

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Zdenko John Bergl**  
**September 14, 2005**  
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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Zdenko John Bergl, conducted on September 14, 2005 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.

**ZDENKO JOHN BERGL**  
**September 14, 2005**

Beginning Tape One

Question: Good morning.

Answer: Good morning.

Q: It's nice to see you again.

A: Same here.

Q: Tell me what was your name when you were born?

A: My name was Zdenko Bergl.

Q: You had no middle name?

A: No, I did not have a middle name. I was born in a little c-community in Croatia, and in town where I was born there were only five Jewish families, so we didn't have a Jewish [indecipherable] per se.

Q: Right.

A: So we were very much integrated, and to have any Jewish relationship we had to go in neighboring town where there were quite a few more Jewish families. So but where my father conducted the business, and where we lived, so, for all practical purposes, and to enroll me in the school, middle name was not required. And my family was -- by that time, where I was born there were what you would consider today Reform Jews, not very religious Jews.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Even to the -- my grandparents come from a different background because you see the -- the Yugoslavia is really a offshot of Austro-Hungarian Empire. So when Yugoslavia was form as a country, was on the end of the first World War, when President Wilson told to Serbia, what do

you want. And Serbia say, I like a little this, a little of that. So they form a Slavic nation which give a name to Yugoslavia. So it happened consequently that people were living all over in the part of Yugoslavia that's called Croatia today. My grandfather who settled there is really of them from Hungarian make-up. And my grandparents spoke Hungarian at home, and parents used to speak Hungarian at home. So really, my background was Hungarian. And my dad, who was also from Hungarian background, he was actually working in neighboring town as a manager for a Jewish bigger firm, like a little wholesaler, but a bigger town than ours. And then become acquainted between my mother, who was run -- helping her father in the business, and my grandfather was getting big -- older, and older. So my grandfather saw opportunity, he's a good looking guy, he -- he make the goo-goo eyes at my daughter, maybe I can hook up with him, and I got my right hand. And that's how it happened, my hand -- my father married Mom, and the -- start managing my grandfather's business, and that's how our [indecipherable] took place in Croatia. But the background from the both sides, my mother and father, is Hungarian.

Q: Uh-huh. Now, what was this little town where you were --

A: Sv. Ivan Zabno. Saint Zabno.

Q: Saints --

A: -- Zabno is a -- is a really -- is no translation for it, there's just wa -- you know, just one --

Q: Is that near Zagreb?

A: This is approximately north from Zagreb, 14 miles.

Q: Was that far at that time?

A: No, it was not the ti -- all the [indecipherable] we had the train communication to Zagreb. We didn't use the buses at that time, the buses become popular much later. But my grandfather was doing quite well, and so ma -- and my mothers, you know, my mother comes from a family of

three brothers and four girls, so it was a very prolific family, and they were each one in his own way, very situ -- well situated. But in our town that I was born and where my family took root, only two girls stayed. The rest of them married and moved on. Only one sister left, that marry a doctor, who was a Czech, and he was Gentile. Matter of fact, he studied to be a priest, and she married him, and -- and my mother, who took care of the grandparents.

Q: Uh-huh. So the -- were your grandparents living in the same town with you?

A: My -- were living in the same town, in the same house.

Q: In the same house.

A: In the same house. But you know, as we prosper, then they build one, o -- extra house, or they had their own. But build -- that Mother was really caretaker for my grandparents as they were aging. She was never get it from her brothers and sisters to take care of it --

Q: Okay.

A: -- but that's a story a-all by itself, and if you wishing to go into it, I will explain it to you what happened. Because one of my mother's brothers become a [indecipherable] Jewish in Croatia [indecipherable] big buck. And he was really the patriarch of the family because with his money [indecipherable] the power, and he -- when my father -- see, my father was a visionary. He wanted to get hell out of Europe in 1936. And my uncle, my mother's brother says, you know, I-I would prefer if you would take care of the folks and I'll tell you what I'm going to do. When they die, I'm going to buy out all my brothers and sisters, and everything is going to be yours. So my father thought that's a good deal, let's do it now, but let's go to America. But it never worked out.

Q: It didn't work out.

A: But finally at a certain point, he wish come true.

Q: Right, right. Now, you didn't tell us your birthdate.

A: I was born on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1929. And I was the third try of my parents to have a child.

Q: The third try.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you're the only child.

A: I would -- no, after me one more, but see, we -- we were living in such a -- I wouldn't say uncivilized -- a -- a little community that didn't have a hospital back up. That ma -- all of my brothers were premature. Before me and after me, so they die very shortly after birth.

Q: I see.

A: The only guy who was mean enough to stick around was me.

Q: Was you.

A: Yeah.

Q: So that must have been difficult for your parents.

A: Yeah, was very difficult for my parents, yes.

Q: Right.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you, as you were growing up, experience that, that you -- you realized that --

A: I -- I think as I was growing up I took advantage of it, because you know, I was the only one and I rode it for all it's worth.

Q: I see. Were you spoiled?

A: Oh. That's a understatement.

Q: Really?

A: Yes. From all sides. Because my mother's sister, which was married in -- in Zagreb to attorney, she didn't -- they didn't have any kids. So she really directed all her attention towards me, from day I was born, and as the history developed, when she finally lost her husband in Italy, I brought her to America and she lived in my house til she died. She -- but Mom went before, we had to take her to the old age home --

Q: Really?

A: -- because we couldn't handle it at home, which I took care of her til she died. It was kind of payoff -- payoff back time. And I-I was delighted to have an opportunity, because she was to me like a second mother.

Q: Right.

A: You know, anything I couldn't get from my folks, I was playing like a fiddle.

Q: Right.

A: I know where to turn, and she did it. Especially when I was growing up in Italy, and going to the faculty and so on, and I start dating, they saying she financed everything.

Q: She financed everything?

A: Everything.

Q: Really?

A: So I -- so did you -- I don't have to tell you how delighted I was when I was able to take care of her til she died.

Q: Right, oh absolutely.

A: And she knew it.

Q: So before the war, you lived in Croatia.

A: My -- my p -- yeah.

Q: A pr-pretty comfortable life.

A: My grandfather, he started with a little ma -- grocery store.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: He was a grocer before he moved there. See, the hard times, they didn't have that much grocery. And he was like a [indecipherable], my grandfather. He figure out, this is little community, they don't have a grocery store, I think we can prosper here. So it didn't take very much money, he came over there and he opened his grocery store, and that was the first one in the town. The most [indecipherable] whatever is like a supply from home that used to go the town and bring few grocery, and people -- farmer used to know where to go. This was really legitimate grocery store. And then he was diversified, become bigger [indecipherable] little bit of dry goods [indecipherable] then he was taking care of baker, we bring a [indecipherable] stores, we would sell a bread. And we was prospering. And that's how they, you know, he was doing better and better. Family really took off when my grandmother play Austro-Hungarian lottery. And she won 250,000 florins, which my grandfather never knew that she bought, because he was really a dominant figure, he would never allow play lottery. And then when they open the brick factory and that really took off.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: They we really become money -- richest people in town.

Q: In that town --

A: In town, in --

Q: -- in [indecipherable]

A: -- bat -- five Jewish family. In five Jewish family, we were controlling the town. I hate to tell you that. Our friend Mostar, which still lives there, he had a flour mill. Then we had a other



Jewish family who was a general manager of this flour mill. And then we had a pharmacist, who was the other guy who was taking care of. And then finally was -- oh, the guy here that -- bar and a beer joint, and entertainment hall. The town didn't have a -- like theater. When used to come a roving circus in town or -- or -- or silent movie in town, that hall was where was showing it. So really, there's five Jewish family were the key family in town. At that time they didn't feel very anti-Semitic because there's a close relationship with the community. Community was quite poor, so most of the business conducted was on credit, and all those Jews extended credit to the farmer, like the flour mill that would pay more after they got the grain collected, they sold it. And then in carry -- [indecipherable] of the books, so was -- everything was going fine. But later on we found out it was not enough, and the Nazis come in, it was only a front for their convenience.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: People that we didn't expect to be in our -- our corner, they come. And the people that we counted on, they disappointed us.

Q: Right. So --

A: But yo -- I'm going -- I don't want to go ahead of you in chronological order.

Q: It's all right, I can always -- I can always come back.

A: Yeah, you can just go ahead, stop me at any time.

Q: Right. How big a town was this, about ?

A: Okay, we had a city hall in our town, and town which in itself has about 3,000 population.

But the community, or the commune where they will call it, had obtain other off shops --

Q: I see.

A: -- that used to belong to all that. So all together you would tell by the 20,000 people belonged to the commune.

Q: So that's big enough to support all these businesses --

A: Oh yes --

Q: -- cause the small, little town couldn't do it.

A: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Because we had the big -- like, for example, lots of stock. So once a month was the stock market where the butchers used to come by, all the stock what they need.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Then farmer will bring it there, and that's where they do it. They -- they once a month a big market. The -- the vendor with the tent come in the town to -- you know, to supplement thing where the town didn't have.

Q: Right.

A: But did they wanted to go to a bigger town, the be -- he -- the two of them, one was about 15 miles away, the other 25 miles away. But was still quite far away for a guy who was coming with horse and buggy.

Q: Yeah, sure. What was your father's name?

A: Nandor Bergl. Nandor, N-a-n-d-o-r.

Q: Right. And your mother's name?

A: Ilonka.

Q: So tell me about them as people as you were you growing up, what was your relationship with your father and your mother?

A: Ma -- ba -- my father was extremely good looking guy, and my mother was extremely jealous woman. And my father being -- for the business is always traveling all over, and wa -- and women loved him, and that's exactly didn't go big time with my mother. Now, we never used to go to Zagreb, which is the capital of Croatia. My uncle, who was married to that aunt of mine that -- I di -- he was a big prankster, he was attorney. Corporate attorney, brilliant. A matter of fact, he was representing my mother wealthy brother in a course against German ag -- during the Hitler, in 1936. This wealthy uncle of mine, he had -- he was a -- he had a dealership for Agrell car factory for all Yugoslavia. And then some misunderstanding happened, and the German company sued him in international court. And my -- this attorney -- brother-in-law defended brother-in-law, and he won against the Nazis, in Vienna. But that's -- but this guy, this attorney, whenever my father will come to Zagreb for business, and you know how my mother was wildly jealous. He would go put a silk stocking in his shoes, or a note. One time he put a -- he had had two theater tickets in his pocket, because he know when my mother come home she's going to go through the pocket to clean them, and they used to luftig, you know what I -- know what mean luftig? Air it --

Q: Air it out.

A: -- air the clothes before you put the clothes in -- she's going to come with the ticket. So she comes this ticket, and my dad, ask him, were you in theater in Zagreb? He says no, he says, I was working til six o'clock in the evening, I was happy to eat and I slept by your sister, and took a train in the morning. You sure you didn't go no theater? She said, you got two tickets there. Said, I was not in theater there. My mother hired detective to go ahead with the picture of my father, to go around to see if people saw him with a woman in theater. That's how far she went.

Q: So when did you find that out?

A: I found it out when I was already there, because don't forget the I -- when I left Croatia, I was almost Bar Mitzvah'd, 12 and a half years old.

