and Anders.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Or Anders and Begin, which --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- which discusses the relationship. Begin said always that he left on a leave of absence and the Polish army never pursued to get him back, so he w -- as opposed to being a straight deserter, he was actually -- just left on a extended leave of absence.

Q: Right. Did you ever meet any of the boys who had left the army? The Jewish boys?

A: No, no.

Q: You never met them?

A: No.

Q: So you never got an opportunity to talk to them as to why they made that decision.

A: No, but I knew some people who made this decision, and it was mostly because they had been through so much turmoil that when they got to Palestine they just thought it was time to end all this wandering around.

Q: Right. So let's go to Italy. You land in Italy.

A: Yes.

Q: In Taranto, right?

A: Right.

Q: In February of 1944, I gather.

A: Right.

Q: Right? And you're in a light anti-aircraft artillery unit, is that correct?

A: Right.

Q: And you're heading north?

A: Right. And light anti-aircraft unit, although it was a division --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- different batteries were assigned to different infantry units, so we were basically in support of infantry.

Q: I see.

A: W -- we were not like heavy artillery which sits back and shoots, we were --

Q: So you're marching along with infantry?

A: -- with infantry, right, and each -- each battery sort of separately, so we were seldom together as a whole regiment.

Q: I see.

A: And we -- and the guns were attached to a small truck, and were being pulled by truck, so my next skill was I learned to drive a truck.

Q: So you -- so you went from the tank to the truck.

A: I went from the tank to the truck.

Q: And what was the regiment that this unit was from?

A: This was Fifth Division. Had symbol which was a bison.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And it was called Fifth Krisova divisi -- Krisova meaning the edge of Poland, and it's the eastern edge of Poland, it's called Kresse, and the division was in honor of the eastern edge of Poland.

Q: So this is part of the second Polish army, the [indecipherable]

A: Oh, the second Polish division.

Q: Division.

A: Yes. Well, there were actually -- I'm sorry, second Polish army.

Q: Right.

A: Yes. And the second Polish army had the Fifth division and Third division -- Third division and Fifth division. There were not too many divisions.

Q: There weren't?

A: There were two or three divisions.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And we had British uniforms, but Polish insignia. On our -- our arms here it said Poland.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And we had a bison for the division and we had a symbol of the British Eighth Army, which happened to be a cross. And --

Q: And you wore a beret as well?

A: And we wore beret, and -- and it was a regular khaki beret, not a black beret like I had in the tanks. And on the beret it was a Polish eagle.

Q: With no British sign. Was --

A: No, no, no.

Q: I see. So you're traveling north and you're going to come into one of the biggest battles over there. [indecipherable]

A: Right, we first fought along the Adriatic on the east coast of Italy.

Q: Right.

A: And then, when we got some way, half way --

Q: To Italy.

A: -- Italy, we were asked to go west and to cross over to the western side. And I think it started somewhere at Forli is the name of the town. And I remember going through a town called Predappio where Mussolini was born and I was very impressed. And actually, before I left Palestine, I went to a lecture once by a former high commissioner of Palestine and he was talking about his military experience in World War I and he was saying one thing he did was because in the army you have a lot of time, he said, I read books, you know, and I was so inspired. He said he picked three most important books and he read them, so I picked the same three books, I think, which was -- one was the Bible, the other one was Macaulay's "History of England", and the third one was the history of the Roman empire. And I kept reading them, and also learning Italian as we traveled through Italy. So that then we crossed west, and we went to the area -- Montecassino area and mon --

Q: Tell me something, y -- y -- go back for a moment. You have a lot of time to read?

A: Well, in the army you have lot of time, yes.

Q: Yeah? Cause you're waiting a lot?

A: You're waiting a lot, yes.

Q: Did other boys read as much as you --

A: Not as much.

Q: -- you were very unusual, yes?

A: I was maybe more unusual in that respect.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And the other boys learned a little bit of Italian, sort of conver -- conversational Italian.

Q: Yeah.

A: But I was more really doing systematic self study.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So then we got to Montecassino, and the situation was that -- and Montecassino is located between Naples and Rome, and this was about the time when the British -- the United States army, U.S. army had landed in Anzio.

Q: Right.

A: And the bri -- American troops were surrounded and stopped there and couldn't break out. And the critical position was the -- the mountain with the monastery on top, Montecassino mountain. And there were three or four assaults by the British and the French and the Australians and none of them succeeded, and then the Polish troops were called to -- to take their turn at taking the mountain. And our commander, General Anders issued an order of the day in which he said to -- the battle for Montecassino is the battle for freedom of Poland. And Polish soldiers took it to heart and fought very hard, and after a few -- and by the way, at Montecassino, we were -- my unit was made into infantry because the guns couldn't be pulled up the mountain. And we were all crawling, rock by rock up the mountain and the -- it was -- there was also a lot of bombardment because the British were -- and Americans were dropping bombs on the monastery, which was considered an observation point for German artillery. And the Germans

were in bunkers all along the mountains, so i-it was a very difficult situation. It was in May of 1944, and then in the end, Polish troops took the monastery at the top of the mountain and mounted the flag, Polish flag and the British flag at the top of the monastery.

