

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Moshe Leshem**  
**October 6, 2004**  
**RG-50.030\*0491**

## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Moshe Leshem, conducted by Karen Michelle on October 9, 2004 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

## **MOSHE LESHEM**

### **October 6, 2004**

#### Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is October ninth, 2004, U.S. Holocaust History Museum, Washington, D.C. interview with Moshe Leshem in his home in Tuckahoe, New York -- in his office in his home in Tuckahoe, New York. This is Karen Michelle doing the interview. Also present is Mr. Leshem's wife, Alyssa.

Answer2: Right.

Q: Okay. So I actually want to know about your early childhood.

Answer: My early childhood?

Q: Mm. Tell me who yo -- about your parents and what they did.

A: But my father was a -- a -- a ma -- math teacher in the high school. And my mother was a Russian, because the -- she was a good pianist, also, because he -- he [indecipherable] early and ba -- got married to my father in the World War One, because he --

A2: She.

A: She fled to Vienna, and there, my father met her in -- in the public garden, because h-he immediately told her, w-will you marry me, because he agreed.

Q: Now where was this that you were born and brought up?

A: What?

Q: Where were you born?

A2: Where were you born?

A: I was born in th -- Drogo bych because it -- it is -- it -- they, in U-Ukraine, because it was Austria, because my grandfather was an oil prospector. There is no longer any oil there, o -- today, but he was a oil prospector, he was Russian. And I was born in Drogo bych. It is -- my father was a Czech, because I consider myself a Czech, original a Czech citizen.

Q: And when you -- when you were a child, did you have brothers and sisters?

A: I did have one sister, he died in Terezín -- Theresienstadt.

Q: Older or younger sister?

A: Younger. Fo -- five years younger.

Q: Okay. And y -- tell me your date of birth.

A: 30<sup>th</sup> of September, 1918.

Q: So you are just a little bit older today than you were a week ago.

A: Yes.

A2: No next -- the end of the month.

Q: Oh, 30<sup>th</sup> of October, I misunderstood.

A2: No, 30<sup>th</sup> of -- oh, right, 30<sup>th</sup> of September.

Q: Yeah.

A2: I got mixed up. Sorry.

Q: So Happy Birthday.

A: Th-Thank you.

Q: What kind of family life did you have?

A: My father was a very strict man, at I appreci -- appreci -- appreciated it. [indecipherable] Father. My mother was a lovely woman, and she played with us.

Q: What was your father's name, and what was your mother's name?

A: My f-father's name was Armand Lemberger, and my mother's name was P-Paula Buldoski -- Buldoskanova.

Q: So when you were born, what was your name then?

A: Ernest Leshem. Ernst, Ernst.

Q: But it wasn't Leshem.

A: No, no, no, Lemberger, yes.

Q: Ernst Lemberger.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Did you have a middle name?

A: No. Yes. I did have a -- Moshe was my middle name, yes. Because on my birth certificate, I had Moshe mi-middle name, because it -- it got lost, because I asked -- asked the United States embassy where the -- they could find my birth certificate in -- in droga -- Drogobych, because they says -- this also -- was all destroyed.

Q: Now you said when you grew up you considered yourself Czech, but you lived in the Ukraine?

A: No, no, no, no, because I was almost -- i-it -- I got to ch -- Czechoslovakia, I was not one year old.

Q: Okay, so you were born in --

A: Yes, drog -- drog --

Q: Drogobych.

A2: Which was Ukraine. They made -- they made --

Q: It was Ukraine at the time.

A: No, no, no. Because is aust -- Austria, because this -- it's was Austrian territory, because then they came pe -- Polish, and now it's U-Ukraine.

Q: Okay, so you -- did you move then, as a small child, after you were born, or did you s -- did you grow up in Drogobych?

A: No, because I -- I was a year old because my father was a Czech, because Czechoslovakia ba -- became independent after World War One, because he was a Czech.

A2: Then he moved to Brno.

A: No, yes, yes. Because he was -- he was the teacher, beca -- he was told to move to ano -- but those -  
- he was in the Jewish Reform [indecipherable] gimnasium, because that's as -- a -- the -- the -- it was

a private school, but they'd have official recognition by the sec -- Ministry of [indecipherable] Education.

Q: Okay, so when you were very small, you moved?

A: Yes.

Q: To Brno?

A: Yes.

Q: And how long did you live there?

A: In?

A2: In Brno.

A: In Brno? I was -- till June --

A2: Of?

A: Of '39.

Q: Okay, so a long time.

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

Q: You -- you -- you really had your formative years there.

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Okay. Was your family religious?

A: No, no, no, no. Beca -- I was not -- non -- non-religious. My father came to -- Friday night, and -- and ha -- high holidays, yo -- Yom Kippur, a-and Rosh Hashanah.

A2: He went to the synagogue on these holidays?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And did -- did you go with him?

A: Y-Yes. H -- he -- now and -- I -- I used to go, but I didn't believed it.

Q: Were there many other Jewish families?

A: Yes, because there were 12,000 J-Jews -- Jews in Brno.

Q: Did you feel that you were identified as Jewish, as a --

A: Yes, yes, because got -- my father was -- oh yeah, a -- a Zionist, because he [indecipherable] Zionist organizations, cause -- cu -- this was called the realistic Zionism, because th-the -- doesn't exist any more. And I -- I -- we had the -- in Czechoslovakia, you could declare in -- yourself as Jewish by nationality, because there was the -- there was a multi-national law in Czechoslovakia. And we always declared Jewishness nash -- nationality.

Q: Really?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: What does that mean to you, Jewish nationality?

A: Because th-there's a Czech, a Slovak, a Hungarian, a German, Jewish. Because as you -- re -- we -- 35 percent of the Jews in Czechoslovakia declared themselves as Jewish nationality.

Q: What does that mean to you, as opposed to say Czech nationality?

A: Jewish? I was a Jew, because a -- a -- and I -- and until the day I will -- I'm not sh -- ga -- I -- becau -- if they ask me are you Jewish? No, I'm a Jew, I'm not Jewish.

Q: So you mean by culture, not religion?

A: Yes.

A2: By nationality.

A: Yes, yes.

A2: No.

A: Yes.

Q: Now, you say your father was a Zionist?

A: Yes.

Q: How did that affect the way people treated your family?

A: We ed -- were -- we used to have Jewish --

A2: Friends?

A: Y-Yes, because w-we hadn't any Czech friends.

Q: No Czech friends?

A: No.

Q: Why was that?

A: Because th -- th -- bi -- in my -- in Brno, the Jews stuck together, because i-it -- th -- the Czechs and the Germans didn't like the Jews. They don't -- no, i -- th-the -- if their nationality was recognized, because i-in Jewish -- got everywhere, so yes, Jews were considered legal and citizen of Czechoslovakia, and they could get anywhere.

A2: But there was no social intermingling?

A: That is coo -- too complicated as the questions. Where -- there -- what -- he -- because the Germans, for instance, in -- in Czechoslovakia, this -- there's -- were the social democratic party because a -- one of the Germans was a Jew, and was minister in the Czech government.

Q: Did the Jews live together?

A: Yes, yes. No, because -- not in ghetto, because they lived everywhere.

Q: So there was no neighborhood?

A: No, no, no. Yes -- in Prague, yes, because in Prague, i-in the first district, that w-was almost hundred percent Jewish, but they could live anywhere.

Q: And in Brno, where you lived?

A: N-No, no, Brno was not the case.

Q: Okay. What language did you speak growing up?

A: German and Czech, because my sister wer -- was born in -- was Czech, because she knew German also, because the rest of the family knew German, and Czech as a second language.



Q: What language are you most comfortable in now?

A: English. Because I had -- I spoke f s-seven languages, because I know the seven language, bec -- I cannot express myself fluently. Because I speak English also f -- not fluently.

Q: It's quite fluent, come on.

A: Yeah, because I wrote the book in English, and the editor was e-enthusiastic, because he has no work. A -- a -- this is -- was a bad book, because the Jews didn't like it.

Q: What was the book?

A: "Balaam's Curse."

Q: Which means?

A: Bicsees -- Balaam was a non-Jewish prophet, because he proclaimed the -- the Jews would not be a people unlike all the other, and Jerusalem [indecipherable] separate. Becau -- at the heart, Jewish people drifted. That is -- that is not good.

Q: When did you write the book?

A: Oh, it was five years ago, six years.

A2: No, but we'll see, you finished the book before the second stroke, so it must have been published before '94.

A: Yes, so --

A2: Because by '94 you were writing the second book. Where do you have it?

A: Here.

A2: Here, or there?

A: No, no, no, no.

A2: Outside?

A: No. Yes. Oh, ba -- i-it's not important. No, no, leave the book. Is 10 years ago.

Q: We'll get back to the book then. So, you -- when -- how old were you when you started school?

A: What?

Q: When you began school -- we'll -- we'll go to the book in a -- in a little bit, thank you.

A: Wait a sec. These [indecipherable]

Q: Okay, here's the book. Nevermind, here's the book.

A: It is -- says here, '89.

Q: Thank you.

A: Is -- it looks good.

Q: Yeah. "Balaam's Curse: How Israel Lost It's Way, and How It Can Find It Again."

A: Yes. Because it -- it didn't find it. It's --

Q: Simon and Schuster. Well, congratulations. Shouldn't put yourself down for writing a book, come on. It's great. Okay, so you're a kid, you grow up, you started school.

A: Yes.

Q: What kind of school did you go to?

A: Jewish school, because it is -- was the Jewish secular school, because we have the religion for -- i-in high school, four years, the religion. Because that's was the -- also the other schools had religious also.

Q: Was it ever an option to go to a non-Jewish school?

A: Yes, yes, because you could go to any school.

Q: So why a Jewish school?

A: Because we are zi -- we are Zionists.

Q: It would look bad.

A: Yes. We got -- look the good.

A2: Your father taught in the same school.

A: Yes, yes, I've father -- my father taught in this school.

Q: So, did you go to this school from the time you began till you --

A: Yes.

Q: -- graduated?

A: Yes.

Q: Now, was it co-educational?

A: Yes.

Q: Were all the -- were the teachers Jewish and non-Jewish, or all Jewish?

A: No, because there were non Jews a -- Jewish teachers, because there were not enough Jews who wanted to be teachers.

Q: It -- was your father very politically involved? I mean, you say he was a Zionist, but was he --

A: Yes.

Q: -- was he very active, was he holding meetings in the home?

A: No, no, no, no, no. He played bridge. Because i -- i -- every afternoon have -- we went to the coffee house, and we played bridge.

Q: All of you?

A: No, no, he.