Q: Right.

A: So this bickering, I was laughing, was very funny, because they -- didn't take him long to discover th-that my uncle pulled the trick.

Q: Right.

A: And even after my mother become aware that he's a prankster, he still pulled trick on and he got away with it. Because my mother never trusted him, you know?

Q: Ne -- fa -- your mother never trusted --

A: Ne -- ne -- ne --

Q: -- your father.

A: Never. And he was really basically a very faithful guy. When we were in immigration in Italy, and the woman who offered us a villa, and took us in, you know [indecipherable] to be their tenant, and I'm not talking little hole, I mean talking Italian villa, and they give us a room, and a kitchen, and it's a long story, and we -- on the end they gi -- bor -- when they have to go in the hiding when the Nazi come in, they tell you, she give us cash, so we can go in the hiding. But it was the woman's birthday, so my father goes to kiss her, wish her happy birthday, who walks in is my mother. And he say, I was wishing happy birthday. So my father [indecipherable]. Then she went bidi -- the shoes were very hard to get during the war, so we wearing Italian, sh -- wood shoes called zoccoli. So she had th -- and you know how noisy you are when you're walking on your marble with the zoccoli, you think the army is going through. She had the rubber -- a rubber sole put on it so she can tiptoe [indecipherable] so he can not hear it. It was so comic it's unbelievable.

Q: But it wasn't funny for them.

A: No, it was not -- it was not funny for them, it was not funny for my da -- but she -- Mother could not help.

Q: Yeah. But see --

A: Even when we come over here, he could not help.

Q: Right.

A: So it become a more joke than a serious threat.

Q: Right.

A: But basically they were wonderful life.

Q: Right.

A: Because my father was an excellent businessman, but was very lousy bookkeeper, and that's where my mother come in.

Q: So she was a ba --

A: My mother was a bookkeeper, yeah.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And my mother took a schooling and so -- so she was able to go give him a back-up [indecipherable] that needed especially --

Q: Right.

A: -- when they were growing up and developing.

Q: When you were growing up, were you close with both of your parents?

A: I was close with my parents, and with this sister's son -- you know, the -- marry Gentile in the same town?

Q: Yes.

A: They had a b-boy same age, and we were like -- like glue together when is -- we were growing up.

Q: And this is the -- the woman is the sister of your mother?

A: Yeah, mm-hm. She ra -- her name was Emma Chopik, she was --

Q: Emma Chopik.

A: -- an-and he was -- he was a doctor in the town. He is the guy who deliver me.

Q: I see. I see.

A: My mother's --

Q: Right.

A: -- sister husband. He was a --

Q: And the -- the one who is the lawyer in --

A: She live in Zagreb.

Q: And is this a -- is this the husband of another si -- another sister of your mother --

A: No, no, n --

Q: -- or is she a bru -- is --

A: He's -- Ruza is the other sister of my mother. See, really, my mother had a -- three brothers. One was killed in the first World War, in the German army, fighting for Austria.

Q: Mm.

A: And the other, it was killed by the Nazis because he marry a Gentile woman, he thought it's gonna save him, and he couldn't. And the third brother, this very wealthy guy, he came to New York, he -- he -- he had a lots of money in Switzerland, but the war it came, so then he come to Italy with the rest of us, but when you come to the Italian part I will explain it to you what happened.

Q: Right, right.

A: And -- and then he come to New York, he still had a lots of money, but he forgot that for America he was a little fish. In Europe was a big fish. Here was nothing. And he went in oil business in Atlanta, Georgia, and he lost his butt. Quick. I'm talking now 1951.

Q: Yeah.

A: Just like everything he touched in Europe turning in to gold, everything he touched in America went sour.

Q: Oh, that's interesting. So when you're growing up -- this is before the war --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- between 1929, and --

A: And 1941.

Q: -- '41 when the war comes to [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, east German 1941.

Q: Right.

A: Now when the --

Q: So yo -- when do you start school?

A: I started school, I f -- well, I -- I was going in first year of high school when the war happen. I already finish my grade school. We had only five years of high school in Croatia. Then you start the junior high. So I was in junior high when the war start. And --

Q: When the war started. So you say high school, and then junior high.

A: No, no.

Q: No.

A: Junior high before high school.

Q: High school, yeah.

A: Th -- I was just giving you the picture because in America high school go -- go -- I mean grade school go past fifth grade. In Europe, fifth grade you are finished with it.

Q: Finished.

A: If you -- if you don't go any higher, you're finished with your education.

Q: Right.

A: So I went to junior high and then the war hi -- war happened.

Q: And that sto -- and that stopped it.

A: Oh yeah --

Q: Right.

A: And that was for the [indecipherable] of 1941.

Q: Right.

A: Now when the [indecipherable] happened in Croatia, the first thing they done, they confiscated our property immediately. And --

Q: Did you -- let me ask you something. Had you been hearing -- I don't know how -- how politically conscious your family was. Were they talking politics, they know what was going on in Germany?

A: We were very politically conscious.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: The -- only my uncle, this wealthy one, we -- even when the Nazi was marching in the Austria, we all tried to push Prussia, let's get hell out of here. He believed that nothing's going to happen to us. And being that he was the dominant figure in our whole family, in a -- like a clan,



everybody follow his example, nobody broke loose and said I'm -- hell with you, I'm going to go to America. He believed that nothing is going to happen. Well, it didn't work this way.

Q: Right. But your father, wa -- did he want to go to America?

A: My father wanted to go already in '36.

Q: Because of what was happening, or because he want --

A: Because a -- because as soon as the Hitler went on the power, my father say hell, get out of here.

Q: Yeah.

A: He envision where is going, way before the anschluss of Austria and so on.

Q: Right.

A: But then he got stuck there because he was taking care of all the property --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- my grandparent, my -- my grandmother was dot -- dead, but my grandfather was still alive.

So it was no way to get away except if the -- you --

Q: Break off.

A: -- i-if my uncle would have go ahead decide let's liquidate and let's leave, they would -- they work out.

Q: Right.

A: Both of us, we got stuck there. But when the -- wi -- you were interested when the Nazi came in, you want me to take it from there on?

Q: Well no, I'm in -- I'm also interested to know what you're feeling as a kid, before the Nazis even come in.

A: We -- we were aware of the Nazi threat way, way before that.

Q: Yeah.

A: Because when the Nazi entered in Austria --

Q: Right, in '38.

A: -- in 1938 --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- in the anschluss, mass emigration of Viennese Jews in Austria came to Yugoslavia.

Q: Right.

A: Now, there were only two country in Europe that were taking Jews, Yugoslavia and Italy.

Yugoslavia because they thought that nothing is going to happen, and Italy done it because some -- for some Viennese Jews, especially I would call it aristocrat, professor, doctor and genius, Yugoslavia is not very appealing. Italy was much more appealing.

Q: Right.

A: Now, I'm sure you heard, you know, the part that my wife explained it to you, and you know with the fi -- how Italy opened the border. Mussolini -- it was Mussolini, I want you to emphasize that, who was under pressure of Hitler nonstop to do something about the Jews, he kept putting him off. Because from day Mussolini enter in the -- in power, in October of 1928, the 1 -- his liberation in Grand Sasso by Colonel Scorce, German paratroopers, and then whisk him back to Germany. Nobody touched a J-Jew in Italia, not a single Jew was killed. They put a pressure on them, they made their life miserable, but was not life threatening, because Mussolini was put in power by Jews. Well lots of Italian Jewish aristocrats, they were Fascists when he come in power. People don't know that. So he was -- he felt obliged to them, like bonhommes, and all these Jews were still you have in Italy perpetuate in the dynasty in their family, but he was under pressure, and he was passing the racial law to pacify --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Because original Mussolini, he had the agreement with Schuschnigg that if Hitler attack Austria, he is going to defend Austria. And he's a chick -- hit -- and Mussolini chickened out. He figured, hey, that guys is stronger, I'm not going to go with my head against the wall. And they got involved in this thing. But that got Nazi in the war, it concern us as a Jewish, as a salvation. If you notice, every Jew entering that passport Italy didn't stamp it. He didn't want any record how many Jew he let in Italy.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Like when my wife was in the concentration camp, this was like -- first [indecipherable] to go help him that some Jews are th -- I have a concentration camp. But this concentration in Ferramonti di Tarsia was a joke. Now, I have a friend who will live in Tarsia, and he was telling me story, and I unfortunately don't have his picture, Italian guard around there, there was little booth where they stayed and guard, but they couldn't stay there because was -- the little grocery store, with the cigarettes and the fruit and the candy. So even if it's raining, they just stay in front of booths, they're doing business with the people in the camp. So you come to the fence, and you tell the -- ah, Jojo, come here. He say, what you need? Two pack of cigarette.

Q: Yeah, that was before --

A: So, you know. And even in the life in the camp in itself is much completely different life because they, you know, nobody worry about the life. There were so many engineers, doctors, like Evie told you, when she hurts her finger, everybody come running. That was cream de la cream of Vienna, mostly Vienna, in [indecipherable]. Now -- now I'm going back to Yugoslavia and Croatia. Croatia didn't have an organized Jewish community when j -- Viennese Jews start coming Croatia. So what the Croatian community in its -- in itself done -- because you have to

remember, whole Yugoslavia had 60,000 Jews. That the more Jews in one little town in Poland, the whole damn country of Croatia had -- yugo -- not Croatia, Yugoslavia. Now, Croatia would have approximately 12,000 Jews, more or less. So wealthy Jews in Croatia, being they were not organized, each one took a family in the house for boarding and sleeping.

Q: From -- from --

A: From Vienna.

Q: From Vienna.

A: Yeah. I'm talking 1938 - '39. Now mine uncle [indecipherable] in business, and he couldn't babysit or take care of the people in the house. He took a little hotel in Zagreb called Hotel Astoria, and -- and there were 22 rooms, and he put 22 Jewish family in that hotel for duration, food and everything included.

Q: Really?

A: On his own, without anything to do with the community. What those poor people didn't realize, that this hotel was taken lease in 1939, and the [indecipherable] lasted only til Easter of 1941, they had to run again. So the people who choose Italy, they made a better choice.

Q: Right.

A: I just want to tell you --

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: -- a mechanic behind the Croatian Jews help the Viennese Jews. Some Viennese Jews made it to Belgrade. Now Belgrade Serbia had a much bigger Jewish community. And Serbian people as a overall, were less anti-Semitic --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- because King Alexander was a big friend of Jews. You -- you -- you -- I'm sure you know who I am talking about. King of Serbia, of Yugoslavia.

Q: Right, right.

A: And King Staff, you know, Dr. Alkali and all these minister were mostly Jewish. So the Jews had it pretty darn good from the day that Yugoslavia -- inception of Yugoslavia, til the Yugoslavia fell apart in the whole country.

Q: So you didn't grow up with the feelings of being Jewish and there being anti-Semitism in Croatia?