Q: And -- and what was your -- your role? You were holding what ? What kind of --

A: I was actually doing some mortar shooting. The mortar we could carry up the mountain, but also with my rifle climbing and making my way up the hill. And --

Q: This was not your first battle, or was this a --

A: No.

Q: -- [indecipherable] battle that was this rough for you?

A: This was the roughest battle, because -- in part because I was not at my gun, but --

Q: Yes.

A: -- on my own.

Q: On your own.

A: Yeah.

Q: Then who --

A: And we had to carry the ammunition up the mountain, up the slopes, because cars couldn't get up there.

Q: Right.

A: No trucks, no cars.

Q: Now I -- as I understand it, there was a first push and it didn't work, and -- and Anders had to re -- decide what to do now, what sort of a strategy to use to go up the mountain [indecipherable]

A: Yes, well I was not part of the strategy, but --

Q: Right.

A: -- there were several assaults, but --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- in the end the troops went around, and --

Q: Did you get to the top?

A: I got to the top, yeah.

Q: Yes?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Did many of your buddies get killed, or get hurt in this --

A: Several of my friends got killed, yes. The casualties were very heavy.

Q: Were very high.

A: And to this date there is a Polish cemetery at the foot of Montecassino that has many graves. And some of them were wounded. I was very lucky to come through.

Q: You were -- you weren't even wounded?

A: No, I was --

Q: That's very lucky.

A: -- very lucky, yes.

Q: How did it affect you to be in a battle with so many casualties? Was this extremely difficult for you emotionally afterwards?

A: Well, it was very difficult emotionally while it was going on, but afterwards I felt very lucky to have -- have come through unscathed, yeah.

Q: Right, right.

A: And I was very proud also, of having participated in what was a pretty critical battle.

Q: Right. And when you think about Anders saying we're fighting for the freedom of Poland, was that what you were fighting for, or were you fighting for [indecipherable]

A: Well, I was mostly fighting for the freedom of my relatives and fellow Jews, but --

Q: Mm-hm, yes.

A: -- but they were in Poland, so --

Q: Right.

A: And at that time we didn't know yet that eastern Poland had been basically given away by Roosevelt and Churchill to Stalin.

Q: Right.

A: It was --

Q: But by this -- by this time it's clear to you --

A: By the --

Q: -- that millions of Jews have been killed?

A: Right.

Q: Right, and --

A: Right, we -- we knew that already, and -- and I remember at the same time coming across a body of a German and reading a letter he had written to his relatives, or his relatives had written to him, and I could see that they had human problems too, you know, being away from their families, but -- but -- but we knew Jews were being killed in a --

Q: Right.

A: -- brutal way in gas chambers and so on. And we -- when we finished the battle, we were given a break, a little rest.

Q: And where did you go? Or did you just stay where you were?

A: Well, we stayed in the area. I remember once on the mountain, coming across some Moroccan troops which were fren -- part of the French army, and we couldn't communicate with them too well, so we were just as -- we were scared of them [indecipherable]. The worst thing was walking at night, and you know, in different forests or empty areas and when you stood guard that was pretty difficult situation because sometimes you could be -- Germans could be attacking, you know?

Q: Right.

A: But that wasn't at Montecassino, that was elsewhere. We were -- we were also getting leaflets from the Germans. They were dropping leaflets telling us, why are you fighting us, you should -- the Russians are killing Poles in -- in Russia. And my friends had all been in Russia, so they all were very aware that the Russians were very bad people. So -- that had -- had them deported, and had them in forced labor, but they wanted to fight the Germans, too.

Q: Right.

A: I don't know of anybody who deserted.

Q: Uh-huh. So how long was this break after this battle?

A: It was a short break and we were then sent to the east coast of Italy back again and we fought at -- I fought at -- and the Polish army at Ancona, Bologna, at Loreto, and then at Bologna. And there is a Polish cemetery in Loreto, and there are Jewish graves there, as there are at Montecassino.

Q: Who -- who dug graves at Montecassino? Did you boys do it?

A: I didn't do it.

Q: You didn't?

A: No.

Q: Did the army do it [indecipherable]

A: I think the army must have done it, yes. Must have been the army, but they were probably not the front line troops, but the sort of service units.

Q: Right, right.

A: Sort of divisional support units.

Q: So you're in a number of other battles along the way?

A: Right. And --

Q: Does it ever -- does it ever get easier before each battle?

A: No, it wasn't as difficult as at casino, but it was difficult, for example at one point, we had to retreat and that was very unpleasant. But -- but we -- the British and the Americans were interested in keeping the Italian front active to distract the German troops and extend their supply lines so as to make the landing in France easier, and to make the invasion of France easier. So we weren't pushed to advance very rapidly, we were going rather slowly.

Q: Did you ever come across camps that the Italians had set up, or not?

A: Not camps -- with Jews? Or camps --

Q: Th-They had all sorts of people in the --

A: Yeah. No, no. We saw some Italians who were si -- fighting on our side. There were some Italians fighting on our side, but I didn't come across Italian camps.

Q: And were the Italians that you met happy about your being there?

A: It was mixed. Most people were afraid of soldiers and soldiers do sometimes take food and wine away from where they -- in the countryside, wherever people tried to -- supplies are difficult during the wars, so sometimes the farmers kept storing things for themselves --

Q: Right.