Q: Okay. Was -- was your mother also a Zionist?

A: No. My mother was -- he --

A2: She.

A: She went to the opera house, most of the time. And I too, because it was just five minutes from our home, the opera house.

Q: So were you brought up with a life of music, and culture, or what kind of family life did you have, other than bridge for your dad, and opera for your mom?

A: I don't understand.

Q: What did you do as a family? What kinds of things did you do together?

A: Together?

Q: Mm.

A2: With your parents.

A: No, not -- we have a very good upbringing, because we -- we had little social d -- social --

A2: A small social circle.

A: Yes.

A2: Of friends?

A: Because [indecipherable] friends, because be -- he was the son of the principal of the school. I don't know whether the others, you know, others pu -- Jewish people had friends, be -- because we were satisfied with what we had.

Q: What did it mean to you as a child that your father was a Zionist? What meaning did that have for you?

A: I was a Zionist too, because we were in the Jewish school, which was a Zionist school, which had even Hebrew.

Q: So when you were growing up, was it with the idea that you would move to Israel, what was the idea?

A: No, because it was not possible to move to Israel because the British didn't allow it.

Q: So what was your goal? What -- what did your father say was the ideal?

A: I -- I -- before the German occupation, we lived in the -- in a -- a separate environment -- Jew -- was Jewish.

Q: And then?

A: Zionist -- bec -- then the Germans came, and I w-w-wanted my father to -- to regis -- je -- register myself as the Jew, because the ge -- the Germans asked the [indecipherable] because the Jewish -- the

je -- the rel -- the religious Jewish community, all the Jews ha -- must be re-recognized, and I asked my father not to recognize me, because I --

A2: Not to register you.

A: Yeah, register is, because I -- when I was t -- I w-w-was as a young man very pessimistic, because I wanted to go out, because my father wouldn't allow it, because he registered myself as the whole family. But of course -- and I ri -- entered the -- the Hehalutz movement, and I went -- and -- t-to work in a village, because they have ran out -- th-there were not -- is enough working places for young people, because all young people registered with Hehalutz because the -- I th -- think it was fi -- till 25, till 26 years of age.

Q: Okay, so let me go back a little bit though.

A: Yes.

Q: Cause you jumped a -- a lot of time.

A: Yes, yes, yes.

A2: Yes you did. You jumped a whole -- between high school, university and getting --

A: Beca -- da -- yeah, no, but I -- I studied medicine.

Q: Okay, I want to go back.

A: Y-Yes.

Q: Okay. When did you -- you graduated from gimnasium?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And when was that?

A: That was a -- in s -- thirt -- '36.

Q: Okay, so you were 18?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. '36, so it's getting close now.

A: Yes.

Q: All right. What was -- what was it like in Brno then? In '36, what was the climate?

A: Well, the climate -- all people who wanted to study, co-could study at university, because we had as [indecipherable]

A2: It's matriculation.

A: Yes, yes, because I want to study, I want to -- to the medical school, and we were there, and it -- the students were also fascists, ver-very -- very -- as a g-group, the students were fascists, because they -- they were unfriendly relations to the Jews, because [indecipherable] maked demonstrations against Jews, right?

Q: Was there a quota system for Jews?

A: No, no, no, no, no.

Q: So Jews could get into the --

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Not a -- not a problem?

A: Not, not a problem.

Q: How many other Jews were there in medical school?

A: Oh, quite a few Jews, because in th -- in my semester [indecipherable] were 15 - 16 Jews.

Q: Out of how many students?

A: Hundred.

Q: But did you feel prejudiced against? Or did you feel conspicuous as a -- as a Jew?

A: No, no. Because they were very friendly, but the -- the groups were fascists.

Q: So what repercussions did that have for you?

A: No, no practica -- practically [indecipherable] no, no, no. Because the -- the teacher, and -- of anatomy was a fascist, but she -- we didn't feel any --

A2: Discrimination?

A: What?

A2: Discrimination?

A: Yes. Because it -- in -- in -- in exams there were hundred percent all right, because -- because there was one teacher was -- there were no Jews, not [indecipherable] because the Jewish professors went to the German's university. Because Brno was a -- a -- was divided between -- between Czechs and Germans, because one teacher of embryology --

A2: Embryology.

A: Embryology, once made the statement, "If you don't like Jews, you can go to hell." Because there were s -- w-was demonstrations against Jews.

Q: There were demonstrations?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Where were these? What were they?

A: In the -- in the -- i-i-in the seker -- no, no, in the school.

Q: There were demonstrations against Jews in the school?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: You mean other students, or faculty?

A: Yes, yes, yes. That's the -- the -- the fascists in the scho -- in the university demonstrated against Jews.

Q: And what form did the demonstrations take?

A: South.

Q: I mean would -- did they gather in and -- and have a meeting?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Invite people?

A: Yes, they did.

Q: So -- so describe it, please.

A: I was -- wasn't present.

Q: So did they put up posters?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Is that how you knew?

A: No, no, no. Because a -- they ca -- got up and shouted at Jedei ren --

A2: Jews away.

A: Jews away. Because that professor told the Jews -- the non-Jews, to go away from the lectures. He will -- he lectures only to the Jews, because that is not serious, but because the -- if you continue [indecipherable] this, this was pleasant.

Q: What year was this that the demonstrations started?

A: Because y -- y -- th-that was in the -- in the -- in that year that the [indecipherable] that German was --

A2: Annexed.

A: All -- was annexed to Germany, to Hitler.

Q: Were there demonstrations in the city as well?

A: No.

Q: Only in the university?

A: Yes -- no -- yes.

Q: Really?

A: What?

Q: There were only -- the demonstrations, were they outside of school as well? Were there demonstrations against Jews?



A: Because the fas -- the fascists, because this w-was a minority of fascists.

A2: But in Brno itself --

A: Yes?

A2: -- also, or only at the university?

A: No, only iv -- I don't remember, no -- th -- not demonstrations, no. Public, no.

Q: No?

A: No. In our city, that were no demonstrations.

Q: So w-w-when -- when the annexation occurred, did you f -- then feel vulnerable or not?

A: Yes, because -- because annexations was on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, sic -- 1939, because we were -- all were -- we were excluded of the -- to public coffeehouses, restaurants, you g --

A2: They threw you out of the university.

A: Yes.

Q: Wait -- wait a second. Please hold your --

A2: Horses.

Q: -- hold on. Thank you.

A: Parks were -- we -- were -- were -- excluded Jews.

Q: Okay, so at this time were you still in school, or were you out of school?

A: I want out of school.

Q: By -- by your own volition, or --

A: I wa -- wa -- because in the pra -- six months prior to the occupations, I was expelled of -- of -- as the school because I was born in -- in Drogo bych, because I -- I -- I could -- I could -- I could go on because it's -- it's -- recognize that I was not a foreigner, because I was only born in Poland, because I was a Czech, and my father w-was a -- a state professor in -- in high school, because they -- they let me study. [indecipherable] I didn't want to, because I thought that this was no use.

Q: You thought it was no use to keep studying?

A: Ye -- yes, because I wa -- wa -- I was always a pessimist, I thought Hitler, and I -- it -- and I knew what was coming.

Q: So you were expelled?

A: No, no, becau -- I didn't regis -- register myself anew.

Q: You didn't register yourself?

A: Yes.

Q: And tell me about that.

A: Why?

Q: What -- y-y-you were supposed to register all over again?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: With whom?

A: With the uni -- university, with the university.

Q: For another semester, you mean?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Fir -- fifth semester.

Q: When you were almost done?

A: Yes -- no, because th-that was only one third of the -- the medical studies.

Q: Okay, so you quit school one-third of the way through?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: So you kind of voluntarily removed yourself?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: You weren't really expelled, you just said --

A: No, yes, yes.

Q: -- you didn't want to do it any more.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay, there's a difference.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: [indecipherable] because my friend was born in Romania because he applied against this expulsion, and he was -- he was re-admitted in s -- in -- at the re -- university.

Q: Okay, now you -- you say you were always a pessimist.

A: Yes.

Q: And then when -- when Hitler came to power you said, what's the use.

A: Well, yes.

Q: Okay. So how -- when did you become aware of -- of Hitler and -- and of the pessimistic possibilities?

A: Because I listened to what was going on the Germany, and ga -- annexed Austria and I was convinced that Czechoslovakia would be the next one.

Q: Did your father think so too?

A: Yes, he thought so too, because he never spoke about it, because he was a pupil -- a -- a -- got a German pupil, yeah, because in the last -- in the last few years, he was teaching at the German school, because the -- the Czech -- the Jewish school was all Czech, because th -- because -- and one of the pupils sued him, because he -- he -- he got wa --

Q: Did you just say one of the pupils shot him?

A: No, no, shoo -- sued --

Q: Sued him.

A: Sued, sued.

Q: One of the pupils sued him, okay.

A: Because -- because he was a good teacher, good student before -- before he taught him, then my father --

Q: Did he fail him, or --

A: Yes, failed him, and he -- he went to court and the court freed him, because two students beca -- who -- who were in jail, becau -- a-and my father gave them three months afterwards, and they did succeed. I -- I -- I --

Q: Your father sounds like a very generous man.

A: Yes. Generous, this is -- my father was all the -- he was fair. And he died -- he was 59, he died of lung cancer, because at that time, that -- weren't any connections with the smoking a-and cancer.

Q: He was very young.

A: Yes.

Q: Sounds like you were very close with your father.

A: Yes, close, yes. He was very strict and I -- I appreciated it.

Q: When you felt these premonitions, when -- when Hitler started annexing around you and came to power, how did that affect your father's political activities, do you remember?

A: Yes, because he wrote to his -- to his relatives in America, and -- and asked them to get a -- a -- get us out, because it -- it's just not possible, because then he tried England, and it was there not possible, also. But he tried, because -- he didn't succeed.

Q: So how did this affect your -- your family life then? What happened with -- to the -- to your family, what happened to other Jews there?

A: Well, I was out of the family, I was a -- a -- in a [indecipherable] because -- what is it?

A2: They worked on farms.

Q: Okay, so this is -- so you -- okay, I'm -- we're getting a -- I'm getting a little confused, okay. Were -- we -- last I left off with you I think we were in '36?

A: No.

Q: '38?

A: '39.

Q: No, no, no, '39 is too late. '39 all sorts of stuff happened.

A: Becau -- I -- I -- this -- what happened in the court was after '39.

Q: Okay. And you got out -- you dropped out of medical school when?

A: Yes, yeah. I dropped out f-for -- in '38.

Q: '38?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, let's go to '38 then.

A: Yes.