A: I -- I -- I -- I brought up in this little community that I know that was anti-Semitism because you always had -- you have it every place. If you don't have a community that's anti-Semitic -- I mean, I can see -- I felt it which is there, but not to the extent to be threatened.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: A matter of fact, the kids I went to the school is right now one of them is a surgeon who just retired in Zagreb, Croatia, every time I go over there I'm his houseguest. I mean, we grew up together, we hang her up all the time. And -- and other guy was a son of the post officer manager. He's living in Opatia in -- in Croatia, also. I'm in -- with him in touch all the time. So I keep in touch with few of them that they remain our friend, even that we couldn't -- but when they came -- when we couldn't during the war. But when we come to run, the saddest part it is -- and I'm know that you'll be interested in this, when the Nazi come in, they confiscated our property, they come in April, by na -- by June all our property gone, grocery store, factory and all that.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: They send so-called supervisor to run -- they were totally inept. I mean, to -- one -- they sold what was on stock, they were i -- in heap of trouble. But to punish my father, first they send him on a false labor in a old orchards. They had the big orchard with 4,000 trees of fruits. So all town could see the Jews is coming over there, cleaning the veets and all that. And when this got old -- and my mother was working with him, too -- then took my father to the -- ready to ship into concentration camp. And they took him to Zagreb where -- to be shipped to the infamous camp of Jasenovac, okay? But my aunt, married to attorney in Zagreb, she and the guy -- when she was going to the [indecipherable] who was th -- at that time she didn't realize, he was a fifth column, that's a -- you know what's a fifth ca -- the -- the German Nazi underground all over Europe. She didn't know that, but he was [indecipherable]. And when Hitler took over, and the Nazi state of Croatia was created, she seeing his picture that he become police commissioner. So she call him. His name was Medwid. And he told Medwid, listen, what the hell happen, I thought that you love us. He said, I still love you, but that's [indecipherable] my job for me. I -- I believe in a free Croatia. I didn't believe the Serb that should dominate [indecipherable] okay then, I don't want to talk politics, I have a problem. My brother-in-law is in Zbore where they put the -- sending people. Said, don't worry, I take care of it. So he say okay, tomorrow morning he is going to be out, have his family from Zabno, from my hometown come, I'm gonna give them papers so they can go in there to Italian border, and then clandestine over the mountain crossing with Italy, you couldn't just legally cross to Italy, because that's already '41. Don't forget, Evie come with the passport in 1938 --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- I couldn't do that.

Q: Right.

A: That's already different ballgame.

Q: We're going to have to stop the tape, I'm afraid. We'll continue this.

End of Tape One

### Beginning Tape Two

Q: Zdenko, I -- I understand that y-your family was so conscious of what was going on that you had a family boycott of all German goods, is that right?

A: Yes, yes. We started already doing it in 1938, and I was very upset because I -- there's some - even Berkly German toys, fantastic toys, I mean they're the best toys on eur -- i -- on European market. Everything disappeared in 1938. I used to like to have a little lead soldiers, I mean the whole army, in trucks and all the stuff. It was not allowed in our hou -- any part to our family, not even family that was bringing me toys. So the -- we did -- we were very much aware what was going on. Unfortunately, didn't do nothing about it, they still kept s-same -- do business in -- in Yugoslavia, but we knew what was going on.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Did this make you feel bad as a kid, or did you understand it?

A: It made me feel bad to the point because we'll -- my dad, especially, he was very fearful, he -- he always wanted to get out of it for so -- like I told you before. So I've become very uncomfortable because my dad could not expand his business, he was holding back, while his brother-in-law, my mother's wealthy brother, he was increasing it. Now, when it was time to go ahead and run, and pick our marble and go, he started building a f -- mill, steel mill, steel, now listen. One the biggest steel mill that's today exists in Croatia, my uncle start building in 1938. Insane, absolutely insane, because he was so commi -- he felt like a big Croat.

Q: So he thought he needed three mills?

A: Yeah, he -- yeah, he really thought nothing is going to happen, people will appreciate, he was always big patriot. You me -- my uncle by self, supported Catholic church in my hometown. I mean, priests that he needed money for new roof didn't go to -- to Zagreb talk to bishop. He talking what, to guys from our hometown, he got the damn l-lumber yard, and a st -- a -- a brick



factory, and they're making a roof covers and all that, the clay tile. Why am I gonna go to bishop when I got here [indecipherable] or go to Zagreb, next time come to town, and I got [indecipherable] talk to him.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I mean, when they used to come bless the home for the Christian holidays, I mean, the priest went first to five Jewish houses. He collected more money than whole the rest of town. So you see how [indecipherable] integrated with this community.

Q: So there wasn't a sense, even though everybody knew that there was a difference in people's religious orientation --

A: Yeah, no, you -- no -- it was not really a threat or a feel of a strong anti-Semitism.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: We only realized how much was fake to some extent, when we had to finally leave our hometown like I told you before because my father was taken to go to the camp, and we had to follow him when the news come that we are ready to get hell out of there, nobody come to the street to say good-bye. There's only one family, close to the railroad station, that tell us well, if you have to leave, come over, we want to give you dinner before you go on the train. But the rest of the town was hiding behind the curtain. And the sooner we got over there, like vultures they cleaned up the house much as they can.

Q: Mm-hm. Did Germans come into your little town in 1941?

A: The German come in oy -- war started Easter weekend of '41, the Germans actually -- in vel -  
- their physical presence was there 14 days later.

Q: So they really were physically present.

A: Yeah, we did -- we did tro -- they come to our store. My father was still running his grocery store, and they were so starved for fine toiletry, like fine soap, smelly soap and stuff, they bought everything. They give us the German marks.

Q: Were you frightened when you saw these German soldiers?

A: Yes, yes, they were very imposing, very.

Q: They were imposing.

A: Because th -- you could notice -- I didn't see ess -- S.S. troopers, I saw only soldiers.

Q: Right.

A: So they already scaring hell out of me. But when you see a really S.S. trooper, i-it's ri -- it looks to me like a liquidation squads, with the black uniform, with the skullcaps, the marching group. They were so programmed, like the robotics today that you see. It's amazing. I mean, I think they invented the robotic before their time. I mean, it is funny. A -- later on when we were already liberated, I used to make fun of the damn S.S. because it's so funny. One of them is coming, and you're hop, hop [indecipherable] hop, and everybody jump like a bunch of yoyos. I mean, I can see that later on when I was serving American army, I was laughing, said boy this German officer would die if he would come over here. He would try to run American army the way do that. But they were very [indecipherable]. Never question a order. I mean, they come in the town, they say -- I saw in Italy, after Italy capitulated, and German took over, and then when they kill two German, the partisan, they took every man they got hold of and they hang it -- them up on the trees, they will look like Christmas decoration. So -- but that's a different chapter.

Q: So when -- when -- when you saw ess -- S.S. came to your town?

A: S.S. come to town like a month later. When -- when the Croatian government was formed, the Nazi Croatia --

Q: Right.

A: -- under Ante Pavelic, then the S.S. is come in town as recruiter.

Q: Recruiting Croatians?

A: Re -- for -- recruiting Croatian for the Croatian Nazi army.

Q: They get a lot of people from your town?

A: No, they didn't get very many people from my town.

Q: They didn't?

A: No, no, no, they didn't get any place very many people, because many people were aware what was going on because when you volunteer for the job, they know Russian front was next direction.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So they were already aware that the ww-ar is spreading and all that. You know, they were not sitting over there and playing soldiers --

Q: Right.

A: -- they know there's going to be something else behind it.

Q: How much were your newspapers giving you information about what was happening to Jews in Germany? I mean, by '41, there are no exter --

A: Our newspaper give us a blow by blow descriptions.

Q: So you knew how anti-Semitic these Germans were.

A: We know exactly what was happen, we couldn't -- we couldn't believe that Roosevelt in Washington was sitting on his finger, and couldn't understand what was going on. We couldn't - it's absolutely mind-boggling. The European press, of the country not occupied yet by the Nazis, and I'm talking about -- if you're talking '41, at that time you still had the French, that

was part free, part [indecipherable], you had the Belgian, Luxembourg, Holland, Sweden, particularly northern Baltic country, they know what was going. But Baltic country was always pro-Nazi. Even without occupation. The -- the Nazi influence stop in Finland and up there, way up north. But Norway and -- and -- and -- and -- and -- a-and Sweden, they were always Nazi oriented. Now, what concerned the whole Europe, in the countries that were not occupy yet -- you know, Poland was already gone, Austria was already gone, so th -- but that make no difference what people felt there, because they already fell under the Nazi boot.

Q: Right, because a month after --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- they go into Yugoslavia, they're in western Europe.

A: That's right. But see, what happened in Yugoslavia, when -- when the Nazi vic -- wanted Yugoslavia to join the non-aggression pact, and sign this thing that they would fall in line with the Fascist Italy and Germany, it happen [indecipherable]. See, King Alexander was dead, now his brother Paul, who was regent, because Alexander's son Petar was too young, was only 14 years old, so his Uncle Paul was the allegiance -- running the government, he signed that pact with the Nazis. But Serbian people revolted, and they hi -- th-th- then there was demonstration in Belgrade says, better war than pact, "Bolje rat nego pakt." That's in Serbian.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Better war than pact with Nazis. Next morning -- that was Saturday evening, next morning Belgrade was bombarded, they flatten it. And that's end of Serbian war -- a-and it didn't take him long to -- Nazi to go over, especially northern part of Yugoslavia because they -- there's so many infiltrated Nazi in different -- different units, so it was just -- it's a joke, they just marched

through it. Slovenia give them a little more resistance, but Croatia did not give them any resistance, no.

Q: Right. When your father is ta -- he's doing first forced labor in your own vineyards?

A: In the vineyards, yes.

Q: Right. But then he's going to be sent to Zagreb to go to a concentration camp?

A: To Jasenovac.

Q: To Jasenovac?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And that's when he's --

A: We were able to get him out.

Q: Right. Were you scared?

A: You bet.

Q: As a kid?

A: Yes.

Q: Scared to death.

A: Yeah. We didn't know -- we didn't know of my aunt's clout in Zagreb with the Nazis, because later when the same guy helped to have whole family out.

Q: Really?

A: Yes. We never know what happened to him, by the way. I think the partisans kill him at a certain point. Tito. But we didn't know exactly when. They caught up with him, but we don't know where. But he a bi -- eve -- be -- gradually, systematically all the family, except the younger brother, is split on the Adriatic coast, he was married to the gen -- he could get out too,

but she was convinced that she can save him, and he didn't want to leave his wife. Fantastic human being. He had plenty opportunity. Because he -- duri -- Split was in the Italian domain.

Q: Right.

A: And he -- you know, he was able to come to vi -- when we were in hiding, he took Italian, he gave him the [indecipherable]. This is passing document through all the borders. And he come visit us in the hiding. And he brought us present and food from [indecipherable]

Q: And then went back.

A: -- and went back. But when -- he didn't realize that one, the Italian copulat -- capitulated on September 23<sup>rd</sup> of 1943.

Q: Right.

A: The picnic was over. I mean, [indecipherable] we were confined -- when leet -- when we arrived in Italy, over the border, you understand, first we were in hiding, in u --

Q: Explain that. Let's go -- let's go back.

A: Yeah.

Q: When do you go into hiding? Your father --

A: Okay, let me explain you.

Q: Okay.

A: After we got those document to get my father out of the camp --

Q: Right.