A: -- and sometimes soldiers would take it, and sometimes soldiers would kill chickens.

Q: So people were nervous [indecipherable]

A: So that the Italian -- but the Italians in general were friendly.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: They were not -- there -- there -- it was not hostile territory. And they -- most of them didn't like the Germans.

Q: Right.

A: Even though some of them were Fascist, you know.

Q: But it was a different kind, I guess.

A: Right.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I remember in Ancona going to the synagogue for high holidays.

Q: Really?

A: And the army had a rabbi, and occasionally we had services.

Q: Hm. Interesting. So in May of 1945, the war is over.

A: The war was over ra -- around that time. We were approximately at the level Bologna and the war ended and we were very happy. It ended, but there was a question what will become of us, because most of my colleagues like myself were from the eastern part of Poland, which by now we knew was going to become part of Soviet Union. And I -- all the soldiers were given a declaration from England that -- from Britain -- from the British which said that we are encouraged to return to Poland and that they had the commitment that we would be safe when we came back to Poland, or since we had fought on the British side, if we didn't choose to go back to Poland, we could go to Great Britain. And -- and most of the soldiers went to Great

Britain, and -- but some who had families returned to Poland. You know, some had left their children and wives at home. And I knew I wasn't going back to Poland, so -- which was now in Soviet Union, so I had no problem decide -- to become repatriated back to Poland.

Q: Right, right.

A: And I was hoping to come to America, and -- but what was very nice is that when the war ended, you know, Anders said, since Poland has lost so many members of its intellectuals, professionals, that he wanted the young military to be educated, and we were offered an opportunity to attend Italian universities. And -- and I opted to go to the Polytechnic in Turin, Italy. A-And some others who want to study medicine went to Bologna, some others went to Rome, some went to Milan. So there were all these Polish young officer cadets, and young officers, who had matriculation and were ready to study and suddenly going to Italian universities and -- and in the -- in Turin there was a sort of dormitory for the Polish soldiers and -- who were studying, and I was in that dormitory.

Q: And you were still in uniform?

A: I was in uniform some of the time. I didn't have so many civilian clothes, but we could be in civilian clothes at that point. And then --

Q: Let me -- let me stop you for a moment if I may. When the war is over, are you folks guarding Germans? [indecipherable] prisoners of war?

A: Oh -- ah -- oh, what happened was, since I knew -- yes, we saw German prisoners of war, and -- and si -- w-we were either guarding them or seeing them being guarded by the British. But I am also la -- was assigned to a camp where the British were sorting out people they had liberated. Since I spoke English, I was used as a Polish translator for those who were from Poland.

Q: Right. Let's continue that on the next tape, we're going to have to stop this tape.

A: Yeah.

End of Tape Four

Beginning Tape Five

Q: Julian, explain what you were doing in this transit camp, for the British.

A: Yes, I was assigned as an interpreter to a camp where there were a lot of people who had been liberated and were from all different countries. Europe was -- Germans had taken people from different countries for forced labor. From France, from Turkey, from Poland, and from Holland. And when the war ended, somehow we were -- this camp was close to the Austrian border, and a lot of people were brought in, including some who had been in Mauthausen as prisoners of -- as prisoners in the German camp. And some had not been in camps, but had been in forced labor in different factories or doing different jobs. And it was a sea of humanity, and -- and they were out in open areas, so some of them just warming themselves up by fire. And -- and w -- and some of them were from Russia and from Ukraine. And the British wanted to send all these people home. And there were trains and the job in the camp was sorting people, finding out who they -- where they were from. And some of them didn't want to go back, in particular the Russians. Some of them were White Russians, who had collaborated with Germans, or who were afraid that they would be accused of having collaborated with German. So it was quite a messy scene and some of them were basically forced onto the trains and -- and also I saw Serbs being take -- Serbs were taken prisoners because they had fought together with the Germans, and they were being shipped back to Serbia. And -- some Serbs, anyway. And -- and -- and there were Polish people, which is why they needed Polish interpreter. And they were trying to figure out who was who and where they should go and where they belonged. And some desperately wanted to go home, and some were afraid to go home. So --

Q: And your job was what? To --

A: To --

Q: -- question them [indecipherable]

A: -- to question them and get information where they were from, and -- and how they got there. And --

Q: What was the --

A: -- to verify their stories.

Q: Right. Were some people more difficult --

A: It was a British operation.

Q: Right.

A: I was just assigned as an interpreter.

Q: Yeah.

A: It was not a Polish army operation.

Q: Now, I -- as I understand it, you met some people who came from Mauthausen, the men.

A: Right, I met --

Q: Was -- that must have been a very difficult story to hear.

A: It was a very difficult situation to see these people because they were like skeletons and they were basically supporting each other, and barely able to move and walk, and -- and -- and they were still in the striped prisoner gear, yeah.

Q: Now is this the first time that you had met -- met anyone, as opposed to just hearing the stories --

A: Right.

Q: -- who had been through some of the most difficult --

A: First time, yes.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: It was the first time.

Q: And what did that do to you? Anything?

A: Well, it moved me very much, and it certainly made me realize what people had been going through during the war.