Q: I don't want to -- you've got so much that went on in your life that I don't want to condense it too much.

A: Yeah.

Q: You know what I mean, just from what you've sent me, you've done a lot of things.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's just a tiny bit. Okay, so you drop out of medical school.

A: Yeah.

Q: What did you do then? What did you do with your life?

A: Nothing. Becau -- I've started to go to the coffee house, because -- yes, I got the -- a -- a few p-private p-pupils one.

A2: What did you teach?

Q: Just -- I have to ask you --

A2: I don't even know that.

Q: Okay, but --

A2: I'm sorry, this is all new to me, I'm sorry.

A: What I tut -- Latin. Yes. We have to Latin sh -- school also, because hive -- five languages in high school, because in my time the high schools were very good. Not -- not any more.

Q: Your s -- your pupil, did you -- were you restricted to only Jewish pupils, or did it matter?

A: Yes, yes. No, no, they were -- want Jewish people, but before there were -- want German people. Segonkovich was his name.

Q: You have an amazing memory.

A: No, no, because a -- no, my memory is gone.

Q: Fooling me, I'm telling you. At what point was your life as a -- as a Jew determined by being Jewish, so that whatever freedoms you may have had, say to go to medical school as a Jew, at some point, those freedoms were removed.

A: Yes.

Q: At what point was that, and what do you remember about that?

A: Well, we were -- the Jews were victims ahead -- already in '39, because all the -- the laws were -- were -- were -- the Jews were submitted to laws, because the Germans took the -- took -- I -- I don't ger -- Germans -- what --

Q: Well, they en -- they enacted a number of very severe laws.

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Because that is why I went from the family to the -- to -- to the [indecipherable] because they wanted to prepare the Jews for emigration.

Q: Emigration?

A: Yes. Becau -- they -- there were a number of Jews who emigrated, of course -- of j -- of course also to Palestine, because this were a small group of Jews.

Q: Did your father consider going to Palestine?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: No, because h-he -- he didn't consider it.

Q: I'm surprised.

A: Yes?

Q: Do you remember your parents talking about what to do? Do you remember any of that?

A: Yes, because he was worried about the children, because he wanted to -- to get to America and to England because he -- not -- didn't consider himself as -- he was -- he was really -- real -- realist, because he didn't talk.

Q: What do you mean he didn't talk?

A: Because he -- he was with his [indecipherable] he -- he wanted to be exact -- to s -- take a Jewish ba -- he wanted Jews -- wait a second.

Q: You want -- do you want a break?

A: Yes.

Q: A little break? Sure.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is tape one, side two, of the interview with Moshe Leshem. Okay, so yes?

A: The time the Jews did not think bo -- of the Holocaust, the [indecipherable] because they -- they -- there were restrictions, and severe restrictions, but they -- there was no transportation of -- to the -- to

Poland, and there was no -- no immediately -- immediate danger of death, because I was not convinced that this would end well.

Q: What did other people think at the time, when all of the laws came down against Jews, what -- did people think this was just a fluke, temporary, go away --

A: Yeah, yes -- no. Because th -- th-the -- they would -- they went along with the restrictions because they -- they couldn't imagine that they would come down to this, because the majority of the Jews didn't think of that.

Q: Were -- were Jews required to live in specific locations at this point?

A: No, no. [indecipherable] not, because then was a period when whe -- wh -- we [indecipherable] my family was expelled of -- from the -- from the apartment and they w-were forced in this -- i-in one room.

Q: Your family was kicked out of their apartment?

A: Yes, yes. Because this happened to everybody.

Q: When was this?

A: I don't know, but this was in '40 -- '42.

Q: Okay, so much later?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay, but the apartment that you grew up in as a chi -- did you grow up in an apartment or a house?

A: Na -- wa -- apartment.

Q: And how many rooms in that apartment?

A: Not -- wa -- we -- was si -- si -- cause we lived till March 15<sup>th</sup>, of '39, and in a three room apartment which belongs to the Jewish co-community. And -- yes, because th -- there was a -- a synagogue in the -- in the --

A2: Backyard.



A: Y -- th-the backyard, a-and the -- the offices were there, and the Zionist offices were there also, and th -- there were two cantors leaving it, because the ge -- German came and -- and expelled two -- most of the -- all of the tenants, because -- we were lucky, because we went before the [indecipherable] because the Jewish community took over the whole house. Because we were not -- we were not part of the yeb -- sha -- we weren't part of the Jewish community, because we were not functionally, because w-we -- that -- then we moved to the modern a-apartment, which was only two -- two rooms, and one room for the -- for the help, which was given to my sister.

Q: Okay, but that was -- that was when, though?

A: That was -- that was --

Q: So that was still in '38?

A: Ye -- no, no, no. Yes, yes. Bix -- te -- the end of '38.

Q: Okay. Which was the s -- and at that point you were no longer in school, is that right?

A: Yes, I ji -- I di -- was in school.

Q: Okay. I am getting so confused. Okay, you w -- you get out of -- you expelled yourself from school --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- basically. Were you then still living with your parents?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. You -- and you're tutoring Latin.

A: Yes. Once -- one pupil.

Q: I take it you didn't do that for long.

A: No, because the Germans came, I -- I was with Hehalutz.

Q: Okay, so tell me about getting with Hehalutz. Why did you decide to do that?

A: What -- what all young Jews did at that time, because I've register with Hehalutz and they -- they accepted me.

Q: Were there both young men and young women?

A: Yes.

Q: A-And they accepted you to do what?

A: To wait. Because they h-had to orda -- the -- the organizations was trying to find workplaces, because which it -- and everysi -- workplace they find, they took -- they took Jews, because as -- as a matter of fact, the -- this is -- this was easy, because the -- the -- the -- the germ -- Germans took Slovakia as a separate entity, and the -- in -- in harvest time, there were no Slovak workers who used to come for the harvest, because that -- the -- that gave the Jews opportunity to -- to send their own people.

Q: To do what?

A: To -- instead of the Slovak, who didn't come any more because they were a separate entity, and the -- the places that the Slovaks worked in were freed, because --

Q: And they needed young people to work?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Okay. So did you go -- did you leave home then, to work?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Where -- where did you go, what did you do?

A: I went to a -- a individual Hashorah, because they were not -- not a group, because there were three people in the village. And Mikelorwitsa. And all worked with different farmer.

Q: Did you have any training in farm work before this?

A: No, no, no, no. W-We -- we qu -- considered as students.

Q: So what -- what did you do on the farm?

A: Everything. Ev-Everything. Fir -- first it is the harvest time, we worked in the field, and my -- my boss, he loved me. And as a matter of fact, as a -- a -- a shadchan, you know? A [indecipherable] woman who --

A2: Matchmaker.

A: Ma-Matchmaker came one day to me and said ho -- I want to arrange this -- the marriage between you and that daughter of the -- of the farmer. Because -- I said I can't do that, because Jews are not li -- not allowed. No, you've -- you work, you are not a Jew.

Q: You work and you're en -- so you're not a Jew?

A: Yes.

Q: What did that mean when she said you --

A: Because h-he didn't consider the Jews who worked in the fields, because he -- there's pa -- they're - - had -- in their psychology, work -- people who work, they are not Jews.

Q: So he assumed Jews were slackers?

A: What?

Q: He thought Jews were slackers?

A: Yes, beca -- Jews were rich.

Q: Jews were rich?

A: Yes.

Q: Oh, okay. So do y -- do you think you changed hearts and minds?

A: No.

Q: No, it sounds like you did.

A: Because the m-mayor of the village was a fascist, because he -- he was the brother of a general -- of a Czech general who fled to England, and he thought that's who he -- he would be well thought of if you -- you join those fascists, because the -- this -- because a -- a -- a number of farmers went to

demonstrated a -- a -- against the -- Kukarussia was his name, because i-if he was anti-Semite, they didn't want it, because th-three Jews are c -- all right.

Q: So what was the town you were in? Where -- where was this farm?

A: What?

Q: Where was the farm?

A: In -- not -- in Bohemia, but i-i-it was close to the -- ma -- ma -- to my -- to my hometown.

Q: Did you si -- live on the farm?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Were there other people with you, other Jews?

A: Yes. Di -- no, we lived in the -- i-in a house w-w-which was empty, but it was meant for the poor -- for the poor of the village. And one poor -- one th -- one man was leaving to two, not in ours -- in our - - in our room, because we were three.

Q: Okay, three -- three of you, and one of you the prospective fiancé of the farmer's daughter.

A: Yes.

Q: So what -- now --

A: We w -- met her after -- we met her to the sk -- communist Zion in -- in Mikelorwitsa, and she cried.

Q: So di -- was the farmer's daughter interested in you?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: So you had a little romance?

A: No, no, no.

Q: So di -- so how did y -- what -- what happened after -- after this, when the -- you were a -- a -- you were approached to marry the daughter, and you said no, I can't, cause I'm Jewish. Th-The matchmaker says it doesn't matter.

A: Yes.

Q: Then what?

A: Because -- fr -- shortly after that, we were -- I was caught proo -- proo -- Prague, the -- the headquarters of the Hehalutz, because they -- they thought that the mayor was n -- was not in favor of us.

Q: So you were moved to Prague?

A: Yes.

Q: Oh. Then what happened?

A: Then I was two -- two or three weeks in the course -- course, and afterwards the Hehalutz movement, the leadership was in -- they felt that is -- there's war, of course, coming, and they left.

Q: Left Prague?

A: Yes, to Israel -- to Palestine.

Q: So they emigrated. The leadership.

A: Yes, yes, yes. Because they have the certificates.

Q: What certificates? Of emigration?

A: Yes, yes. No, of acceptance in Palestine by the British mandatory government.

Q: Did you think of going?

A: Yes, yes, I thought of it, but I was not -- I thought I could have gone, actually, but then I thought that my fate was th -- with the Hehalutz movement, because I refused to go, yes.

Q: Why?

A: I w-wanted to be with that group.

Q: With the Hehalutz?

A: Yes. With this group that I was working.

Q: What did you think you could do by staying?

A: Well, not much. Because it is a fact that a -- if you refuse to go -- because my father a-a-arranged for me to get a cerfic -- tuf --

Q: Certificate.

A: -- certificate as a student to Jerusalem, bec -- that I won't go, because I was now a proletarian. Yes, sh -- th-that was stupid.

Q: So the -- and what name were you using now, at this point?

A: Yeah --

Q: Still the name that you were born with?

A: No, Moshe le -- Lemberger.

Q: Okay, but it wasn't Moshe, right, it was --

A: No, the movement called me Moshe.