A: -- we went to the border town ca-called Kraljevica. That's was Italian zone of occupation. Now, Italy had the two zone of occupation. I want go slow to try to give you the picture. One zone they consider occupation zone. When you were in occupation zone, you were not safe, because you -- the Croatian Nazis, and Italian occupation forces together.

Q: And is that the north?

A: Yeah --

Q: The north tri --

A: -- I'm talking about north. O-Over there covers Opatia, Fume, Trieste --

Q: Right.

A: That zone. And in that zone, you was always in danger if they catch you, the Nazi -- the Italiament -- the Italian Fascists would turn you over back -- they would not harm you, they would give you back to the Croatian Nazis.

Q: Croatia, right.

A: When you enter to the joint Italian an-annexed to Italy, like Ljubljana, you know, they consider part of Italy, you have it made. So our job, after they finally get in a s-s -- half safety zone, an occupied zone, to get to annexed zone, this was a big thr -- because we know, if we reach Ljubljana, we are free. And we manage again, with the help of a -- how would you call it, of city manager of a little community by Opatia, you know, in the northern -- little commun -- maybe 1200 population. My father become friend with him, he know that we are in hiding, he said listen, I will need a paper to declare us that we are resident of Grobnik and we have to go to business to Ljubljana because we have to catch a bus. And give us some names f -- cock and bull, whatever you want to make. And he give us temporary pass with all this stamps and what y -- and we caught the bus from spl -- Rijeka, that is right of Opatia, to Ljubljana. We pass few checkpoint. Croatia Nazis and Italian. Once we enter in Ljubljana, we went directly to Italian authority said hey, we are here, the Jews from Croatia, we want to apply for confinement in Italy. That's ag -- very good. Now here come the new information that fo -- Evie didn't tell you. She said they got a subsidy. Italian [indecipherable] to all the Jews that didn't have nothing, and they

had to eat. And they just have them all in camp, because there were whole bunch of them, and the only known camp was Ferramonti di Tarsia. Didn't have any other camps. Had to give them livelihood. Every head of the family got a five lira a day, wife got three lira a day, for each kids, two lira a day. So if you add it up, it was not enough for a fantastic life, but you would not be hungry. To give you idea how [indecipherable] to a real -- what, over 300 lira something. A rent would cost you 120 lira a month, approximately in the little communities. The rest of it for your food. So they give you enough money to survive.

Q: Right.

A: So when we arrived in Ljubljana, we apply for subsidy. Til my uncle Rich Rada, til he find out where we were. Once he find out we were -- he was running too, because he was in Italy, in Aosta.

Q: In Aosta?

A: Aosta --

Q: Aosta, uh-huh.

A: Aosta, province of Aosta. That's northern Italy.

Q: Northern Italy.

A: Okay.

Q: Right.

A: And he didn't have no problem go to Switzerland because he come to the border, say here, my s -- account in Swiss bank so and so, and Swiss say welcome Mr. Rada. Now for rest of us a different story. But when he -- once he becoming -- got into safety -- and even before, when we were confined in Modena -- we were sent to Modena, by the way, which -- this a breadbasket of Italy. The most fantastic cuisine if you can ever dream. And then we [indecipherable] by this



Italian family like I mentioned before that helped us eventually, we even -- Italian -- they -- you know, this was the war. So even Italian when they want to go over there and get a supply for the winter, they have to go city hall, get a permission to buy a pig. They'll have a pig, or the cow, have it butchered, and then they will take it home, and they will [indecipherable] and refrigerate it -- because they didn't have a refrigerator in every house, but there were lockers that you could rent at -- to store the -- freeze-freeze the stuff. My father went with rest Italians have on the permission to buy a pig. The Italian give him a pig, he had the pig butchered. We -- we were never kosher, so that was no problem. I always say Jews don't eat a pig because doesn't know how good it is. And we had the meat all supply and the fat for cooking, because we were not used yet, to olive oil. It's later on that you acquire the taste for olive oil, and we completely [indecipherable] lard --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- and [indecipherable] that stuff.

Q: All right, now I -- I want to go back because I don't understand. Once your father -- once you have your papers for your father --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- you leave this little town with your father --

A: We leave --

Q: -- or does he go alone?

A: We never go back to the town. From the Zagreb where was the gathering point for all the -- for the [indecipherable]

Q: You go there with your mother.

A: We go to Zagreb with my mother.

Q: Okay. Is your aunt --

A: My aunt -- we stay --

Q: Her si -- her sister.

A: -- we go to her apartment.

Q: Right.

A: We meet there, in Zagreb.

Q: And what about the aunt that -- your mother's sister who is in St. Ivan?

A: In Sv. Ivan Zabno? No problem, she stayed with her husband. She --

Q: And she's --

A: -- she was never touched.

Q: She was never touched?

A: Never touched.

Q: And she just stayed in that little town?

A: She stayed little town. He was a town doctor, they needed him desperately.

Q: Okay. That's interesting.

A: Yeah.

Q: So you leave with your mother?

A: Yeah.

Q: And you go to her sister's --

A: To Zagreb -- in Zagreb.

Q: Right, th-the guy who was playing games with your father.

A: That's right, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Okay.

Q: Now, does your father then come to that apartment?

A: He come to the apartment, yes. And then the next day we take a train to Italian border.

Q: And you have papers so you can go.

A: We have a paper so that nobody would touch us on the train.

Q: Now does her sister and her husband go, or --

A: No, they stay behind us.

Q: They stay behind.

A: They st-stay behind us.

Q: All right, so it's now the three of you.

A: Three of us. And her sister that was living -- it's a -- one more sister was living in neighboring city. This the oldest sister of my mother.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: With her husband and with her daughter, and the granddaughter. They're running also, but not with us, right behind us. We tried to break, not to be all in the same group, you understand?

Q: Ri-Right, in case something happened, right.

A: But we -- we were going the same direction in the hope that once we get on the safety, we can combine.

Q: Right.

A: Which we did.

Q: Right. So you're 12?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Am I right?

A: I was Bar Mitzvah'd on the run.

Q: On the run?

A: I was Bar Mitzvah right after we crossed the illegally border to -- to -- to the occupied part.

And I remember like today my mother asked me what do you want to have on day of Bar

Mitzvah, I said I'd like to have a tripe. You know what's a tri --

Q: Really?

A: Yeah.

Q: A fish.

A: No, tripe.

Q: Tripe.

A: Tripe. This is the intestinal --

Q: Ah, ah, ah, right.

A: -- tripe. It's Italian dish with lots of garlic, it stink like hell, but it's delicious.

Q: Is it?

A: But see how modest that was?

Q: Right.

A: She thought that I would want a steak, or a wienerschnitzel, something. I knew better, I knew it was not available, it was in wartime. But I saw -- when you enter a restaurant and you start smelling from garlic three blocks away, I know that they would have something --

Q: Right.

A: -- that would --

Q: Right.

A: -- and that was my -- my Bar Mitzvah meal.

Q: Now, I know this is going to sound a little odd, but y -- did you have your own little suitcase?

A: Yes, I did have my own suitcase.

Q: Yes.

A: Yeah.

Q: And did you pack that suitcase?

A: I car -- I carry s-stuff in my suitcase what I pack myself until finally my mother had to throw away because it wa -- become a burden. Like little toys, or little train kit and all that from school, and comic magazines.

Q: But not clothes?

A: Yeah, I had the clothes in it, but very little.

Q: Right. More -- more of the things --

A: That's right. You know, I di -- in -- about 1938 in Yugoslavia, they start publish Popeye magazine.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Superman magazine.

Q: Right.

A: And everybody come -- Mickey Mouse, oh. And I was saving those strips.

Q: You like that? Right.

A: And I want taking with me wherever I go.

Q: Right.

A: Mother dumped them, at a certain point, til she discover what is in the valise, because she [indecipherable] packed the valise.

Q: Right.

A: It was -- my junk was much heavier than my clothes.

Q: I bet it was. Now, I gather your parents must have left o -- just about everything in the house.

A: My -- we left everything. We had some friend of my mother that she couldn't find jewelry. She said the Nazi came, took it away. People that we really trusted. Now, what mine father did that -- when he noticed the Nazi was coming, he went in the basement of our house. We had -- in this town by the river is the factory, we had the three homes.

Q: Mm-hm. Three homes?

A: Three homes, yes.

Q: In this little town?

A: Yeah. All of them built in three years or four before the war.

Q: Wow.

A: My father knocked it down, and build because original house where my fa -- grandfather started the business was 95 years old by time -- that time, so he knocked it down the same spot, in two. First he knocks down the old grocery store. So he moved the grocery store in the living quarters. You understand?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Then when we -- the new store was built, move it back, knocked over living quarter. Then he finished living quarters, now this house was done. Then he went cross the street, he build the house which he figure for us, says one day I'm a -- want to retire, if I sell the whole thing we have a place to live. And then he bought additional property, was right on the border, a lot with the house next to it, he bought it also.

Q: But that had all been confiscated by the time --

A: That was all the [indecipherable] by the Nazi. We got back everything but the last house where was -- what my dad built for us, and we will never get back because is post office in it, to this day.

Q: Hm. But you did get back the other?

A: We did get the other, and we sold it.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: But the stuff that was in the house, you --

A: Was [indecipherable]

Q: It was -- it was gone.

A: Gone.

Q: It was gone.

A: Very fast.

Q: Right.

A: Now my father took all silverware.

Q: He did?

A: Yeah. And he buried it in the house, in our house, he bury it in the house. Now, that was 1941. In 19 -- we came to Kansas City, '49, in 1955 - 1955, a Croatian guy -- well, I -- you know, it's so difficult tell you my story in a -- in right chronological order.

Q: It's fine, it's fine.

A: And I'm jumping.

Q: I'll -- I'll remember.

A: When we were sent to Kansas City --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- you know, at random, we didn't have no choice.

Q: Yeah.

A: The Jewish community just send us to Kansas City, and -- and my mother said, you know, Kansas City, I think that one guy that work for us on our brick factory, he -- he got married and he went to Kansas City. And his name was Nicola Rodina. I wonder if he's living in this town. Now he come before the war, first World War, to marry his sweetheart, then war happen, he couldn't come back to America. So he and his sweetheart live -- and he worked for my grandfather and my dad til the war was over, and then after the war, around 1930, went back to Kansas City, where he started. And he was working -- you know, Kansas City was third biggest city for meat packing house, and you had the Swift, [indecipherable] Armour, all of them were in Kansas City. So they were working because didn't need much language to be a butcher. So Mother go over there, pick up in the telephone book [indecipherable] Rodina. And he had a son about my age, and we [indecipherable] right away, and we become friend. But in 1955, this Nic Rodina that used to work for us, goes back to Croatia for first time. And my father said, "Nic, you want to do me a favor. In my house," and he write him -- make him a sketch of -- a schematic.

Q: Right, right.

A: "In this part I buried all of our silverware. Take a shovel, see what the hell is there." He take a shovel, the first time he pushed it -- because our basement by the way, it was no concrete.

Basements are dirt.

Q: Yeah.



A: The first time he push a shovel in, it hit the metal box with the stuff. The first. Took him exactly 10 seconds to hit a spot. Right on the money. He brought all the silver. Now whatever was silver was okay, but we discovered the handles, you know what I mean, it was not silver. Knife, and blade and the stem was silver.