Q: Right. And were you in favor of what the British were trying to do, or did you think this was wrong?

A: Well, I was in favor of people being sent home, but I think there could have been a little more humanity to it.

Q: Right.

A: And they didn't have the amenities. Some of them -- some of them were -- they were being packed -- sometimes when I see the movie like "Shoah", and I see how the Germans packed people, it wasn't that bad, but it was -- some of it was forced packing of people onto trains.

Q: Uh-huh. And how long were you doing this? A month, two months?

A: Probably like a couple of months, yeah.

Q: Uh-huh. And was it after that that you were given the opportunity to go to Turin and go to the university?

A: Yes, it was after that, yes.

Q: Did you happen to know that Primo Levi, was he anybody that was known, wh-who came back to Turin, who lived there for the rest of his life?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No, I didn't.

Q: Not at the time.

A: No.

Q: Did you like going to the university there?

A: Well, I liked very much, yes.

Q: Yes.

A: It was a relief and a reprieve after service in the military and then we again all got along very well, and -- and we were like a close group together.

Q: Right.

A: Eventually I moved out of the dormitory to a private apartment with another Polish colleague.

Q: Right.

A: With whom I'm still in touch, you know, lives in Florida, he's a Catholic, but he calls me up very often.

Q: Now tell me something, because people may not know, was there a lot of destruction in Italy, because it seems -- it could seem surprising that a university would be open --

A: Well, in Turin there was very little destruction.

Q: Very little.

A: Almost no destruction.

Q: I see.

A: Turin, Genoa, Milan, were not really destructed too much.

Q: Yeah. And your Italian was good enough to go to the university?

A: Yes, my Italian --

Q: By then, yes?

A: -- was quite good, yes. And I took a sort of engineering course, yeah. First year of engineering it was called.

Q: So, are you, throughout this period, are you able in some way to communicate with your parents? Are you a --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and your sister, you're able to write?

A: I was able to write and send letters, and once I was even given a leave of absence during the war to go back to Palestine and visit my parents.

Q: Really?

A: By boat, of course.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Yeah. And with a few other Polish friends --

Q: Right.

A: -- who had relatives in Tel Aviv, or some --

Q: So that must have been a very nice thing for you to [indecipherable] to do.

A: It was a nice interlude, yeah.

Q: And did you then, when you met your parents and your sister, discuss what you would do? Cause it was clear that the allies were going to win by this time.

A: Right.

Q: I mean, it probably was clear even before.

A: Right. And we at that time started corresponding with my aunt who was then in New York, and --

Q: Now this is the same aunt, this is the sister --

A: The same aunt, yes.

Q: The [indecipherable] right.

A: Yes. And we were trying to get a visa to come to the United States, and -- and actually, at one point I -- my aunt [indecipherable] was in her second marriage. In her first marriage, her married name was Ulam, and her nephew, son of her husband's dead -- the husband died, she was a widow before she remarried. And he was in the United States, his name was Stan Ulam. He was -- later became known for inventing the hydrogen bomb. But he was at University Southern California and he was a mathematician, an outstanding, world famous mathematician. And he also then went to New Mexico, or to -- to Los Alamos to participate in the development of the bomb. And he was well connected, and he got me an admission to the University of Southern California. So I went to the consulate in Genoa to see the American consul to pick up the visa, and the consul asked me, do you want to stay in the United States? And I said, of course. And it was absolutely the wrong answer, because the moment I said that, I couldn't get the student visa, because student visa is only for temporary stay as a student.

Q: Right, right.

A: So the consul said, you have to apply for regular immigration visa. And Polish quota was very tight because at those ti -- in those days, each country had a quota, and since a lot of people from Poland were displaced, the Polish quota was very difficult to -- to get the immigration visa, and it was like a three year wait. So I didn't get the immigration visa til after I got to London. So my trip to Genoa was wasted, but my aunt finally send me the -- the papers to -- affidavit to -- to apply for the visa.

Q: Now, are your -- your parents and sister trying to get to the United States at the same time?

A: My parents and sister -- well, my sister went to study in Beirut, Lebanon, because she didn't want to study in English or in Hebrew. S -- and she was interested in French, and in Beirut she first went to the English university, but transferred then to the French university, she studied

medicine. And so my sister was already in Beirut, not with my parents, and I was in the army. And the British then offered to evacuate Poles from Palestine. Just before they were going to leave Palestine, they evacuated Poles who wanted to leave, to Great Britain. And my parents communicate with my sister and she came and together they left from Palestine to -- to go to England, yeah. And I was already in England at that time.

Q: Oh, so you got there before.

A: I got there before.

Q: And so you were --

A: The British didn't want to keep Polish soldiers in Italy too long.

Q: Right.

A: And actually, the better student you were, the longer you could stay. So I stayed quite long in Italy to complete my first year of engineering, and then I had to leave.

Q: Right. Now, was there any thought on your parent's part to stay in Palestine?

A: Not really, no.

Q: No, uh-huh. And you had no interest to go --

A: To return back, no. I was interest to start a new life.

Q: Right.

A: And when I got to England, the British wanted to have better control over Polish soldiers in England so they put -- so they incorporated us into something called Polish resettlement corps.

Q: Right.