Q: Okay, well ha -- the movement called you Moshe?

A: Yes.

Q: Was that your choice or theirs?

A: No, my choice.

Q: Why?

A: Because tha -- this was my middle name.

Q: But why give up your first name for your middle name?

A: I didn't give up, because I was Arnosht -- Ernst Lemberger on -- on the official papers, but among ourself they called me Moshe.

Q: How did that start?

A: Everybody used her middle name.

Q: Okay. Was that to be more jew -- more bonded in your Jewishness?

A: Yes, yes, yes. Because I was afterwards col -- I became a member of the Hehalutz leadership, because they -- they -- they frunthe -- function of this left because they took every Zionist movement, but took -- they made you hanhalla.

A2: Directorship.

A: Yu -- ri -- directorship. I was one of them, except I was never a regis -- registered stylist, because they took me -- I-I was o-on a Jewish school, and my father was a -- a -- was a Zionist because they took me in.

Q: What in you -- I mean, given -- I mean your father was a Zionist, you weren't. You weren't related -  
- raised in a very religious household.

A: No.

Q: What happened in you to make you want to be a leader in that movement?

A: Well, they asked me, because I was a -- a Zionist always, always, because that was the good move for me, I thought, because I was immediately the -- the -- they made me director of the bake -- Beit Hehalutz, because th-that's was a ho-home for workers, because th -- the -- I go --

Q: Want a break?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. [tape break] Okay, so we're on you've become the leader.

A: I was the rev -- dov -- rest -- director of the Beit Karlotseim because this is h-h-ha -- hostile for Karlotseim, you -- who did find work, because -- and they were waiting for certificates, and all means of illegal transport sessions to Palestine. Not -- not one of them went.

Q: Okay, hang on, there's something now funky with the microphone. Okay, they were waiting but none of them went?

A: Yes.

Q: Why not?

A: But -- because I found out that the ce-ce-certificate of going to Palestine were sold to Jews for money, because -- including non-Zionists.

Q: Who sold them?

A: That Palestine office, because i-i -- the head of the chi -- pi -- tels -- Palestine office w-was Mr. Jakov Edelstein. He s-sold them. But --

Q: So Jews were exploiting other Jews?

A: Yes, because they -- they needed the money, because w-why give certificates to -- to poor people, proletarian, if they can get a lot of money for this -- for this certifi -- certificates.

Q: So you were stuck with a bunch of proletariat?

A: Yes. I believed in that, because we -- we went -- w-we wanted to go to dol -- the real kibbutzim in Israel, and that was proletarian culture.

Q: But you couldn't if you didn't have a certificate.

A: Yes, because we waited.

Q: So what did you do?

A: Well, I got disappointed very early, and that -- and then I -- I -- at the beginning, I published two pa-papers called Allez Immigrants, because up to then I was told I could not publish it because this allsbare illegal pub -- publications, that the Jewish community did not allow that. But that was a disappointment, but I c-continued my work. But then I -- I published later, I don't know the date, a -- a -- a -- that's was all -- oh yeah th-that -- then I -- there's -- took this Beit Karlotseim and turned it into a social affairs --

Q: Committee?

A: Yes -- no.

Q: Organization?



A: Yes, because -- and I organized a group of members of the Beit Karlotseim to protest against this -- against -- I can't sa --

Q: Against the change, you mean?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay, so help me understand. So here you're th-the -- the leader, right?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Of the young Zionist organization, of the Hehalutz.

A: Yes.

Q: You pissed off the people in Prague, right? They're mad at you, the other Jews?

A: Yes.

Q: So they say, okay, you can't do that any more, now you're a social organization?

A2: No.

A: Yeah. What?

Q: No?

A2: They wanted to declare them as social cases.

A: No, no, no, no.

A2: Well, see, that's what you wrote in the paper.

A: Because the -- there has -- the be -- Jewish community had a social department.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And that -- there was a number of organizations, social -- social organizations, Beit Karlotseim was separate because there was a separate o-organization, not -- not --

Q: Okay.

A: And the -- the organiz -- the social services department turned the Beit Karlotseim into a social organization. And this I acs -- saw it, but this was a move to young people to prepare the transportations w-when -- if c-comes.

Q: Really?

A: Yes.

Q: You s -- okay, I'm sorry.

A: And organized the young people of -- who lived in the Beit Karlotseim, to -- they must [indecipherable] against this move. And they didn't appreciate it at all.

Q: So the young people didn't go along with you?

A: No -- yes, is --

Q: They did.

A: They didn't go -- because the head of the social bi -- department, Dr. Katz didn't even talk to them.

Q: So the so-called adults --

A: Yes.

Q: -- just made a decision that you felt put the youth in peril?

A: Yes.

Q: And you fought against that?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And you got all the youth to go along with you?

A: Yes. Because then I was a -- then I was a -- a -- I was no longer head of the hek -- Beit Karlotseim, because I was sus -- suspect, because I said -- and that was actually what happened. The young people were sent to a -- a -- a -- a -- a camp in -- in Bohemia to -- to prepare the -- the -- the future ghetto in Terezín, because that time, Jewish community got the idea that -- that Terezín is the future of the Jews, a-and why at that time already two transportations went to -- to Łódź, because -- and that's -- the

Jewish community -- I'd believe so, they -- they -- they believed that was at -- a -- a solution for the Jewish problem in -- in ber -- bets -- ter -- te -- ter -- [indecipherable] Berman and Melber -- Bohemia and Moravia, because they would save the Czech Jews from being sent abroad to -- if -- ist -- it's proved to be death camp. But they a -- the Jewish community believed in that. I didn't. And -- and the youth repaired th -- Terezín as the ghetto. They were -- th-they were -- we -- s -- were strong. And youth, be -- I -- and young people, and dup -- keek -- they did prepare it. And when the ghetto came into being, I -- the -- the -- I can't. I can't.

Q: When -- when the ghetto came into being, did you feel vindicated in any way? Did you feel like, look, I -- I pointed this out to you, that this was a problem here?

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes. And how in -- how long --

A2: The directorship.

A: The directorship of the ghetto was almost hundred percent Zionist, because that was Jankov Edelstein's work, because he -- he believed in that, I think.

Q: And where was the rest of your family during this time? Where was your mother, and father, and sister?

A: Fa -- Father was dead, and Mother -- and the sister lived i-in pa -- sw -- in a -- a one room, expecting to -- to be transported, but it was not -- she -- she was -- she went to -- to Terezín s -- much - a bit later. I -- at that time, I published a leaflet warning the people who was the directorate in Terezín against -- it was very -- I don't -- I don't --

Q: So e -- were you -- in the leaflet, did you basically say look, your leaders are misleading you?

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Q: Must have gotten you in a little bit of trouble.

A: Well, yes, because I was a -- a -- not expelled, but I was suspended of the Hehalutz movement.

Q: So what -- what did you do then?

A: Well, la -- the directorate of the Hehalutz al -- in the Hehalutz was the -- the Hashomer Hatzair, and they voted against it. They wanted to keep me. Bu-But -- because I went to live with a friend of mine, a -- a German Jews -- Jew, who was married to a -- to the Aryan Jew -- a -- a German.

Q: Mm-hm. This was in Prague?

A: Yes, they were in Prague.

Q: So weren't you afraid to live with them?

A: No, pe -- he was the -- he was also waiting for a -- for a m-means to go to I-Israel.

Q: Okay.

A: Palestine.

Q: Okay. So you're no longer with the Hehalutz?

A: Y-Yes, because I was su-suspended.

Q: You have quite a history of that.

A: Yes. No, no. I -- I -- I -- I cannot -- I cannot continue [indecipherable] because maybe we make another date.

Q: We can do that.

A: Yes.

Q: We can do that.

A: I can't --

Q: I understand.

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: Keep speaking.

A: What?

Q: Keep speaking.

A: What -- I pick -- I w-want to s-speak fluently, but I cannot speak that.

Q: Well, you're doing just fine. This is a resumed interview with Moshe Leshem. It is November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2004. This'll be tape two, as the continuation of our interview, side A. This is Karen Michelle, the interviewer, and we're at Mr. Leshem's home in Tuckahoe, New York.

A: You speak very well.

Q: Still, let's hope it continues. Okay, we were -- we were your -- your history of getting kicked out of the Hehalutz --

A: Yes.

Q: -- I think is where we left off.

A: I was kicked out because I was -- I was living with a friend of mine who has a A-Aryan wife. He -- h-h-he was from Berlin, and h-h-he had the en -- apartment on -- he took me i -- to live with him, because I was a friend of his. And a -- and I lived there, and I worked with him o -- whatever we f-found. Snow -- so we got in the snow business, and a-all kinds of business. But I -- once we were sitting at dinner, and the father of the -- of Mrs. Weisner w-w-was with us. He came from Berlin. And suddenly the -- the Gestapo man ad -- came in, and he didn't react. He was -- because he was -- he had his hat on because it -- suddenly there's Mr. Davis, that was the blo -- the father-in-law of Mr. Weisner's, cou -- told him, "I don't answer because you don't take off your hat." Because he took off a hat, and he answered, and it -- he's of -- was a high official

of the German arm -- defense department. And in the end he said all right, he want -- h-he want -  
- he -- he was i-i-insisted, that Gestapo man, that I-I couldn't live with an Aryan wo-woman, and  
I went back to the -- to the Beit Karlotseim.

Q: They took you back?

A: Yes, yes. I -- well, they had to take him back -- back. I -- I -- I didn't have any difficulty in --  
there -- there was room that -- four -- shu -- so I went back to live there.

Q: When you say there was room, was this a group home?

A: Yes, yes, yes. Because Beit Hollitset, there was 30 people living there in -- in bunks -- in  
beds, not the bunks.

Q: So how many people to a room? How was this?

A: Oh well, here -- 50.

Q: Oh my gosh.

A: But -- beca -- I -- when I was director, I was the only director of this Beit Harthound who  
lived there, because I couldn't lived -- lived in -- in a sublet in -- with some Jewish people. No, I  
wanted to stay with -- with -- with the people who I was co -- [indecipherable]

Q: Okay, so this was like a commune?

A: Yeah -- no, no. This was -- this was a -- no, no, not a commune, because people who waited f-  
for certificates of -- for a transfer patient to I-I-Israel.

Q: How long would people wait there? How long would they stay?

A: Till they went to Terezín, because these people had -- were -- and ha -- these people were --  
were -- these people were there because they waited for it, because they -- they waited in vain,  
because -- and now na -- a number of them from Polska Paskavuz, that is -- that's -- was a -- a  
part of Czechoslovakia wh-who -- which was ceded to -- to bi -- yats -- Soviet Union, to uni --

Ukraine. And they had certificates which could make them go there, because they s-sold their certificates and -- and -- to other people, who could pay, and among them were a number of Jews who were a-anti-Zionists. I found that out.