Q: Right.

A: So when you brought everything -- spoons were no problem, forks were no problem.

Q: But knives.

A: I'm talking knife. So when he brought it to Kansas City we had the new stems put with the -- I got -- the silver was there in Kansas City.

Q: The same --

A: -- silver yes, but [indecipherable]. So silver didn't rot, but whatever it was not --

Q: Right.

A: -- what was not silver, it rot. That was just like a little postscript to -- to the story.

Q: Did you have to be explained why you were going, or was it really clear?

A: No, it wa -- I -- to me it was very clear why I was going, you know, when -- when we first arrived and were confined in this little community of -- of si -- Concordia Santa Catarina, which is, you know -- Modena is a breadbasket of Italy. Wheat, grain, fruit, you name it. So they told us right away in -- Italian police in Ljubljana, they say hey, you guys, you got it made.

Q: How did you know in Ljubljana that you were going to Modena?

A: We didn't.

Q: Oh, you didn't.

A: We came over there -- my dad come over there to police department. [indecipherable] say, we are going to send you to Italy, insi -- inside Italy, and you'll be confined to a little community.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And they gave a whole bunch regulation, you cannot socialize with Italians, you cannot work over there. You have to report to the f -- fascio. This the Fascist head police once a day, head of the family, so we know that you are in the town. They're not going to look for you, you better show up there. And give us all these rules. And that -- that was not difficult to f -- to -- to follow. But the Italian [indecipherable] people. I mean, I cannot find the words to describe my love for Italian, because when we arrived to the -- in Modena, and we went to questura, which is a police headquarters, which in Fascist Italy -- and I'm not talking regular police, I'm talking Fascist Italy. Italian everything they do they have their own political version. Even Italian communists go to church. I'm telling you how ridiculous it is. The red shirts and the flag in the church at the confession. So they -- they modified the -- the convenient. So we go to this questura and he tell us, now these are the community around here. Do you have any particular town that would you like to be confined? And my father say I would like to go to a little town that is not expensive, and that there are nice food around. They says, I'll tell you where I'm going to send you to Concordia sua Secchia. Secchia is a be -- river. Concordia on the ri -- on the Secchia river. He says, fantastic bread, everything was rationed, the -- with the farmer really, your ration cards would be superfluous even if you sh -- needed to go to the store, but farmer will supply whatever you want over there and you can enjoy yourself. And he gave us all this rule that we go over there. So when we trooped up to this lady, that she was divorced for a high ranking Italian officer, she was living with a sister and a daughter. Daughter was about -- I was at that time already fi 15, I think -- no, maybe 14 and a half, 15, she was 18. And so there she was looking, oh my God, I -- she was in [indecipherable] in a sexy and all that. And then my family engaged

her to teach me Italian. And my Uncle Pawel, and Ruza are already with us, in the same house [indecipherable] with them.

Q: Is that the Mitrani and adio --

A: Mitrani, yes.

Q: Andreoli?

A: Andreoli Mitrani.

Q: And is it Andreoli mita -- Mit-Mitrani?

A: Mitrani Andreoli.

Q: Andreoli.

A: Mitrani is the woman married to the [indecipherable], Andreoli is the sister, because sister never marry. So she keep the maiden name.

Q: I see.

A: You understand?

Q: Right.

A: The Italian officer was named Mitrani.

Q: Right.

A: And they had a daughter, Anna Maria, and she was teaching me Italian. And my uncle, he was looking over there from the balcony when she was teaching me Italian. He says, "You know, Zdenko, if you want to learn Italian -- I watch you from balcony, you have to stop staring at her breasts. I mean, are you -- you are not paying one word of attention what the woman's teaching." I said, "How do you know?" He said, "I'm watching you from window [indecipherable]." Said, do you know any -- do you know anything what she told you? And I would ba-ba-ba, I start [indecipherable]. He was right.

Q: Right.

A: And that was the end of my staring. And he told her, he says, you know, you're a yu -- pretty young lady, and you want nephew to teach him Italian, dress up a little different. A young boy, his hormones star -- start working, you know, make possible for him to concentrate what you are doing. But was very funny, that -- that's a little --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- postscript into the whole story. But they took us in. Now, when --

Q: No, wait, I'm going to have stop you because we -- I'm sorry, we have to stop the tape.

A: Okay.

End of Tape Two

Beginning Tape Three

Q: How long are you in the occupied zone before you get to Lub -- Ljubljana, do you think?

A: Nine months.

Q: Nine months.

A: Nine months, yes, we were hiding in a little town called Silvo, S-i-l-v-o. Real --

Q: S-i-v-l-o?

A: Oh, yeah, this town was maybe 200 population. Is right between commune of Grobnik, that I mentioned before, and Shushak. Really a small town, but we -- we tried to be a -- you know, a -- a -- as unseen as possible. So we found in a -- by -- old lady, you know, about 75 years old, she had a room to rent. So my parents, they kind of crammed in there, and nobody in town know about us, that we even there.

Q: Now why are you hiding there?

A: We are hiding there because was Italian occupation there, but we're afraid if Italian get hold of us, they might turn us back to the Croatian Nazi because they hi -- they were sharing authority in that zone.

Q: Right.

A: There was not completely Italian authority.

Q: So how -- who was figuring out how to get out? This was your father who was --

A: Well, when we were there we were aware that in order to reach a complete safety we have to go in Italian zone, which is annexed.

Q: Right, right.

A: Not occupied.

Q: Yes.

A: Quote unquote, there's a big difference annexed and occupied.

Q: Right.

A: And we know that because we've still -- we still saw even that Italian had the final word.

Now, if you were -- we got caught one time by Italians. See, is only [indecipherable] what Italian catch you. One time they caught us, they were ready to ship us back to Zagreb and the -- and we were begging, please don't send us, you know what's waiting for us. They guy say, you don't know. So there were five Italian cops, and they were arguing between them, we couldn't understand. Little bit, not very much. They were dickering. One guys said, let them go, why the hell you playing around with them? And they said no we can't help it, our duty -- well, we are -- we allied of Germany. Send them back to Zagreb. So it's -- they said, you know what, let's make a smart thing. So you want feel guilty that you didn't carry order and that I didn't carry order.

Let's tell them that we go for lunch, and we be back in 30 minutes and that's why they don't -- and I don't have to tell you how quick we [indecipherable]. But that's only happen in Italy. I mean, all the Italian with the stuff like they said, hey listen you guys, you are [indecipherable] in the arrest but by the way we go for lunch, but don't go anyplace, we'll be back in 30 minutes.

Q: Could you understand some Italian?

A: Very little.

Q: Very little.

A: But -- no, but once I got in Italy, young, I couldn't go to school, so the only organized playground is the church backyard. Everybody was there. I mean, they -- the movies, priest was showing, you had the ping pong table, he had the basketball tab -- ev-everything what the kids in this little town which we were confined, [indecipherable]. So I become, you know, with -- when you are with the kids, you pick up Italian very fast. And for me is no problem to ge-get

integrated. A matter of fact, to a certain point, I got integrated little too much because my parents noticed that I was going st -- sitting at the mass, and the one time they short of the kids, and the priest talked me into be -- helping serve the mass, and I come home, I could serve the mass better than those Italian kids. Why? Because during the Hebrew school -- see, the -- the Testament, Old Testament is same. And the kids my age didn't get to New Testament yet. So what they knew, I already was way ahead of them. And priest was very impressed with it. [indecipherable] told me, how do you know, and he says -- I said we Jews didn't have to worry about New Testament. We worry only about the Old Testament. So he said, would you like to go over there and help serve the mass? I said why not? What is in it for me? He says cakes and cookie and hot chocolate. I'm in.

Q: Now let me go back to Ljubljana again. Is -- was this typical that if you got there, you could go to the authorities and say you wanted to get to Italy?

A: Me and 2,000 other ones.

Q: There were 2,000 Jews?

A: 2,000 Jews. Even some Austrian Jews. Once you reach Ljubljana and you were Jewish, this is such a amazing thing about Fascist Italy. That they let you in, but they didn't want to know you were there. Like remember in the previous segment when I told you that they give us list of do and don't do?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, when we got over there with all these restriction, and my father's reports the first morning to the -- to Fascist headquarters, said, here I am. Then he come next morning there. And finally the third day the guy told him, "Why you bother me here every morning," he says. "I

know you are here.” He said, “But we supposed to,” -- “I know. If you are missing here, somebody’s going to tell me. Don’t bother me no more.”

Q: I see.

A: Then if you want to go to movie, you need a special permission. So I was a young kid, I liked to go to movie, every time they -- there’s a big plaque at the [indecipherable]. No American movie, Italian -- Italy made lots of movies, lots of -- many of them propaganda movie and stories and -- and I was going to movie every sun -- when the -- owto -- if Fascist authorities saw me in the movie, they wouldn’t bother, they’d turn around, they didn’t want to see me. They didn’t want to know I’m there.

Q: So how -- how -- how did you understand this? I mean, you come to Italy, they have anti-Semitic laws.

A: Ye-Yeah.

Q: The Jews have been thrown out of some occupations, right?

A: Yeah.

Q: So there’s a certain level --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- of oppression.

A: Yeah.

Q: Then there’s another level where there is no oppression.

A: No oppression.

Q: It’s -- it’s very --

A: Because -- because Italian are flexible. That’s a very good word to describe. Italian are opportunistic. Italian -- no, first time that we come to little town it says, oh, the Fascists told us



that you Jews were take -- taking eyes out of the kids and that's why you're confined. I said that's a bubkes. That's not true. And th -- when they got acquainted with you, when they notice on daily basis the way your people with a -- when they saw that we went, asked the farmer for bread, or to give us some flour, or to share us the flour, everything. We th -- it -- it was unbelievable, the response of the community, we feel so comfortable. Now we come to the -- the September, or armistice, that we got so excited, and finally the war is over. At this point, Americans already past Sicily, they landed on the boot of Italy, and on Calabria. And they're marching their way the boot. And we are in Florence. That's like 450 miles down the boot. Lots of mountains. So we, a little educated, we knew what was expected that there's not going to be a pancake, especially the German from the Brenner --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- were coming out. But when we had to run to go back when -- when the Italy collapsed, you know, and when we had to run, the questura, the -- these Fascist headquarters that tell my father pick up where you want to go, he send the word to the priest of the town telling people to get -- he had a -- a lot of that, because starting tomorrow Nazi are taking over, I'm out of business. [indecipherable] ever protect him, so whatever you can do for them, do for them. Then the -- the Andreoli relayed this to us. Andreoli had the connection with the priest in Florence, and they call that priest in the Florence, said we got these refugees here, and we're going to have to put them someplace because Americans are coming up the boot, we know that it is only a question of time. Can you help us? So the priest said, I see what I can do. And sure enough [indecipherable] they couldn't s -- we had only hours, said okay, tell him to go to -- to Florence, and go to such and such a store in piazza Pitti, you are f-familiar with Florence? In piazza Pitti, right in front of the Palazzo, piazza Pitti --

Q: Right.