A: Polish resettlement corps was a British unit for Polish soldiers. It was not to fight, it was just to control them. And then, people who were in Polish resettlement corps could either get leave of absence to go to study, or they had to go to work. In Britain at that time there was compulsory

labor actually, yo-you had to work, so you had to report to the employment office, and they would assign you a job if you couldn't find one.

Q: Right.

A: And a lot of Poles ended up in coal mines, and -- because [indecipherable] Britain, so -- but I was one of those lucky ones who were given a -- an -- an -- an opportunity to go to London and study, and I started in something called Polish University College, which doesn't exist any more, but was preparing Polish former soldiers to take degr -- amer -- British degrees. And at that time University of London had a program which was called external program, so that you didn't have to attend the university, you could just take exams as an external student. And I couldn't get into any British university, they were all fully booked, so I went to this Polish University College, and I start preparing for what's called part one of the Bachelor's degree for the University of London external examination. And then -- and I took that examination and when I passed I transferred to Worcester Polytechnic, which was sort of a college, but again the exams were external University of London exams, and I was preparing for part two, and I was going through it pretty quickly so that by 1949, when I was 24, I was ready to take the Bachelor's degree exam, but then my visa arrived from the United States, and the American consul would not renew it. I wanted to wait til June, it was March, and he said he couldn't renew the visa, I would have to go to back of the line. So I went to the university office, and I asked them whether I could go and take the external examination in Canada, which was at that time a British -- part of British empire. And the -- well, I said even maybe should come back to London because be it'd be cheaper than taking a whole year of study.

Q: Right.

A: And they said, well what we will do, we will send you the examination papers to New York. So I did my Bachelor's degree --

Q: In New York?

A: -- in New York. I was at Columbia University under the supervision of somebody the British designated to supervise I was not cheating.

Q: Did your parent and sister go before you?

A: My parents, sister left for United States before me, yes.

Q: And they -- and --

A: Because they had no reason to stay --

Q: To stay.

A: -- behind, yeah.

Q: But when your parents were in [indecipherable]

A: Actually my sister went from England back to Beirut to pass her final examination to become a physician, and then she came back.

Q: And then she came to the United States. The period of time that your parents were in England, were you living together?

A: When we were living in England we were not living together, no. I lived in Kent, near Worcester Polytechnic.

Q: I see. And was your father working [indecipherable] and your mother? What was going on?

A: My father was doing some kind of menial work and my mother was sewing and earning money by sewing, yes.

Q: Uh-huh. So the period of time when you were in Palestine, while you were in the army, fighting, was she mainly supporting the family by her sewing?

A: She was supporting and I think they were getting a stipend from the Polish government.

Q: I see.

A: Like all the refugees.

Q: Right. So --

A: That's most likely.

Q: Uh-huh. So did everybody land in New York? Is that where you [indecipherable]

A: Well, my parents landed in New York and my sister, and they moved into an apartment and my father got different jobs selling newspapers in a kiosk and making deliveries and my mother kept sewing.

Q: Sewing.

A: She ended up becoming an expert at sewing ties and it was piecework, so she worked very hard. And I arrived in New York, and the first few months I prepared for my final exam.

Q: Right, right.

A: And then I looked for a job and I couldn't find any because when -- for good -- there was a shortage of good jobs. I didn't know whether I had yet received my Bachelor's degree, because the papers went through Britain by boat and the results were not in. And -- and my sister worked as an intern in a hospital, but she wasn't making much money either, and -- and when I -- it was a menial job they thought I was too well educated, they didn't want to give me a menial job. So in the meanwhile, when I was in London I had applied for college in America, not knowing I was going to get the degree from London, and a fre -- friend suggested that I apply to MIT and I got admitted, but I didn't have money to go and some kind person in New York -- the Jewish family service send me to somebody and he lend me some money and I went then to MIT. And when I arrived at MIT, I was told that since I didn't have yet my Bachelor's degree, because in

September it wasn't yet known whether I had passed in June or not, believe it or not and they said it depended how well I passed before they could admit me to graduate school. A -- th -- and I didn't want to become an undergraduate because I thought I'd passed, so they made me a special student. And there was a bit of a disaster because special student can't get the scholarship.

Q: Oh.

A: So -- and there is an organization in Boston called -- at that time there was an organization in Boston on Mount Auburn Street where they were helping Jewish immigrants and they gave me a loan and I also got a job at -- part-time job at MIT, so I finished for a few months as special student, then my matriculation results -- my Bachelor's degree results arrived and they admitted me to graduate school, so --

Q: Uh-huh. And then you got your --

A: And then I became an assistant [indecipherable] the scholarship, yeah.

Q: And what degree did you get from MIT?

A: I got a Master's degree in electrical engineering, yeah.

Q: [indecipherable]. And then you went to Harvard for Ph.D.?

A: Then I went to work for Lincoln Laboratory, which was located in those days at MIT. And I got admitted at Harvard for a Ph.D., and I was commuting -- working -- I was both working at Lincoln Laboratory, going to Harvard, it was slightly illegal because you're not supposed to be a full-time employee when you are --

Q: A student.

A: -- when you're a full-time student.

Q: Right.