Q: But it was a way to get out.

A: Yes, yes, beca -- it -- other Jews --

Q: So in this -- in the Hehalutz group home, were there families --

A: No, no, no, because they were all bachelors, and there was and -- different -- a different home for halut -- haluktort, because women, which were only a few, because the women didn't get certificates because -- I don't -- everyone that got a certificate got married because in -- that's formally married because they -- they -- everybody here had a -- a certificate, could bring his family along.

Q: So people would do a marriage of convenience just to bring other people?

A: Y-Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Uh-huh, and di -- and what -- what was your status then when you were there, back at the -- at the group home?

A: What?

Q: You moved -- you were taken back in the group home because you had no place to live.

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: And then what happened? How long were you there, what did you do?

A: Well, I -- I-I -- there was no hope of emigrated through Israel, there was no hope, so I went to the -- to the directorate of -- to the -- and I had a-an idea, because it was autumn, the end i -- they want men, but they didn't want women because I su -- I suggested to the Hanhalla that the -- the dir-directorate -- because they would [indecipherable] allow [indecipherable] to take -- take our

girlfriends without -- without their having work, because they agreed to do it, there was the only Haktarah because they to -- they agreed to this, because I found the three -- three comrades who had ra -- women, because one was married, one. And if we -- I went to a place c-called Oberra, and this was -- this was -- i-it was very nice.

Q: What kind of place was it, what did you do there?

A: Ah, because that was a farming estate. A-As a matter of fact, the owner was a German Nazi, ol-old Nazi, he had three farming stake in the -- which were originally Czech, because he was own -- th-the owner of the three places. He was very nice, because I spoke ger -- German, and I - - I spoke to him on -- what -- whichever way needed, and he -- he -- he told me, I would have a son-in-law that did like you [indecipherable] I have a son who is stupid. He -- he was in the eastern front. He was -- was very, very nice.

Q: And how long were you at the farm?

A: Few months.

Q: Mm.

A: Because I was determined to go underground, and in the vicinity was a-another group of people who were fr -- sent by the Hashomer Hatzair, tha -- it was -- was a -- a radical left wing group. And I -- w-we -- I talked to him and they promised to help us, or this -- or the -- or the comrades that were in that -- i-in our group, and I wi -- I-I -- they had connections to the communist underground, and they would help us.

Q: Now how did you communicate with the other groups? Weren't you kind of isolated on your farm? You were allowed to get out, have a social life?

A: Yes, no -- social life, there wa -- wa -- there wasn't much of a social life, because I-I c -- I visited there on Sundays, two, three times or four times.



Q: Okay.

A: Because I -- I -- I visited the -- the [indecipherable] office to get married, because what, I don't want to t-take yo -- why our girls married, because I got married was with -- cause they picked her o-on the transportations to Terezín.

Q: So this was a marriage of --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- convenience.

A: Yes.

Q: Not love.

A: Well, becau -- I -- no -- no, I had -- this was my girlfriends for summer once.

Q: Okay, so she was your girlfriend?

A: Yes, yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Okay. And she was about to be transported?

A: Yes.

Q: And so you married her?

A: Yes.

Q: And so she wasn't transported?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. What was her name?

A: Helena Rotamar. Sh-She was from Slovakia, n-not from Czech Republic -- Republic, there wa -- Protectorate.

Q: How did you meet her?

A: She was a member of Hehalutz, yes.

Q: And did she come then, live with you on the farm?

A: Yes, ji -- h-he was one of my girlfriends.

Q: One of your girlfriends? Listen to you.

A: No, no. N -- he was the only one.

Q: And she came to the farm with you?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay. And so together you were looking to join the communist underground?

A: No, beca --

Q: No.

A: Nobody ask her to look on -- it -- in the -- in the underground, there was no -- no -- no affiliations or su -- a-a-any of the groups, because the conc -- communist ha -- was the only underground group who took Jews. The others were not much of an underground.

Q: How did you make contact with them?

A: Through the members of Hehalutz Hatzair, because they had very close copper -- co-operations with the s -- communists.

Q: So then, at what point did you leave the farm and join them?

A: Well, I left the farm in May, 1942, because I -- we thought then that a number of people, including myself was in -- under transportation, because he le -- he -- he left bec -- because we left on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, that is exactly the -- the d-day that [indecipherable] was against Heydrich. Buc -- we didn't know about it, and I w-went illegally, I -- I had no documents, nothing. And I went to -- to t -- Prague, and we heard fr -- the news of the -- of the murder -- murder fr -- o -- f -- o-of Heydrich who was the Reich's protector. He was th-the number one Nazi in protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. And it was a -- a -- we'd had some Czech friends

fr -- and they were black mart -- black markt -- marketeers. [indecipherable] and -- and when -- when we went to their apartment, and the family was -- was ruled ba -- by th -- the woman, who he was a prostitute. But in the meantime he got married, because that -- th-the husband fell in love with this prostitute whom he hired, because he wa -- he was a very nice man. And this th -- I don't remember the name, and he s -- he said, "Well, you can't stay with us, because i-if they catch us, and th-they will -- would shoot us," yes. Not immediately, b-but it wa-wa- was -- was a -- emer -- emer --- emergency rules. And he -- she thought that I was wi -- if they shoot us all, it is ra -- all right, if you're a -- a Jew, or n-not. And I -- at night, he -- there -- they went into apartment -- o-of course th -- they missed one because it was a million citizens [indecipherable] fra -- because they couldn't go into all the a-a-apartment, and I stayed there, and we were safe, they didn't come.

Q: You -- your wife was with you?

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes. And -- an -- then the day after I tried to be in -- a Jew and that was not easy, and I knew -- I knew that the -- the office -- Jew -- the j -- Jewish community office was -- h-had my summons to -- to the -- in -- to come to Prague and go to Terezín. And I went to them, to the guy who had the -- th-this -- I ask him to give me this summons, because that summons I was legally in Prague. He shout no, yo-you ha -- you have -- you are an -- an transportations, and h-he wrote transport. But he wrote it with a pencil. I tried to argue with him, I -- I -- I -- his name was Fisgoos. He was a -- a -- a -- he was a -- a -- an fi -- official of the Czech [indecipherable] that -- in the ch -- Czech Republic. H-H-He was a Jew. No, because I -- this summons was -- was sent to the Gestapo. I w-w -- had a friend -- a friend, a-and a -- a guy who was in the Jewish community leadership, by the name of Francis Chekfreedman. I remembered him because I have ask him to send me the Gretz -- a history of the Jewish people by bre -- Gretz, of -- so I went to

him, and I told him what's has to happen there. He went to the o-office where these documents [indecipherable] and find -- found my document and gave it to me. And i-it was li -- eeg -- legal, but --

Q: So this was the first time you'd had documents for some time.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: So how did that feel?

A: It was really -- afar -- I was happy that I had those docs -- documents, except I had a -- a -- a -  
- a difficulty. I had two yellow Jude. I had no -- no [indecipherable] Jude [indecipherable]

Q: Di -- you say you had -- you had two Jew -- two yellow stars --

A: Yes, yes.

Q: -- on your clothes?

A: No, I didn't have them.

Q: Oh, you didn't have them?

A: Yes. But I went illegally to -- to Prague. I-I didn't have one because I-I -- I begged fr -- from friends I had fo -- before, that's -- they gave me two.

Q: Two stars?

A: What?

Q: Two stars?

A: What?

Q: Two s -- [indecipherable]

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes. And I went to [indecipherable] the -- that document to the -- the police headquarters, and I registered with the police, and the -- I -- a -- I know I'll be remembered that

one of the Karlotseim was -- w-was -- was with the en -- with the -- with f-family, because he didn't live in the -- in the Beit Karlotseim because he had fis -- [indecipherable]

Q: Ah.

A: Because they -- and I heard that he was transported to Terezín and I went to the -- to those -- to the landlord, who was the Jew, and to apartments, and I said I was -- I wants to -- to hire this room, because I -- I c -- which was I was married. And the -- he -- that -- he signed, and -- and I got legalized as a Jew, and I moved in this apartment. I -- I stayed three or four weeks because he was transported to -- to Terezín, and I lived there.

Q: You were moving constantly.

A: Yes. Since then I moved also, because I was in so many countries as ambassador. But --

Q: Wit -- do you feel uncomfortable now if you don't keep moving?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No. Because I ode. No, because w-we ha -- were in America 26 years, because you [indecipherable] of it, yes.

Q: Okay, so u-up until you were 60 years old, pretty much, you kept moving?

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Q: Okay, so we're in 1942, is that right?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. You're in -- you and your wife are in -- in a room --

A: Yes.

Q: -- in this man's house or apartment.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, for three weeks, and then you move again?

A: No, no, because I wa -- I do not quite remember how long we stayed, because then I -- and a -  
- in that time, I met -- I was with Weisner, with our friends, and I worked off hi -- for him,  
because i -- we worked for the German army, yes we -- we were -- we had inlaids.

Q: You had what?

A: In-Inlaids for the -- for boots. We worked for --

Q: You worked at making boots?

A: No, no, inlaids. In -- inlaids. It was rabid.

Q: Oh.

A: In --

Q: Insoles?

A: Yeah, i-insole -- insoles, yes.

Q: Okay, rabid insoles you made.

A: And to -- we were -- went also for the er -- German army, an -- and I don't know how there  
were -- there -- fo -- for children, the -- the were on glass plates, and we made the -- they were  
pictures and we made the [indecipherable] watercolors, because this was a -- the Germans did --  
did allow that.

Q: So that was a better job?

A: Ye -- no.

Q: Not a better job?

A: No.

Q: A job is a job?

A: No, it's -- that's the same --

Q: All the same for you?

A: Yes.

Q: All the same.

A: And then we got into contact with the Hashomer Hatzair, and -- and they told us that I got legalized, because in -- in the mayor of a -- of a little village, he was say that w-we actually were f -- were from there, because he didn't have to do anything, because he -- h -- I-I -- the police asked them if -- if it's was all right, bec -- because he -- he didn't have anything to do, because if it is -- a citizen was not known, he would have to report it because if he ni -- if all -- all right, that is all. Because enter that, and in --in this way we were legalized. But I wanted [indecipherable] as I lived a-as a Jew, I met a man called Vaslav Limberski, and because he was -- he -- I don't know, he was a driver of a -- of a lorry -- o-o-of a -- no -- n-n-not a -- no, lorry i-is a British --

Q: Truck.