A: It's a little leather good store.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Hamer leather goods store, and selling to -- ca -- look for Senor Torchio. Senor Torchio is going to take over from there. Now this is only two blocks from Ponte Vecchio.

Q: Right.

A: Okay?

Q: When Ponte Vecchio is --

A: Is on the ri -- that's right. So they say we -- they send us over there, we already on next train, we have a problem. We got to make to -- to Florence, and from the station to that store roof, missed the -- we're -- was --

Q: How do you get there?

A: Yeah. We went on the foot, we didn't want -- we tried to be like 20 - 30 feet apart, individually, not as a family. All these Fascist Italian with the Nazis decoration and I'm talking hard [indecipherable] they volunteered. They were embarrassed because Italy collapsed. So we -- finally we made over [indecipherable] I got place for you, it's not very far. You go over there, and via Borgo San Jacobo, this is a street right next to Ponte Vecchio, and th-the houses all -- one was on the [indecipherable] and the other was across the street. And wa -- were called via Borgo San Jacobo and was going -- extending about three, four blocks. He say go and visit -- I forgot the number exactly, and talk to the housekeeper, who take care of palazzo. They -- the garden apartment in palazzo. She was called -- so called portiniya, you know, that's a -- in charge of whole building [indecipherable] whoever needs anything. Here you would call it doorman, but she was not doorman. You come to this, you at s -- anyway, in this apartment was

Italian colonel, very big Fascist, who was so ashamed that Italy collapsed, that he volunteered for Russian front. Now, what the Nazis did, the S.S. come, seal his apartment, because he knows somebody else is going to try to rob it or take it over, some Nazi or Fascist, so nobody can touch it. So obercommand from deutsche politisi sealed the apartment with a seal. But she has a key from back door. So in this apartment of this Nazi, we were refuges in there with Ruza, with this attorney husband, my father and me. Ruza was the only versatile enough to go in the street not to be s-suspected she's not Italian. She blended in perfectly and Italian was quite good. So all the supply that we needed --

Q: She got.

A: -- was Ruza provide.

Q: Your mother's there too, yes?

A: Yeah, what -- this th -- oh, five of them. Big apartment. Ah, there's a radio, we were listen radio London, and [indecipherable]. Had everything.

Q: Yeah. But you have to hide there, you have to --

A: We are hiding, of course, nobody in building know we are there.

Q: Right.

A: And we didn't worry that some Nazi come in because it's sealed. My mother catch t-typhoid while we are here in that apartment.

Q: Typhoid?

A: Typhoid.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So again we go back to Mr. Torchio. He said, [indecipherable] okay, I get you a doctor. At 11 o'clock at night, Italian Fascist doctor, a major with a Fascist uniform, come over to the door and

tell to Neila Fussi, that our house ki -- was hiding at -- say you got here a Jewish family hiding, and she almost doody in her pants. She said yes. Say, I'm a doctor so and so, that Mr. Torchio send me over, you got some people sick here. So he was coming there every night, giving us shots, and taking care of my mother, at the risk of his own life, that's why he's coming 11 o'clock at night. Stealing the serum from the military supply, til my mother got well. After the -- four [indecipherable] say no, it's very dangerous for me and for you, I don't want to come because somebody might follow me. You know, you never what they do [indecipherable]

Q: Right, right.

A: -- he said. Now, she's to the point of recovery, she's not infectious any more, so you can relax a little bit. But one thing she is desperate is a vitamin C. Where the hell do you get vitamin C? Again you go back to Mr. Torchio, to a -- and don't worry about it, he said. It's a monastery up there, the hill above Florence, the nuns. They growing lemons on the tree inside monastery. Next day we had all the lemons and stuff that we wanted. Just to give you a little [indecipherable] this is absolutely mind boggling. So my mother weather this things out. Now, Americans already in front of Florence. German are feeling the heat. And German Hauptcommander give the order that all the streets facing the Arno River have to evacuate because there's somebody that screw up in [indecipherable] think American won't be able cross the arn -- Arno River. Now, the only city they didn't blow up is Ponte Vecchio. Now everybody thought that Ponte Vecchio, first of all, Germany loved the arts, and they didn't want to destroy. It was something else, German engineers, they figure out Ponte Vecchio cannot hold American Tiger tanks.

Q: Anyway.

A: Yeah, so they will not tr -- the Americans are not stupid, is not going to close it. So when the Americans -- they didn't touch it. So they left this here. With the rest of it, where we lived -- but

it didn't blow up. They gave us four hours to move. Not us, the whole build -- now we didn't want [indecipherable] no more, because now we are [indecipherable] with Italian.

Q: Right.

A: 4,000 refugee in Palazzo Pitti. Now, that's where is -- where all the art gallery be, all the fun stuff. Now, the shelf where used to be those expensive things, we took the picture and pile them against the wall, and those were our beds, because they were 18 inches apart. Now in the garden there were two wells of water. Now, for four days, the 4,000 people only supplied the water for them in this Palazzo Pitti, was this thing. No bathroom facility. But we really made that flower garden really flourish. Now you --

Q: Are you staying outside?

A: Oh no, no. We -- we --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- we're i-in the -- in the garden --

Q: Inside.

A: -- inside, during the night, all of them in the building. Younger people, without the kids, they were sl-sleeping in the garden, they didn't want to. But for us they give us, with the family, we were using the shelves as a bed. Didn't have no mattress or anything, a blanket, or you coat, whatever you could put under the head.

Q: Right.

A: On the fourth day, about three o'clock in the morning, when they blow all the houses, and I hit the -- the air percussion was so strong that my head hit the bunk above it. I really -- moved me up [indecipherable] everybody, we know bye-bye, Germans are gone. Now here come the Americans. You know how long took Americans to cross river? They brought those big

Caterpillar bulldozer, and they fill up the Arno River in two hours. Italians -- the whole Florence come to see what the hell that stupid American's doing. Like nothing. They use the ruins of the building, they actually done him a favor. They just pushed the debris in the river. But they were smart, they couldn't keep it very long, otherwise they would block the flow of the river.

Q: Right.

A: When they were on the o-other side, they cleaned it up dimen -- and then they come, American pontoon engineer and put those temporary bridges in -- in 48 hours river was flowing and American was going both direction. Now come -- we report right away to American authorities. And they tell us, okay, we got the camp in Rome, which all the foreign refugee, now quote unquote, who are awaiting repatriation to their homeland are going ahead to the camp of Cinecitta. Now we are going to move you on the trucks partly, and partly the trains, because some part the [indecipherable] train is not working. So we have to move you from Rome to Grosseto by truck, and then we put you on the train to Rome. We couldn't care less, we're sleeping the army tent, I got introduced to the corned beef, and to all the American good stuff with the breakfast. Egg -- powdered eggs, the first time in my life, you ever tried them?

Q: No.

A: You wouldn't believe it. You would -- you -- but was all kind of food you wanted. Bacon, oh my God, was coming out of your ear. And you could eat as much as you want. I mean, there's not such a thing you what -- what is --

Q: And who was cooking? What was --

A: American army.

Q: Uh-huh. So you

A: Was ya -- you -- it was just --

Q: -- so you were eating with the [indecipherable]

A: Yeah.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: It was regular under tents you know, no building. When --

Q: Under tents?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah --

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: -- it was sh -- f -- like MASH, only without the hospital in the field tent.

Q: Right.

A: And -- and then they put the truck, take us to Rome. Now we arrive -- we were liberated sometime in the first part of the August, th -- took about, I think, one weeks journey from liberation to arrive in Rome. By time we arrive in the camp in Rome, Evie was there already because she was liberated four days before me. She was further down south. But that time her mother was working, her father was working, and in -- in order our family, which was friend of Evie's from V-Vienna, they were in Ferramonti. They were liberated before so they were first in the camp, and that's was a mother, father, daughter and Kelmer was a son-in-law of that Winkler family. Family was Winkler and son-in-law was Kelmer. And he was a typical Jewish Viennese finagler. Al-Always know his [indecipherable] to find. It took him exactly 10 days that he become a general manager of the kitchen for refugee. He spoke a little Italian, spoke a little German, he was able to get connection with Americans, say hey look, you're a guy, we need somebody to run this kitchen, we got about turnover between 900 and thousand prov virtually every week, and we need to put it together a staff to feed and take care of it. Now one thing you know about American, they're not multi-lingual.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So they need a multi-lingual staff to take care of this [indecipherable] because there were 10 - 15 nations. But next to us was a Italian camp, still in Cinecitta, just for Italian refugee. That Italian [indecipherable] took care of it. But was a big different in the food and supply what American were taking care of in Italian [indecipherable]. So Italian refugee would be delighted to be in the foreign camp, but couldn't get in foreign na -- now, by the end it came they were looking -- i-if car -- is approaching some kind of American holiday, I don't remember if was Labor day or whatever it is. And American guys the officer wanted to have a holiday. So they ma -- they send a feeler out, any of the refugees you know how to cook, we need a cook and a baker to make cakes. So I asked my mo -- my mother says how long for how long. He says, well all depend how good you cook. So sh -- my mother start cooking for 30 guys. Now, Evie's mother was already working for the employees of the camp. Now Kelmer, that guy who was first arrived, he was running refugee kitchen, so I'm telling you how those Jews got all situated in key position. Now my mother wa -- pure accidentally because my mother was a gourmet cook and a baker. So she prepared, you might think, Labor day meal what -- August was Labor day, because we arrived in August. And she cook him a pishinger torte and a Dobish torte, and a Sacher torte, a -- you name it. And the guy said -- and then say she cook him paprika golish and stuff. Sa -- says hey listen, we got to hook up with the girl. So she -- Mother told him, you know what? You have three Slovenian guys, helpers. All of them know about cooking a little bit. I'm considering the deal, but I want those three guys as helpers because I cannot handle it by myself. I know these guys know what they are doing, and if I give them direction [indecipherable]. She got the job. Now my Aunt Ruza that was liberated with us, when we come to the camp the first thing they want to i-in -- give us injection and all the protection all diseases. But my Uncle Pawel ba --



my smart attorney, is like Evie's brother, no injection of me. Nobody's going to poke me with the needles. Next day he left the camp to live in Rome. Found himself a little apartment [indecipherable]. And they never came back to camp. Lucky for them [indecipherable] order that my mother got job in the kitchen, because they never had to spend a di -- dollar for grocery.

Q: Mm-hm

A: They came twice a week for the food supply that you will not believe it, the shopping [indecipherable]. It just happened the chief of police, again a refugee, was a gradanier, Serbian gradanier from Belgrade, he was a royal guard, about six foot five, he becomes chief of police. We become friendly with him, and that [indecipherable] our family was schlepping this stuff, said did you come for the supplies?

Q: He knew.

A: He not only knew it, he say that's what they have, you want me to get you Jeep to take you -- they were living in piazzzi [indecipherable] maybe only four miles down the road from Cinecitta.

Q: And Ruza is with him? Cause it --

A: Yeah, Ruza is with Pawel in the apartment. Ruza was carrying, and Pawel, but some of the stuff is heavy, you know.

Q: Right.

A: They had to catch a streetcar to go back.

Q: Right.