A: So I used to pick my classes early in the morning or on Saturdays, or -- or at lunch hour.

Q: I see.

A: But -- and then I got the scholarship from Harvard, and I transferred there -- went full-time.

Q: And what happened to your sister? She got a degree in medicine, but certainly she couldn't just use it in the United States, she would have to take another exam, yes?

A: Ah, right, she, I believe, did take another exam. But my sister then -- my sister had been in love with somebody in Beirut who was her instructor, actually, he was professor of medicine and he came to New York, and they got married, and she went back to Beirut.

Q: She went back to Beirut?

A: Right.

Q: Oh my. And she remained there?

A: And she remained there, and was -- I -- when we got married we went to visit her and then when the fighting broke out in Lebanon she came for a short time to New York and then she went back, yeah.

Q: Yeah. Is she still alive?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No.

Q: I was thinking about your parents and in a way, while your life changed drastically, or you have to go through a number of changes, all of this happened when you were very young and in a formative state, whereas your parents lost everything --

A: Exactly.

Q: -- that they had.

A: Yes.

Q: And they were never able to recoup that.

A: Right.

Q: Is that right?

A: That's right, yes. It was very difficult for them.

Q: For them.

A: Yes. Particularly for my father, yeah.

Q: Because he never acquired the status that he had [indecipherable]

A: Right, mm-hm. But they never complained.

Q: They didn't?

A: No. They felt very lucky that their lives were saved --

Q: Right.

A: -- and their children went to school and were alive.

Q: Right. Do you think of yourself as a survivor?

A: I th-think of myself more as a refugee than as a survivor. I can't compare myself to people who were in camps.

Q: Yeah.

A: I was very lucky, yes, being able to reconstruct my life and --

Q: Right.

A: -- to come unscathed from the war.

Q: Is there anything that you'd like to talk about that we haven't spoken about at this point?

A: I -- I think --

Q: You think it's [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, pretty good story of my life, yes.

Q: Well, I want to thank you very much for your agreeing to tell us your story.

A: Well, thank you.

Q: It's been really quite fascinating, thank you.

A: Thank you.

Q: And we'll shut the camera off and then do your photographs.

A: Okay.

End of Tape Five

Beginning Tape Six

Q: Julian, tell -- tell me a little bit about what you did once you got your degrees from Harvard and MIT. What work did you do all these years?

A: I was mostly in -- I became a specialist in communication theory and signal processing and I first worked on development of radar and then on development of visual communications or radio communications in particular. And I first worked at Lincoln Laboratory, and then I worked at RCA and then I started my own company.

Q: How -- how did you happen to narrow the field? I -- I'm assuming this is -- is part of the field of electrical engineering, am I right?

A: Correct, yes.

Q: And if that's the case, how do you -- how did you narrow it down to these particular aspects?

A: I looked for the most mathematical part of electrical engineering.

Q: Really?

A: And that turned out to be signal processing and what's called statistical communication theory.

Q: Uh-huh. But this led you also to work a great deal with the military, I gather?

A: Right, I worked quite a bit military research and development and with NASA. And very proud I contributed to the first landing on the moon because I assisted in the selection of radars for them, and testing them for -- for the landing on the moon.

Q: Really? So were -- were you there when -- when the lift-off happened?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: No, I was not there, I watched it on televisions.

Q: On television like the rest of us.

A: And I was very excited.

Q: I bet you were. And you worked for how long? When did you retire? Just --

A: I retired formerly in 1987.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But I continue still consulting.

Q: You do?

A: Yes. And I occasionally write something and I just recently wrote a chapter for encyclopedial telecommunications.

Q: I see. When -- when you look back on your life, do you see that your experiences had an important influence on how you lived your life after the war?

A: Definitely, yes.

Q: An-And how would you characterize that?

A: Well, first of all, having served in the military and having had ups and downs in my own life, I learned that money is very valuable, but that you really -- well, it's more important that you feel good and do the right thing. And -- and I learned to respect people in every walk of life. And -- and sometimes I found different people helped me in different situations and some of them were not my buddies, and -- and also I learned to not give up easily and to have faith that I can get out of a situation, and if it was difficult for example, in business, I learned to persist and -- and try to find a way to solve problems. And I kind of got -- I get very challenged to -- when I'm in adversity, to deal with it. And I think I've taught my children that.

Q: And how do you relate that to the -- do you think -- well, I don't know how -- whether you can even answer this question. Had you not escaped, had your not -- not -- your parents shown

you that there are other ways to handle things, it might have been easier to become depressed, or -- or not have such a hopeful outlook.

A: Well, I actually am determined not to become depressed.

Q: Right.

A: And my mother at one point became depressed and I felt s-so miserable about it, and saw her so miserable that I decided --

Q: That you wouldn't. [indecipherable]

A: I will not let myself become depressed, under any circumstances. And I -- I -- I kind of sometimes welcomed the challenge. I -- I don't regard it as adversity, I regard it as something to overcome, when there is a problem.