A: It's truck, yes. Because Weisner was a genius businessman, and he go-got his driver with a trunk to -- to take our work to the Germans. And I -- he was from Vishnova, and h-he was in -- o -- in Bohemia as a [indecipherable] because he was in Germany, and -- and -- and I remembered the -- the -- the name, because I -- Limbersky and Lemberger was pretty close, and so I -- I registered in the police as Arnost, which was my name, Bohamire -- it is Limbersky. And I wa -- registers my wife a -- Maria Novakava, sh-she -- sh -- I paid one woman to give me h-her birthd -- birthd -- certificate. Well, so we were legal. I don't know -- I -- my wife, that is number one --

Q: Out of three?

A: Yes. She never worked. She -- because the -- the man who -- I never met him, who got to be the -- the mayor of the city, told me I ne -- I -- you know German, it gets f -- to the -- to this -- to the -- the -- to apply to the -- the language institute.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: Tape two B, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2004, continuation of the interview with Moshe Leshem. This is Karen Michelle and here we go.

A: Well, I -- I -- I applied the -- the -- to this institute, and I was accepted, because they had few people who could teach German. And he was -- before the war, this was a Jewish institute, because -- and the director was a German, who used to be a German teacher at the same institute, Dr. Powell, very nice man, too. He ge -- he hired a nu-number of Germans Yiddish sol-soldeeps because they had Jewish wife, and they had -- they're half Jews, and he knew about it. And after a time, the Gestapo g -- ordered him to -- to get all the Jewish -- all the half Jews or -- and -- and who -- and who m-miss -- miss them. And then after -- in that period, he called me and said to me, "Listen, the -- the -- the people t-tell me that you are also half-Jewish, a-and what is the matter?" And I told him, if a man has a bit of shekel -- and I use the word shekel, you immediately think h-he -- he is a half Jew. You know, he -- I said, it is n -- I think he t-took a -- a document out of this drawer, and I signed a letter, not a Jew, not a Pole, and not a gypsy, I signed it. And wa -- wa --

Q: Very clever.

A: Yeah.

Q: As it were, yeah, yeah.

A: Because a je -- a -- Germans in -- in s -- the Sudetenland, they were used to Yiddish words because there were -- were J-Jews there, too, because he was employed by a Jew, and he took this as a -- a -- a -- the -- the word shekel, took this it is all right, because you -- this was a -- a word, the Germans knew this. And afterward I send a -- a yurnafarka and -- and -- and then who



are -- who -- I met a -- as a Jew, I met one Czech, and -- and by the name of Lahrer, and I -- and he ex -- he thought hi-his summonsed to this yurnafarka and he went to Germany as a friend [indecipherable]. And he was in Breslau, and he was at b -- at the reichsbard, because he was the red -- the -- at the state railway station, and he got in uniform with a hakkencrosse in his coat [indecipherable] a-a-and he was -- he was a -- a -- all right. And he came, and the ger -- he wa -- had a right to come home, of course, a-after a certain time. And he w-was -- h-he -- I told him go to Vishnova, and -- and a -- I went through -- with him, a-and with -- we went to the cemetery and took the name Li-Limbersky, and it so happened that these were his parents, who were dead. I knew that, because th-the -- the -- the truck driver told me his parents were dead, and I gave him 5,000 kroner and I told him if a -- I told him, as he wrote out the documents, I t -- told him to give a thousand kroner gift, that's was an important sum. And he didn't have change, because he -- the Roman Catholic priest went to the -- to the pub, to trans-change -- exchange it. And I told him to k -- a few documents empty and s -- stamped them.

Q: So while the priest was out getting change --

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

Q: You took the documents and stamped them.

A: No, no. Yura Farkat, I was not there.

Q: Okay, your friend.

A: Yes.

Q: Accomplice.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Stamped these documents.

A: Yes.

Q: And the priest then never knew.

A: No. Because it ha -- I -- at that time, I went -- I -- I ki -- I got a -- I si -- forged documents, because I had a friend, Eny Crew, who came to the house, and h-he -- he u -- forged lino -- linoleum. He -- he was very clever. He forged the stamp of the police director, and -- and a s -- stamp of the -- of the district toward who -- who get ber -- who taught -- who would stand that the documents was a copy. Y-Yes, because I have [indecipherable]

Q: You have with you now? You still have it?

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Q: May I see them?

A: No, no, no, no, because th -- th -- the ha -- copies, yes.

Q: Mm. I'd love to them.

A: Yes, yes. And that -- I -- I -- that was all right. And I -- in the -- and th-that I took a fr -- a number of people who went to Germany, because I wa -- have the friend -- a -- a -- a friend, a Czech s -- who was i-i-in the labor exchange, and he was -- he sent Czech citizens to Germany. Of course they didn't want to go. Acts -- acts -- that is -- it is not dangerous, cause there were -- they're -- were free, because th-they're were not sl-slaves, because yeah, they -- they lived in camps, and they didn't have any right to speak to Germans, and -- and that -- and then there was a bombing it takes, o-of course, not many were s -- to gentle Germany, it was a c-cat -- catastrophe for the Czechs. But of course, I had to -- I was -- spoke to that man, and he told me that it -- it -- a fantastic idea. The -- the Jews will -- will pay 5,000 [indecipherable] and I -- Czech also -- what's 5,000 kroner, I -- that's -- it's [indecipherable], and I've -- and I -- and I-I had three or four men who went and I can -- I can it -- I couldn't find any other to exchanged, because the Jews were afraid, were afraid.

Q: Now how did you separate your life out, the people who wi -- knew you were Jewish, and the people who thought you wouldn't -- you weren't? Did you behave in a certain way to --

A: Yes.

Q: -- some people, and a different way to others?

A: Yeah, no, I -- the -- the Jews -- I -- w-were people who knew me, not -- not strangers.

Q: Okay.

A: Because a -- and -- a -- among the Jews, the Jewish women whom I -- whom I wanted to exchanged was a Stella Kurswalawa -- Lebolawa, because he -- I was -- I met her after w-war in Israel, and he told me you will, of course, write, because he was with my mother in Auschwitz, and h-he was g-gassed, because that's was the last transportations wode -- wi -- which went to the gas chambers, yes. And that -- we -- wis -- was in '44.

Q: Very late.

A: Yes. And -- and that is -- th-that's was a -- a -- in -- I couldn't deliver Jews, I couldn't, because they were afraid. And i-in addition to this, I forged a lot of doc -- documents who I didn't know. I -- cause tha -- that w-was a Czech friend, Eleanor Gevishava, who was a -- a -- increbil -- increbit -- incredible -- i-if -- she was a -- she wa-was a -- a -- one of the few Czechs who was named a righteous -- a Righteous Gentile [indecipherable] the nations. I've also -- also one of the sponsors, and sh-she came one day and asked me -- asked me show the documents, the I.D. cards fr-from -- o-off a Jew from -- or a Czech Jew who e-escaped from Poland and Russian soldier. I think he -- he was a -- a -- a lieutenant who was cate -- came from the prisoners of war c-camp, and he -- I -- he wanted me to meet with, I refused because wi -- all the time Eleanor didn't know my real name, because I told her my name was Kaliwater, because I knew that the communist underground force, there were n-Nazi spies in there, and they told me that the-they --

they ha -- they witness enough destructions of Jews, I'm -- I think it's was a -- w-was a -- that just the first mass destructions of Jewish -- Jews in Poland. I forget the name. I can look it up.

Q: Okay, all right.

A: What?

Q: Amazing.

A: Treblinka -- Treblinka. I think it was Treblinka, and she asked me to speak to the Jewish community and tell him -- them, about it. And I got a -- a -- a -- the woman I to -- I want to send to Germany, you -- the -- the mistress of Rickart Israel Friedman, who was the -- he was the Viennese Jew, because when Gestapo send to pro -- P-Prague, because he -- there was a -- an understanding. He was the -- the Gestapo man beca -- he -- he was not a traitor. Of course, the -- the -- Greece considered [indecipherable] a traitor, because h-he was -- he was a go-between. And -- and I told him this story, and a few weeks after -- after I told this Stella, and he -- he told me that I -- I shouldn't panic the Jews, and he made a hint that he knows where I was living, and I -- I knew that ri -- Friedman must have known this thing a-all the time. And wi -- and after -- a few weeks afterward, the two were shot, because -- how one man, a Czech shot two German guards, cause he missed them. And a -- he was a -- a -- he was a -- a -- a -- a agent of the Gestapo, and she -- he threw away a briefcase, and there was all the -- all the member of his group, and I was not among them. Of course, maybe I was Kaliwater, because he didn't -- didn't know -- know my name. And -- and all the -- all the members of this group were arrested, and ol -- only one came back. Because he -- everybody was kept alive three months, because they tortured him, and they -- they got a -- to -- they -- they wanted to tell them more about that school. This guy was three months -- was -- was kept three months, a-a-and he was late, he was arrested late, because he -- i-i-in the meantime, the war was over, he -- he came back. And

Eleanor was also arrested, because he was not on the list. All -- they found a book with her name in it, and he was arrested.

Q: She was.

A: She was arrested i -- on the -- as a consequence of this book name. And he -- she ta -- told them this i -- I -- I lost the book, because I -- I don't know how -- who got hold of it, and she wer -- was freed. And she -- sh-she was -- sh -- and she telephoned me, and -- and -- at the language institute. I --

Q: Where you were teaching German?

A: No, no, I don't know, because he -- he never knew my name.

Q: Who didn't know? Your -- your wife didn't know your name?

A: What?

Q: Who didn't know your name?

A: Eleanor, becau -- I -- no --

Q: She didn't know your name.

A: Yeah, because he telephone -- no, I don't know. I -- I don't know how -- I don't know how -- how he got it to touch with me, neither before and afterward, but she got it -- in touch with me, and I continued to -- to deliver documents, and I remember that I have two blank paper of the S.S. hauptkrotere, because that -- that was the generous stuff. And I gave her one -- I gave her a dogod -- do -- go -- document that's this -- th-there is no objections that this -- this man can go to his visits and h-he -- he lived with this docu -- document.

Q: Now this may seem like a strange question, but I'm curious about this. It seems that people -- well, not -- it seems like people obviously had to lie and be deceitful, and keep track of all of these different forms of truth --

A: Yes.

Q: -- all the time. Did you practice doing that?

A: No. No.

Q: Because it takes a really good actor to convince the people.