A: So he ask him, you want my Jeep to take you home. It was so funny. He -- Evie -- when sh -- when Evie was standing next to him, he was resting his elbow over on Evie's head because she was so small.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Sorry. But that's why my mother got employed in the camp in Cinecitta, and -- and we thought we were living like kings. Now people, who went out to Rome on their own become wealthy. They were dealing with gold, they were dealing with all kind of mishigosha zachen on the black market. But we were content, we didn't want to take any chances, we didn't want to rock the boat, we were very happy and we live like king because we got those private rooms that used to be dressing room of the stars. Like, we were in a room that used to be dressing room from Italian actress Alida Valli, I don't know if you ever heard of her.

Q: Her -- see, I don't know her --

A: Okay, but --

Q: -- but I know it was great film --

A: Well --

Q: -- studio.

A: -- so we were -- and we had the running water in the bathroom, and all of that. And then I hooked up with Evie's brother and Heinz Winkler. That was the brother-in-law of Kelmer -- Kelmer and Mary Winkler's dau -- really, Winkler's sister.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And they become a little clique in the camp, and I thought that I had died and went to heaven, I love it. Four -- five Austrian Heinz's, and me --

Q: And you.

A: Yeah, I fell in this group. So it was four -- I couldn't speak German, except a little that I pick up at home. But those guys was constantly blabbering in -- in German, so I was forced to [indecipherable]. So we decide, look, we got these [indecipherable] Jews for the camp, at least 20 percent of that which -- let's organize Jewish community center. Hell, the Americans have

their [indecipherable] and on their own the Jewish community center is getting all kind of goods from America. So we go over there to Jewish community [indecipherable] says, my name is Moishka Pinsel, we would like to make a Jewish community center in the camp at Cinecitta, what can you do for us? Says, well you bring us the membership, give us the name all the kids you have, and then come once a week, [indecipherable] the chocolate, and the candy, and all information you need. Said, but you got to have some kind of orth -- organization. Here -- go back in the camps, so I tell every brother, okay, you are going to be vice-president, you are going to be treasurer, so m-make a little legitimate thing. We go Italian print shop, and we go to Italian haberdashery shop. We gather those -- you know, like American hats what the soldier wear? With a big Magen-David with a green background, and we become a -- Jewish boys [indecipherable] Cinecitta. Come for the [indecipherable] Jewish -- the own special bridge, we create it. We --

Q: From -- from this small group?

A: From -- yeah.

Q: And you didn't -- you didn't include other kids, it was --

A: Oh yeah, sure.

Q: Oh, you did. I mean, but --

A: We were just the managing, see, because we are on permanent stock.

Q: I see.

A: The rest of kids were coming and going.

Q: Right, right.

A: So they have to have a nucleus who is running the thing. And we came here with a room for meetings. And we had the minutes for the meetings, because Americans are not stupid, they

wanted the minutes from the meeting before they give us chocolate. But first time that we got chocolate, give us so much chocolate I tell to Winkler, my friend that's still live in Kansas City, said, "Listen Heinrich, we got only 32 kids, Americans give us like 100 box. Let's sell them back and make money [indecipherable]

Q: So you sold them?

A: Yes. We still had the -- more than we need.

Q: Where did you -- where did you money to do these hats?

A: From the stuff that we sold. From the stuff that we sold, we got so much overflow of the goods that --

Q: From this chocolate.

A: From the ya --

Q: You had extra money.

A: -- chocolate and the candies, all the kind of stuff they give us.

Q: And who did you sell it to?

A: On the black market, piazza redi --

Q: You sold it on the black market?

A: Piazza Vittorio.

Q: Really?

A: Yes. Right wi -- piazza Vittorio. You could sell anything piazza Vittorio. Not then, even today.

Q: Did your parents know that you were doing this?

A: My parents didn't know damn thing except Evie's brother know, Winkler know, I know, and children, because we have to finally [indecipherable]. We were thinking to charge a membership.

But how can you charge a membership to the kids who might be three days in the camp, or might be three weeks in the camp?

Q: Right, right.

A: So we have to have a source of income.

Q: Right.

A: We didn't have our own sources to go [indecipherable] with.

Q: Right.

A: So we had to come figure it out to finag [indecipherable] -- w-we did what American army does for last hundred years. You know, I learned that when I was drafted. I mean that, I was in a -- a quartermaster. I would take a hundred pair of tee shirts, I will go to the motor pool and I will say, listen, I need the Jeep, I need this, I need that. I didn't steal, I didn't get a dime. But I changed the services [indecipherable]. I went to the kitchen in Tokyo and I told the chief cook, I said, you know what, I would like to come -- when I come from Tokyo, a little t-bone steak, I would like it when I come at two o'clock in the morning, kitchen is working all night, I don't want that you give me hard feelings. But you will never have to make application for the white paints and the shirts, anything. You come to me, I take care of it. I'll bypass the slips altogether. And that worked for me for year and a half in Tokyo.

Q: So it's a lot of bartering.

A: It's wa -- oh, everything is bargaining.

Q: Right, right.

A: A matter of fact, when it was time for me to come back to United States, and that's called return to Z.I. You know what's a Z.I.? Zone of Interior. And I say damn it, I went to Japan and Korea in the ship, I don't want to do that again. The army transport ship, you sleeping in the cots

eight high, one on top of the other. And I was stupid that I was figure I don't want to crawl up there, I was going to be the bottom [indecipherable]. And the sergeant who was on top told me son, crawl as high as you can. So I'm not going crazy. He says, you'll be sorry. Yeah, I was sorry, because everybody who got sick he would cough right down below you.

Q: Right.

A: So I learned, so I said I'm not going to go through this. So when I had to take a medical examination to return back I said to my doctor, what can you do for me to send me back by air? Said, ah, that's if you're sick, wounded, high ranking officer. So, you know sir, I know you buy your uniform. How would you like to have a three pair of headquarters -- I mean lowquarter shoes, a couple of pair of boots, some underwear, and I gave you a uniform to put me on the air. Says how can you do it? I says, you put me on the air and you'll see. He says, you have a deal. So he wrote a paper that severe motors -- motion sickness, that I got deathly sick. So -- but I didn't trust that son of a gun, so I brought him all the left shoes, and I brought him pants but no jackets. And I brought him shorts, but no tee-shirts. When I saw my name on the order that I'm going to States by air, I gave him the rest of it. And I flew. I fl -- descended back the air. I was so excited that I was in 24 hours in California. Now, he put the manifest that I'm very si -- problem with sickness. He said, be sure when you arrive San Francisco, ambulance be there for you, so you better be very sick. So I was there, and they sure pick me up with the orders [indecipherable], but when we stopped next to a telephone booth, I couldn't resist to jump to call home that I'm back in States. They caught me. No plane back to Kansas City. Boot camp to Camp Carson, Colorado peeling potatoes for two weeks.

Q: We have to stop the tape.

A: Do you got --

End of Tape Three

Beginning Tape Four

Q: Zdenko, when you were in Modena, when you went to Italy, did you have to have a change of name? Did you chan --

A: We do -- we do -- no.

Q: You had no --

A: No, I had a -- I went to Italy with Zdenko Bergl, my father, none of the family changed his name. We had a false name later at a certain point when we went in the hiding, when we got the matter of our false paper which were issued to us during the German occupation of Italy, then I become Luigi Bianchi.

Q: And was that in Florence?

A: No, when we -- when we had to run from Modena, you know, from --

Q: Right.

A: -- Andreoli-Mitrani --

Q: Yes.

A: -- they figure out that she has to give us some kind of paper if we get stopped.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So -- so we, again, through the ecclesiastic help, the same channels they use before, same pipeline, they gave us documents that -- the Italian identity card that I have a photocopy it here. That I become Luigi Bianchi, my mother become Maria Bianchi, and my father become Georgio Bianchi. And they gave us birth benevento, which is southern Italy already in American hands. So if they wanted to find out if is true or not, they couldn't. So they had the foresight when issuing the false paper, that they're issuing for a province there is no way the Nazi or Fascist could check it out.



Q: Right. But not -- not -- so this is when you were moving from Modena to Florence?

A: Before -- before we went to Florence --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- they give us like overnight those funny paper --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- if -- case we get stop on the way to hiding place.

Q: Right, right.

A: To have something I.D., because --

Q: Right.

A: -- in Italy at that time, every two steps somebody ask you for I.D.

Q: Right.

A: So we didn't want to press our luck to go, you know, a-around just for a walk. We just needed to go from point A to point B, in case you get stopped you have some kind of paper. And those paper were issued to us on the way to Florence.

Q: Now, did you keep those papers when you were in Florence so you -- so in case --

A: I keep these paper -- no, I kept them in Florence, I kept them to -- to this day, til I turn it over to the institute in Washington. They kept the original, they send me the photocopy.

Q: I see. So you could use it at any time, obviously.

A: Yes.

Q: Right.

A: They did do -- if he would need it we could use it any time, yes.

Q: Right, right.

A: Wethi -- done quite well. I mean, they were -- it was done in a m-monastery, I don't know which one exactly, above Florence.

Q: Right.

A: And they did a hell of a good job.

Q: But when you were in Modena, you didn't need anything?

A: In Modena.

Q: In Modena, rather.

A: All right, in Modena I didn't have any paper, because we were it -- Italian power, Fascist government was in force.

Q: Right, and it was --

A: And they didn't ask me, we're just who we were, we were Jewish refugee from Croatia.

Q: And it was no --

A: So it was no problem, no, no, no. Til -- til -- til the moment that the Germany took Italy over, we didn't have no problem at all. We could move more -- more than you -- more than you can even imagine.

Q: So you were outside playing, and --

A: I was with the kids playing, my father was going dealing with the farmer, we're going to bicycle to neighboring town. Nobody ask anything. A matter of fact, when -- I'm going to go take you back, I suppose you know a little bit about opera.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: You familiar name Benjamino Gigli?

Q: Yes.

A: When Gigli come to sing, I think, in "Madame Butterfly" in neighboring town -- I mean, the -  
- we went to see hi -- to listen to him. I mean, you know, in Italian it's a big faux pas to say see  
him, you don't see opera --

Q: Right.

A: -- you listen to opera. So we went to listen to him -- we went to ask can we go and listen to  
him, he says, what do you mean if you -- give a permission? It's a law that you got to listen to  
Benamino. They were so proud of him. So we really had a -- you know, when -- when I think at  
the same period the Jews were dying in these concentration camp --

Q: Right.

A: -- it was obscene how free we were. And we felt free. We never worried one single second til  
Mussolini was in power, for us. And I'm quoting in power himself, because once the Italian  
government failed, and the new republic si -- si -- Repubblica Sociale Italiana, become in  
formation and Hitler arrested the member of Grand Consiglio, those are the people that voted  
Mussolini out of power, arrested all of them. In between him was -- between them -- I'm trying  
to ration myself, so I better slow down. Between them was Galeazzo Cino, which was his --  
Mussolini's son-in-law, which was married to Edda Mussolini, ex-Italian ambassador in Berlin.  
Hitler hated his guts because every time come back from Berlin and told Mussolini, his father-in-  
law, "Dad, German don't know I speak fluent German. They think you are idiot. They think you  
are a patsy, they have no respect for you." And Hitler wrote that he reported that to Mussolini,  
because Mussolini told Hitler, you know, I -- you think I'm such a joke because I got  
information. So didn't take Nazi very long to put together that the only person present when they  
were making fun of him was Galeazzo Cino.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So when Italy capitulated they managed to arrest all the member. Mussolini got nothing, Galeazzo Ciano was shot in Verona with the rest of the member of the Grand Consiglio.