Q: And I understand that you are very involved in Polish Jewish relations and involved with those Poles with -- who were not Jewish necessarily, who went though similar experiences to you. [indecipherable]

A: That's right. I -- I -- I feel that the people who went through it, we really had all very good relations. Now, this was not true of survivors, some of whom are very bitter that some their friends denounced them. And on the other hand there are people who survived who were saved by Poles. It was almost impossible to survive without some assistance from somebody. But I'm interested in seeing Polish Jewish relations become normal, and -- and this is impossible unless you participate and try to do it, y-you can't just say I won't have anything to do with these people and hope that relations can become normalized. And I believe it's important that people get along no matter what nationality they are, and what ethnic group they are and what religion they are.

Q: And do you see improvements in the relationship of Polish Jews and Polish Gentiles?

A: I see improvements particularly among educated people and we are amazed when we sometimes go to Poland, in recent years we have gone to Poland almost every year, that there are some people who become very interested in -- in Jewish history and contribution of Jews. Jews who are 10 percent of Poland. And I think some of it has been the German propaganda that sort of separated Jews into umensch, which means, not a man, inhumans basically.

Q: Right.

A: And -- and also Soviet propaganda which was against Palestine, and against Zionism, and -- and some of this is the Soviet and German inf -- a-and, you know, the Germans have become democratic country now, and -- and Communism is dead and some of it is disappearing in Poland, but there is still, particularly among people who are deprived, who look to be either better than somebody, or to be mean to somebody and compensate for their depravation, no matter whether the person is guilty of their depravation or not. And some of these people are still sort of anti-Semitic --

Q: Right.

A: -- but the more intelligent people are not, I don't think. And so I am active in -- in -- both in trying to document Polish Jewish history and in Polish Jewish relations.

Q: Relations. And tell me when you met your wife.

A: I met my wife around -- I'm not very good at dates, but I think it was around 1958.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And -- and I was already working and my wife was still a student and she -- and I met her at a party, and at first she wasn't interested in me, but then one day I arranged to meet her finally, and she asked me some questions about my past and she became interested and -- and then our romance was partly my telling her the story of my life and then it turn out her father had been

from Poland himself, and he came here just before the World War I, and she was listening to what I had to say and gradually our friendship grew.

Q: And when did you get married?

A: We got married in 1960.

Q: Oh good, you remembered that.

A: It's a -- that's one easy -- because it ends in zero, that's an --

Q: That's an -- it's an easy date [indecipherable]

A: -- easy date, yes. And it was really, I think a very fortunate experience for me, and --

Q: And you have three children?

A: We had three children, two girls and one son and our daughters are 38 and 35 now and our son is 33. And we have done a lot of family traveling, yeah. We went to Poland and actually to Ukraine with the children, so -- in 1989, when the Iron Curtain dropped. I had been afraid to go to Poland before I retired because I was working in defense industry, but then after I retired and Gorbachev came to power or something, we decided to go and visit Lwów.

Q: And you went as a family?

A: And we went as a family to show them. Actually, my -- I didn't want to go at first, but my wife insisted, so we --

Q: Right. And you have eight grandchildren?

A: We have eight gran-grandchildren, yes.

Q: Well, I think what I'd like us to do, we'll stop the camera.

A: Thank you.

Q: And I thank you, and we're going to look at some photographs --

A: Okay.

Q: -- so that people can see part of your life --

A: Okay.

Q: -- in photographs.

A: So we going to change seats?

Q: Yes.

Q: And who is this gentleman here?

A: This is my grandfather, his name was Joachim Philip. And actually in the birth certificate he is listed as Chaim Carmen Philip. And he is a very dapper gentleman in a bowler hat and with nice gold chain and a cane in his hand and stiff, white collar.

Q: And this is your mother's father?

A: My mother's father.

Q: Okay.

A: He was in real estate business.

Q: And who is this?

A: This is a family photo of Joseph Bussgang, and Stefania Bussgang, my father and mother with myself, Julian and with my mother and my sister Janina, or Janine. And my father was very proud because he had gone on a trip to Amsterdam and bought those matching outfits for my sister and myself.

Q: And who is this good looking lad?

A: This is myself, Julian Bussgang as a young boy, and I am with a -- in a sailor kind of uniform, which was a school uniform in the school I attended during my elementary school.

Q: And about how old do you think you are?

A: I think -- I wrote it in the back. I think I tried to reconstruct it. I-I-It's on the back of the picture. I think I am --

Q: Eight. That's what it says.

A: -- I think I'm eight, yeah. Eight or nine.

Q: Okay.

A: This is a photograph of my mother who is in mourning, that's why she's dressed in black with a veil. And her mother had passed away. And it's myself, Julian and my sister Janine in Krynice, which is a Polish sort of resort spa where there is -- famous for its good mineral water, and we are holding glasses with glass straws to drink this special water.

Q: And this one?

A: This is my father, Joseph Bussgang, also in Krynice, walking al -- along the street, which is kind of like a park and he carries an umbrella and has a rain cap on and he has got breeches on. This is his informal sports outfit. And he came to visit us because my mother and we used to go on vacation and my father would come and visit us for a few days and go back to work.

Q: And this?

A: This is my mother, Stefania Bussgang, and it's a photograph that she took for a passport, I think, and it may have been taken just before we went to Palestine, I think.

Q: And when was this taken, do you think?

A: I think this was taken 1938, just before the war, when I was a high school student.

Q: You're very serious.

A: I look very serious, yes.