A: No, I -- I'm not a good actor, because we met Weisner and I -- I must tell -- tell you that I got a -- a I.D. card from Weisner too, because fr -- he was called [indecipherable] and h-he was a genius because he -- he went to Germany and in -- in no time he was a millionaire. He -- and he came back to Czechoslovak -- to [indecipherable] protectorate, as -- as a dosta, because he wa -- has the wife was living in Prague. And he -- h-he was fantastic. I -- and -- am in contact with his son in Hamburg. A-And he died 45 years old, a -- a heart attack. And w-w-we talked freely, but not to the people outside.

Q: Now at what point did you stop working for the underground, di-did you say okay, I've got to get out of here myself?

A: Who?

Q: You. When did you finally say, time for me to go?

A: Oh, there cus -- there came a -- a period in Czechoslovakia, after war, who let all the Jews out of Czechoslovakia. [indecipherable] i-i-it's a -- was the -- the anti-Semites in the communist party wanted the Jews out, because --

Q: So where were you when the war was over? Officially over?

A: In Prague.

Q: Still?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And I -- it changed my -- my -- I'd -- I made Arnost Limbersky my official name. I -- I went to the police headquarters, and I told -- told them I want to legalize my name. [indecipherable]. He says, but wait a second. And he came back out, I said -- he said we cannot do that, because there is the ar -- arrest -- no --

Q: An arrest warrant?

A: Yes. Of course --

Q: For you?

A: Yes, yeah. You were suspect -- I told him who signed, he said -- he says the Gestapo. And of cour -- I think you are a -- you are an idiot. And that's it.

Q: Now where was your wife at this time? Number one?

A: It was with me.

Q: So it was still with you then?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Because I -- I -- I told her during the war that I will divorce her the moment th -- the war would end, I -- I -- yes, she didn't believe me. I -- I -- I -- I took the blame on me, because -- and th -- the -- the judge, after he divorced me, on my fault, he told me to come to his chambers, and I came there, and he says -- says -- she said, "I wou -- you had the witnesses against you, but I warned you not do that any more, because otherwise I would not divorce you f -- f -- in your fault." Is -- he -- he knew.

Q: That it wasn't for real?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: So you -- you got divorced, this was in Prague?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And then -- and then she went her way, I guess.

A: Sh-She is -- she was still in Prague, I -- I don't know whether she is alive, but she's -- she lived in Prague.

Q: And you, you went, you left?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: Y -- no, I got married to -- to my second wife, and we left -- we -- we left together for Israel in '49.

Q: Okay, who was your -- what's the name of your second wife? What was her name, number two?

A: Hava -- Ava -- Hava.

Q: And her last name?

A: Lodeska.

Q: How did you meet her?

A: She was a -- a -- a -- I -- I met her, she was a teacher, English.

Q: Okay, so you got -- how long after you divorced number one did you marry number two?

A: Few weeks.

Q: Okay. Cause number one, that wasn't love, that was convenience?

A: No, no.

Q: Yeah, okay. Number two was love?



A: Yes.

Q: Nice, okay. And then you decided to go to Israel?

A: Yes.

Q: What was the process of getting there?

A: This was easy. You went to -- to -- I -- this was not procedure, because you have to -- to give up all your goods, and you were allowed one -- one -- what is that [inaudible] what -- you were allowed to -- I -- I don't know what it --

Q: Okay. One suitcase?

A: No, no, no. What was the -- the ships that come to America? Libsy?

A2: Yeah, I'm coming. [indecipherable]

Q: Think we need an interpreter.

A2: Yes.

A: What was --

A2: What are you talking about, one word? Give me one word, what are you talking about?

Q: He said he was allowed one something or another when they went to Israel from Prague.

A2: When you left Prague, one -- the CD's. He had to -- he had a huge collection of CD's.

A: No, no, no, no, no. No, no.

A2: But [indecipherable] just let me tell the story, maybe it will remind you.

A: No, no, no, no.

A2: Yes, because you said that one was the -- a prayer that you --

A: Yes, and no, no, that is not the -- what --

A2: Furniture, piece of furniture?

A: Yes, becau --

A2: Cupboard?

Q: One trunk?

A: Wha -- no, no.

A2: Armoire?

A: No, no.

A2: Bed?

A: No, no. They came by ship.

Q: Like a steamer trunk?

A: What?

Q: Like a steamer trunk? Came by ship.

A2: [indecipherable] can -- listen to me, when you came to Israel, I think you had with you from Czechoslovakia your beds, the ones which you had in Cholone, or you bought them in Israel --

A: No, no, I -- I had the wi --

A2: -- from Czechoslovakia

A: Yeah, because had one furni --

A2: Piece of furniture.

A: Yes.

A2: Desk?

A: What?

A2: A desk? A writing table?

A: No.

Q: Came by ship.

A: What?

Q: Whatever it was, it came by ship.

A: Yes, yes, because --

A2: What do you do with it?

Q: How bi -- how big?

A: What?

Q: Yeah, what do you do with it, good question.

A2: What do you do with it? When you have this piece of furniture, what do you do with it?

A: I was fi --

A2: You sit on it, you lie on it?

A: No, no.

Q: You put things inside of it?

A2: Table. Box.

Q: So it looks like a trunk. Like a s -- like to hold things in, to store things in.

A2: You -- you're looking for suitcase, valise?

Q: A box, a big box.

A: No, no.

A2: Leave it for a minute, leave it for a minute.

Q: Yeah, but let's -- we can go back.

A2: Sit.

Q: You were allowed to bring one something, okay.

A2: Well there's one something which I think should be -- should be actually mentioned,  
because it hit me so --

A: No, no, you aunt --

A2: Jenny.

A: Yeah, gave me 300 pounds --

A2: Of picture?

A: No.

A2: A --

Q: Like a book --

A: Was --

A2: You put things into it?

A: Yes, yes.

A2: What -- and a -- an armoire.

A: No.

Q: Not a trunk?

A2: Not a trunk.

Q: Not a big box, not a big suitcase.

A: Merce.

A2: Container.

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

A2: Merce is -- is a shipping company in Berlin. I -- I -- I need to tell the story about the -- the -- the disks, the CD's, he had a huge collection.

A: Yes.

A2: [indecipherable] I don't know, 345 long playing disks, and he said one prayer disk. And he -  
- they allowed him to bri -- but he had to leave the whole collection there, but they allowed him  
the one, which was -- which was a prayer disk, so to speak. Communists.

A: This is not important.

A2: No, it shows you what Communists are.

Q: It's interesting, though.

A: Containo.

A2: Container. Was it you need more?

A: No, no.

Q: Thank you.

A2: You didn't have anything.

Q: I did, I had two cookies.

A2: You need some sustenance here, you're working hard.

Q: No, I'm listening is all I get to do. He's the one -- your husband's the one that's working hard.

A: Yeah -- no, no. Because I -- I real so-sorry that I cannot express myself fluently.

Q: You're doing very, very well.

A: No.

Q: Yes. We're going to change tapes.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: Interview with Moshe Leshem, November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2004, in his home in Tuckahoe, New York, for the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, this is Karen Michelle, and we keep going with the story. Okay, so we're into going -- why did you just -- why did you want to go to Israel?

A: I was a Zionist.

Q: Yeah, but I thought you would -- had conflicted feelings about Zionism?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: No. Because then -- I was -- I -- I guessed that the Communists would be not a -- a -- a -- not for justice, and -- and yet -- I guessed that the communist party would be subject from -- to Russia, and that -- it was a -- as -- a -- a terrible regime, and that made me go to Israel, because my wife was -- was -- pressing me to go to Israel. I -- I have a daughter in Israel. Today is her birthday, 58 years.

Q: When you went to Israel, what did you expect?

A: Expect?

Q: Mm-hm. You remember that -- first, do you remember the date that you arrived?

A: In the -- May, '49. And I had friends there who helped me get it -- then -- in the -- the foreign service, because I -- in Czechoslovakia, I had Israelis who went to Czechoslovakia in -- in my official capacity and I got to -- to meet and then the Israeli minister, because in this -- that's was not an ambassador [indecipherable] because the -- in -- medium states had ministers or -- and because this was Ahoud and Abriel, and we were very -- we got very friendly.

Q: So you were then made an ambassador?

A: No, no.

Q: You were in the foreign service?

A: Yes.

Q: And what did that mean at the time?

A: Foreign service?

Q: Yeah.

A: I -- I was an official of the foreign ministry.

Q: So what did you do? Where did you live, what did you do?

A: An -- and the -- the first job I had was in the re-research department. Then I was a -- a temporary spokesman, and then I went to Burma as a first secretary to -- th-that was an ambassador Harkoim. And --

Q: S -- sorry.

A: That I was married to this Anetha.

Q: Whew, okay. So -- so you're -- you're in this -- where were you living when you came to Israel?

A: What?

Q: Where were you living at first?

A: Cholon.

Q: Did you feel a sense of relief at finally getting there? Did you -- did you feel that you were home, how did you feel?

A: Yes, yes, I w-was home. I felt I w-was home.

Q: What was the feeling of -- a-and what name did you use then, when you were home?

A: Limbersky, because I changed my name to Leshem.

Q: When did you change it to Leshem?

A: I don't know, beca -- very soon, very soon.

Q: After you got to Israel, you cha --

A: What?

Q: Soon after you got to Israel you changed it?

A: No, because I-I was in the foreign office a-at that time. All the o-officials of the foreign office had to change their name.

Q: Why?

A: Yes, because that was an order.

Q: No matter what your name was, you had to change it?

A: Yes.

Q: Then how did you decide what name to take?

A: I looked i-in the dictionary, a-and I found Leshem. Because i-it -- that no longer exists, this word, no longer.

Q: You looked in the dictionary and does le -- what does Leshem mean?

A: I -- that's the -- the high priest had 12 stones, each one for one -- for one tribe, and Leshem was the tribe of [indecipherable] done.

Q: Okay.

A: Because it is not clear what Leshem was, because Leshem is this -- I don't -- nobody knows what it was.

Q: So you could have been -- a-and then your first name, how did you decide that Moshe would be your first name?

A: Because if -- it was Moshe, because I -- I remember I told you that my name was Ernst Moshe --



Q: Right.

A: -- Lemberger.

Q: Yeah, so you took your middle name as your first name.

A: Yes, yes. Yes. Because that was my Hebrew name.

Q: Right, of course. So you could have been Moshe Maccabee instead for all --

A: Yes, yes. I could have.

Q: So when you became Moshe Leshem, did you feel in any way symbolically that you were a new person?

A: Yes. Oh -- oh -- old new persons.

Q: Not too old.

A: Not too old.

Q: Pretty young, actually.

A: [indecipherable] was '49 -- '18. I was born in '18.