Q: And this one?

A: This is my sister, Janine, with two friends, during the summer of 1938, ye -- training as auxiliary women corps or something like this, when the girls were preparing for war. My sister was very tall so she looks high -- taller than the other girls, and the other girls are not Jewish and they're all good friends.

Q: And this one?

A: This is a photograph, portrait for a document, of my father, Joseph Bussgang, who always looked very serious and was very serious.

Q: And this photo?

A: This photo is of myself, Julian Bussgang and my friend Karot Sangler, who now lives in Toronto. And it's taken on sort of sand dunes in Palestine and we are on a boy scout expedition with a Polish troop of boy scouts.

Q: And who is this group?

A: This group is the graduating class, my class from the Polish high school in Tel Aviv. And I am in the first row standing second from the right. And the photograph shows that many of my colleagues were already in military uniform, and had come from the army to -- on a leave of absence to finish high school. And the director of the school is seated second from the left, Mrs. Parish. And in the front row, the first on the left, is our classmate, his name was Bigniew Okulicki, his father Leopold Okulicki was the commander of Polish underground just before the war ended. The man seated in front of me, second from the right is Janusz Jedrzejewicz, who had been minister of education in Poland and Prime Minister for a short time, and he was our teacher of mathematics, and he was an excellent teacher and I was one of his favorite pupils.

Q: This photo?

A: This is my mother, Stefania Bussgang in Polish Red Cross uniform. She was a volunteer Red Cross person in Palestine and helped with people who were Polish military refugees who were ill or hospitalized.

Q: And this?

A: This is myself, Julian Bussgang right after I was -- I joined the army a-a-as a 18 year old, young recruit.

Q: And when was this one taken?

A: This is myself, Julian Bussgang, in my first military training, in an armored u-unit, with tanks in the background, in El Kasasim in Egypt near the Suez Canal. And I have a black beret which was the insignia of being in tanks, and the Polish eagle on the beret. And we have British uniforms with Polish insignia.

Q: And this one?

A: This is myself, Julian Bussgang, after the battle of Montecassino. I received one bar promotion to -- I'm a cadet officer, or officer cadet, which is shown by the white stripe on the epaulet and I have the ribbon from the Cross of Montecassino on my left -- above my left pocket and on my beret I have one bar for being lance corporal, and it's a posed photograph.

Q: And this shot?

A: This is Julian Bussgang on the street in Rome in a summer uniform, dressed up to go to an officer's meeting, and looking very serious.

Q: It was 1944, you think?

A: 1944, yeah, definitely.

Q: And who is this?

A: This is my father, Joseph Bussgang in a picture taken for a document, probably for a passport.

Q: And these two?

A: This is myself, Julian Bussgang, and -- in uniform, and a f -- colleague and friend called Anjay Kovach or Andrew Kovach, and he is in civilian clothes, and we are both students after the war at the Polytechnical di Torino, which means Polytechnic of Turin, in Italy. And we are standing right on the bank of the river. And we took this picture because our sisters were studying in Beirut and we're good friends and we send the picture of the two brothers to the two sisters.

Q: And this building?

A: This is the house that I was born in and grew up in. I was actually born not in the hospital but at home with a midwife delivering me. And it's in Lwów, Poland, and we lived on the first floor with a large balcony, and we had a tenant on the second floor with a small balcony, and my father had an office on the ground floor. And this picture was taken in 1989 when my wife and I went with our three children for the first time for me after 50 years to visit the place where I was born. And the house is not changed very much outside, it's changed very much inside.

Q: And this?

A: This is a photograph taken on the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Montecassino in May 1994. In May 1994 there was a big ceremony at Montecassino. And this is the Polish cemetery at Montecassino but the two rows of graves at the bottom have Stars of David on them, and they're the graves of Jewish soldiers who fell while fighting in the Polish army. The other graves have crosses.

Q: And when was this taken?

A: This was taken, I would guess, around 1999. It's a photograph of my wife Fay, and myself,

taken in Wellesley, Massachusetts where a friend of our daughter's took a photograph, she liked photography and -- and it's a shot in a park in Wellesley.

Q: And what about this gang?

A: This is the Bussgang gang. It was taken in the -- in sum -- in October of 2002, and my wife is in the rear along with myself. And my son is in front of me on -- on the -- on my left, and -- and in the center is my son-in-law, who is married to my daughter Julie, who is in front of my wife. And my daughter Jessica, who is our oldest child, is in front of my wife, bending down. And -- and then my daughter-in-law, my son Jeff's wife, is bending down, or kneeling down in front of him, and my son-in-law, Tom Rosenblume is on the right, holding his baby boy. And my daughter Jessica has three children, two girls who are in front of her, and the little boy Tom is holding. And my son Jeffrey has three children who are around his wife, and one is in the middle in the little baby si -- seat. And the two boys on the edges are twin -- identical twin brothers who are about a month old or -- or -- or two months old, who belong to my sister Julie, who lives --

Q: You mean your daughter [indecipherable]

A: -- in California -- I'm sorry, my daughter Julie, who lives in California, yes. My oldest grandchild is the girl in the black dress in front, her -- her name is [indecipherable].

End of Tape Six

Conclusion of Interview