Q: Mm-hm. So 31.

A: Yes.

Q: Pretty young.

A: Yes. Today I think it is pretty young.

Q: So as this new person, what did you feel that you could do as this -- as a new person at -- of 31 years old in this new country?

A: Well, I was in the foreign ministry, because I -- th-this was my profession.

Q: You had no real profession, you had been so many things just to -- to be, to survive.

A: Yeah, well, because the foreign office was a very good position.

Q: Yeah. Did your wife work?

A: Yes, yes. My second wife w-was o-of -- worked as an English teacher.

Q: Did she ch -- and she changed her name also?

A: What?

Q: She changed her name also?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Wow. I can't imagine what that would feel like, to take on a whole new final identity, after you've taken so many names just to -- to survive. And then you finally said this is [indecipherable]

A: I am basically the same person. The name is not -- i-is not important.

Q: Did you -- when you got to Israel, did that affect your faith in any way?

A: Face?

Q: Your faith, your -- your spiritual beliefs.

A: No. I am -- well, I am -- am a Jew, eth -- ethnically. I'm not a religious Jew. I have fre -- freep -- freep -- pretended to be as -- as an ambassador, but --

Q: So what -- see -- so you were still pretending.

A: Yes. No.

Q: I mean then, you -- you -- you kept pretending before you got to Israel.

A: No, because the -- why ask [indecipherable] has said that y-y-you are Jewish, I thought, no, I am a Jew. I'm not -- not -- not Jewish.

Q: Then why do you wear the chai?

A: That is -- I sa -- has this 40 years, because it -- chai means l-life.

Q: So you -- you're an ambassador, you went to Burma, you said?

A: Yes.

Q: Were you still with wife number two then?

A: No, three.

Q: Hard to keep up with you.

A: Yes. No, no. This is very easy.

Q: So did you meet Alyssa in Israel?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Because I was a related-tive to her family. My grandmother was the niece of her grandmother.

Q: The nephew of her grandmother.

A: No.

Q: Your grandfather.

A: No, the niece.

Q: No, you said your grandfather.

A: No.

Q: Grandmother.

A: My go -- gra -- grandmother was the niece of her grandmother.

Q: Incredible. So how did you meet?

A: Oh, because I -- we were in contact because i-i -- I went over [indecipherable], I met her, I met the family, and I met her -- it was 15 years, h-he was 15 years.

Q: She was 15 years old?

A: Yes, she.

Q: You met a young one.

A: Yes.

Q: And then -- so you divorced number two, and married her?

A: Yes.

Q: When she was very, very young?

A: Yes. She was exactly 19 years old, almost 20.

Q: So you -- there's a -- an age difference between the two of you.

A: Yes.

Q: Quite the man.

A: Why?

Q: I mean that as a compliment.

A: Aha. Accepted.

Q: So you went to Burma, and then you were there for how long?

A: Two years.

Q: And then you went to?

A: Israel.

Q: Back to Israel.

A: Yes, I -- I -- then I worked with -- i-in the American department. In the meantime, I was a -- a spokesman for the -- for the -- for the office, and this was in the second -- in the first -- in the first Sinai campaign, I was.

Q: So you were quite -- you were a diplomat?

A: Yes. I was very good as a spokesman, because Golda didn't like it.

Q: Because who didn't?

A: Meier didn't like this.

Q: Oh really, why?

A: Because she had a mind, the press was not existent. And I tried to convince her that was -- press was very important, which -- bu-but I -- a-as I went to Africa, I was her blue-eyed boys.

Q: She sent you to Africa?

A: Yes.

Q: To?

A: No, not she, the --

Q: The department, yeah.

A: Yeah, th --

Q: Okay. But I see you have her picture on the wall. Golda Meier is up above your head.

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: And so you -- when you first got to Israel -- I'm sorry, my s -- my history is very poor, was that when -- was Chaim Weitzman, and did you work for him then?

A: No, Chaim Weitzman was the president, because Moshe Sharet was the f -- was the foreign minister.

Q: How did Israel change once Golda Meier took over? How did -- how did things change? The texture of life, and the relationships.

A: Well, she was not intellectual, whereas Sharet was, A-Aba Evens was. She was -- she was very straightforward, but no intellect.

Q: So you had to become the intellect to explain pro --

A: No.

Q: -- to the world, no?

A: No. I-I was not that close with -- with her.

Q: So you say that you were her blue-eyed boy because you went to Africa?

A: Yes.

Q: What do you mean by that?

A: Because Africa was i-important continent for us. Th-That's a -- a -- that's -- a-at that time Africa was pro-Israel.

Q: Where were you stationed?

A: Kinshasa, Congo, four years. This is one very nice place. And I got very well along with all the Ak -- Africans.

Q: After that where did you go?

A: Afterwards, I went three -- three years head of the African department i-in Jerusalem, and then I was sent to the U.N. for -- for three years, and then I went to Copenhagen, and also to Iceland. What?

Q: That's amazing.

A: Yes.

Q: So every few years you move?

A: Yes. No, because I was -- i-i-in isra -- in Copenhagen five years.

Q: Okay, and when did you move to the United States?

A: I went to -- back to Israel because I resigned from the foreign office.

Q: Why?

A: I w-want -- I didn't wish to talk about that.

Q: May I ask why you don't want to talk about it?

A: I don't wish to talk to [indecipherable]. You ask me of my work in the underground, this is not an underground.

Q: Okay, so you resigned.

A: Yes.

Q: You won't -- you won't talk about that. And then what happened after you resigned? What was your -- what was your life decision then?

A: I w -- I went to America.

Q: Why? Why come to America? You could have gone -- you've lived so many places --

A: No. Because a -- a friend -- good friend of mine, Herb Friedman, did -- was -- opened an office for a -- which was supposed to collect money for a high school in Israel, and I worked for two years, because th-that's collapsed.

Q: Okay, so you -- because of your friend you thought you'd move to the United States?

A: Yes. Not my friend. My wife had a b-brother here in is -- Israel. H-He arranged the immigration for us.

Q: So Alyssa had a brother here in the United States?

A: What?

Q: She -- Alyssa had a brother in the United States?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: In -- where -- where in the United States?

A: Troy.

Q: Oh, in New York.

A: Rens-Rensselaer.

Q: Okay.

A: Rensselaer.

Q: It's upstate.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay, so did you first move there?

A: No. Why? Because yo -- we send the boys for three -- f-four months to Troy, a-a-at the -- the high school.

Q: How many children do you have?

A: Three. One the daughter, and two boys.

Q: And what years were the three children born?

A: What?

Q: What years were the three children born, do you remember?

A: I remember Marty was born '63, and Meerong was born in '64, and you f -- can figure she was born in '45.

Q: What countries were your three children born in?

A: Beca -- the two boys were born in the Congo.

Q: And your daughter in Israel?

A: Yes. No, no, no, in Czechoslovakia.

Q: Czechoslovakia.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Of course, yeah.

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: Right, working backwards, right. I'm not thinking. Your mind is better than mine. Okay, so she was born -- so she came with you.

A: Yes.

Q: Oh boy. Was it hard to arrange for?

A: No.



Q: No. The boys in the Congo. Amazing. So how many of your children came with you here to the United States?

A: Two [indecipherable] boys.

Q: The boys. When you came here, what did you expect to find? Well, you had been -- you had worked for the United Nations you said before --

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: -- so it wasn't all new to you.

A: But fof -- I was consul in Atlanta two years.

Q: Atlanta and New York a little different.

A: Yes.

Q: When you were in Atlanta, did you encounter anti-Semitism at all?

A: No.

Q: What was the sentiment toward Israel?

A: Very positive at that time, because it was a segregated -- se-segregated place.

Q: When you encountered that segregation in -- in Atlanta, did it remind you at all of the segregation that you had felt as a Jew?

A: Yes. I -- I wa -- felt really bad about it, because there were Jewish families who were anti-segregationalist.

Q: Did you work for civil rights while you were there?

A: I couldn't, as a consul, I couldn't work, because I -- I was a foreigner.

A2: Can I get you some water?

Q: No, I'm -- I'm good thanks, but I -- I --

A2: I tried to invite Martin Luther King to our to -- to our [indecipherable] place.

A: No, no.

A2: Who told you not to?

Q: No, please. So you -- you were going to invite Martin Luther King, Jr.?

A: Yes.

Q: To your home?

A: Yes, yes.

A2: Yes, to -- to the Independence Day reception.

A: To -- no, no, no, no --yeah. But [indecipherable] the Jewish community -- the secretary of the Jewish community told me that I should not invite him.

Q: You're kidding.

A: Yes.

Q: Why would he say that, or she?

A: Because -- h-he -- because this was a segregated society.

Q: And even Jews --

A: Yes.

Q: -- followed that?

A: No, because he was afraid that the whites -- the -- the w-w -- the whites would take offense if I invited Martin Luther King. But I wanted to, but --

Q: Little bit ironic, no?

A: Yes -- no, no. Because this is very complicated, the -- the relationship there, because the -- the -- the rabbi of the temple roths -- Rothschild was -- was against segregation because he also had to be careful.

Q: Hm. Wow. Now that you've been in New York all these years.

A: Y-Yes. Here.

Q: How long have you been here in Tuckahoe? The whole time?

A: Yes. No, no. I was two years i-in [indecipherable] and I moved to Tuckahoe, because --

Q: Have you -- have you worked while you've been here, or -- or --

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: As what?

A: I worked for two years with Friedman, and two years with UJA. And then I worked for Robuto Sector Sacco.

Q: How did that come to be?

A: I was a friend for -- for -- from -- for -- for Robuto.

Q: What did you do for him?

A: Here?

Q: Yeah.

A: Public relations.

Q: And what were you doing for UJA?

A: I was i-in money -- collecting money.

Q: Fundraiser?

A: Yes, because I was not very good at this.

Q: In -- in this country, do you feel that this is where you want to spend the rest of your life now?

A: What?

Q: Do you want to spend the rest of your life here?

A: I wi -- this is -- I am 86, whi -- I-I am prepared to die here.

Q: Is here home for you now?

A: What?

Q: Is here home for you now?

A: Well, I am an Israeli citizen and an American citizen. I guess that explains it.

Q: No.

A: No?

Q: No. Home can be a place, and home can be an idea. It can be physical, or it can be conceptual.

A: I was 30 years in Czechoslovakia. I very fond of Czechol -- Czecho -- I was 33 years in Israel, I very fond of Israel, and I 26 year, I very fond of America.

Q: Do you feel safe here?

A: Y-Yes.

Q: I'm going to turn the tape over.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Conclusion of Interview

[Side B blank]