Q: Right, right.

A: And when Edda went to her father and told him listen dad, you [indecipherable] I don't want to ever know about you. Mussolini told Edda, my dear, I have nothing to say. And Edda didn't believe him. And when Mussolini was on the run, Edda could have saved him with partisans, but she didn't want to.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Because when they caught Mussolini on the run in Como, in Swiss border, the partisan got ahold of Edda, and says, who? She told him she will never forgive him and she never did, till she died.

Q: Cause she thought she had --

A: Yeah, now I -- I -- but a little interesting background because we are going to -- more -- more in depth than my own personal biography, that Mussolini could have been saved, see, when -- when Cardinal Montini -- was Cardinal of Milan at that time, later became Pope, he told Duce don't leave anywhere, the Americans be here in three days. His entourage, that was loaded with the gold and jewelry, they were -- they were in hurry to cross the border and go to Switzerland because they figured that's the only way they can take booty across. And they figure if you have a Mussolini with that, you have a sure way to pass the border. Well, they didn't, because at Zongo they caught him and all of them. But when -- Montini told him three times, Duce, don't leave. And I have a personal feeling if he would not run from the Americans, Il Duce would be alive till he died a natural death, because maybe -- America would never kill him. But we felt very safe until Mussolini -- the way it was.

Q: Right.

A: We ne -- we never worry a single second. [indecipherable] lots anti-Semitic law, he will -- he write the story what happen in Italy, and there were unpleasant things, especially for Italian Jews, they become sort of -- Italian Jew resented Mussolini more than us, because Italian Jews helped him get in power, so they become very resentful. We look at from different perspective. We look to our savior. And they look at him and feel we were wealthy and prosperous, he took it away from us.

Q: So [indecipherable]

A: So it was nothing, you know, cutting -- you know, it wasn't simple solution. It was a much more complicated than appear in the surface. But that's -- y -- that's -- about this period that's all I got to say, except if you got any questions.

Q: Where did you -- you had your Bar Mitzvah in ma -- Modena?

A: I had the Bar Mitzvah in -- in -- i-in Yugoslavia, in Sucha.

Q: In -- uh-huh.

A: That were part of the territory occupied by Italia, not annexed.

Q: Right.

A: The -- the first place that we run across, and was --

Q: Had you been studying for your Bar Mitzvah?

A: No, no, nothing, nothing.

Q: So -- so what was it like?

A: It -- it was kind of winged under -- like a underground Bar Mitzvah.

Q: Did you do --

A: You didn't have no Torah, you didn't read, you didn't make a speech. My dear mother and father, my uncle and all this the American kids do, it was nobody there. We were three poor Jews on the run. So th --

Q: So there was no rabbi?

A: No -- n-no, it was no rabbi. It was a cantor that we went to visit.

Q: Oh.

A: That he was in the hiding also.

Q: I see. So it wasn't a real thing.

A: No, no, but --

Q: Right.

A: -- the best we can d-do on the --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- circumstances. You know, if you will go get a bunch together Jews to go ahead, to try to perform a ceremony, it be just like going a open trap.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Especially where you were --

A: So it was not -- it was not feasible, it was not possible. Now if that was -- if I had the Bar Mitzvah in Ljubljana, yes, it c -- we could have pulled it off.

Q: You could have.

A: Oh yeah, plenty Jews in Ljubljana.

Q: In Modena were there other Jews?

A: In mo -- in province of Modena, yes.

Q: Right.

A: P-Province of Modena had approximately 250 Jewish families spread out. We -- some of them from Croatia --

Q: Right.

A: -- some of them Austrian. Lots of them I never had the chance to meet, but yes, we do, because i-Italian -- once i-i -- once Italian Jew government accepted Jews to come across, they didn't send them no more in deep south. Deep south, was only camping for a month there because Mussolini wanted to go ahead and show Hitler that he put the Jews in a difficult position, which was not difficult position. For a month it was in very unpleasant climate, but if Italian could survive there, I mean, Jews can survive also. But they put them there in the boot of Italy, clear in the bottom. But the rest of the Jews I would say nobody went souther than Naples. I mean in confinement by Italian government.

Q: Mm-hm, right, right.

A: I remember in -- when my Aunt original -- Ruza and Pawel, they were sent to Rovigo, province of Rovigo, which is close to Padowa, and we were sent to Modena. And then we decided, why should the sister be separated? L-Listen to this, is less conceivable. So we go ahead and write to Rome, and say listen, my name is so and so, we appreciate very much for your help, but my sister is in province Rovigo, is only hundred miles from here, why we cannot live in the same town? There no problem. S-Send the paper to Ruza, move over there to Modena with your sister. I mean, is incredible.

Q: Right.

A: Resume --

Q: Now, when you're in Modena, when it's -- it's 1942 --

A: '43 now. You talking armistice. Ru -- my Ruza arrived there in '42.

Q: No, it's -- '42, right.

A: Yeah.

Q: Before -- it's before the armistice --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- because you moved to --

A: Yeah. We were already in Modena about six, seven months --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- then we asked to join us and then we spend additional eight, nine months together.

Q: Right. Are you hearing what's going on in Europe? Are you hearing about death camps or anything?

A: Not only that we -- we heard Italian propaganda because Italian press and Italian radio had every hour bulletin. And one thing I like about Italian, Italian would never have a bulletin that says American troops advance and we lost the Sicily. Italian rado -- radio would say something, according to our established the plans of defense, we moved our defense troop on the other side of Straits of Messina. On the other side of -- that mean that Sicily is gone, if they moved the troops on the side of Straits Messina, if you know geography. In -- or if, like for example when they lost Bali, it says in Italian, [speaks Italian here]. We retire -- we retreated according previously established plan. Baloney. They were after -- Mark Clark was after them til Naples, going like wildfire, then it stop. From Naples on to Rome took him five months.

Q: Right.

A: Because you had the Monte Cassino that slowed the whole operation down.

Q: Mm-hm. That was a tough battle.

A: Yeah. And Anzio.



Q: Mm-hm.

A: Which is right next to Rome. And they were defending Rome. That's why -- and they were sitting in Florence with us listening to radio London three times a day in this apartment from this Fascist.

Q: But that's in Florence?

A: Yeah.

Q: So, in Modena, what do you know about what's going on?

A: We don't know nothing.

Q: You don't know --

A: Once we left the Modena, we don't -- we know only one thing, that Andreoli-Mitrani -- that as long as that money that we that we could go ahead, all -- we got him -- we give him a receipt, they give us this cash. And they know that my uncle was already in Switzerland, so that sh -- they not worry eventually if they catch us, that he might honor our promissory loss.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And on base of that they give us the money, but they didn't have n-nothing guaranteed, you know, there's -- there's all --

Q: Right.

A: -- a promise in the sky. But they were more interested helping us than worry for this money.

Q: And they give you 50,000 lira?

A: 50,000 lira that would be money today about 12,000 bucks.

Q: 10,000?

A: 12.

Q: 12.

A: 1200 bucks.

Q: 1200 bucks.

A: Yeah.

Q: That's a lot of money then.

A: Well, a ton of money. Can you imagine when I come to Kansas City, the minimum wage was 75 cents. And that was before, so it was much m -- I don't know what was -- and that was 1943, so minimum wage in America was probably 35 cents. So it was lots of money, but they had the money, and they were not worried. Now, while we are hiding in Florence, they brought us food lots of times.

Q: They did?

A: Yes. But the ham, the prosciutto, e fromaggio, and all kind of --

Q: And they come up to the back door all the time?

A: Always.

Q: Everybody comes up to th --

A: Oh, everybody. N-No, that -- the front door seal was never opened, because the guy got killed on Russian front. He never came back. The apartment --

Q: I s -- I see --

A: -- the guy [indecipherable] he never made it back.

Q: Right.

A: So I don't know exactly -- I --

Q: So how did you -- how did you keep so quiet? There are f -- there --

A: You had to be quiet fi -- we had to be very, very quiet, becau --

Q: So how did you use a toilet?

A: -- apartment -- huh?

Q: How did you even use a toilet?

A: Oh, we didn't worry about toilet because the apartment was in the middle of the building --

Q: Right.

A: -- and that was on the east side of the building, it's over the courtyard. So we didn't have any tenant next door to us on left or right.

Q: I see.

A: You understand? So th-that were not -- we could not talk loud, we could not -- oh, there's something, you talking about if I was spoiled. I know they could not yell at me, my parents. I mean [indecipherable]. I got away with murder. See, I went with the husband of the woman that I'm trying to make a right -- Righteous Gentile at Yad Vashem. That's a -- that was really managing this building.

Q: Who's this? Neila Fussi?

A: Neila Fussi, yes.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: With her boyfriend at that time, they were not married yet. I used to go to horse races. I used to go to opera house with all the Nazis, only they were sitting down --

Q: So you used to leave the apartment?

A: Oh yeah, with -- with her boyfriend. See, I spoke fluent Italian. And at that time was about 15 years old.

Q: Right.

A: And u-used to go to the horse races in the Hashima. I was l-like a regular Italian kid, til one time I got scare. We were at the horse races, and the ki -- like, it's a public park like, in Hashima,

and the -- and next to that park is a railroad tracks, but which are really actually hi-hidden by the cypress trees, so you could not see the track or the train. The German put a boxcar there, and waited for the sonderais to go ahead and pick a bunch of forced labor of solely Italian guys, to send them to Germany for labor camp because they were running short of labor force. But thin -- the --

Q: Right.

A: -- the military was 15 - 16 years old, German. So they came over there in the middle of the race, they stop the race -- first when they saw the horses, and they riding on the boxcar, and then they push everybody towards the exit to get the working force to go.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Now the -- the boyfriend of -- of my -- of Neila Fussi, when he saw that there was something going on, he says, Zdenko, you are young, so probably you will get away. I'm going to jump over the fence before everybody goes ahead to over there, and he disappeared. And he says I'm sure they will leave you alone. But I was not sure because I was pretty good size boy. But I saw the exit next to me, a woman, when she was -- while the German was talking to her, and she went to the German off the [indecipherable] and the guy just kick her in her ass and pushed her out of the line. So when my turn come up, I turn to the German, he ask me what's your name, blah, blah, I say eh-eh-eh, he let me go.

Q: So you were acting as if you were --

A: If I -- I would never think of it if I didn't see the woman who -- at the other exit. And -- and that's -- after that I never left the apartment til liberation. Tha -- so -- so scared.

Q: And you're just so scared.

A: Very close call. Not as a Jew. As Italian labor force.

Q: Italian, yeah.

A: Because I was at that time already Luigi Bianchi.

Q: You're carrying those papers, yes.

A: Yeah, yeah, sure.

Q: Was -- was your mother and father able to leave, or they stayed in the apartment?

A: They never left the apartment.

Q: They --

A: Only my Aunt Ruza will leave the apartment.

Q: To get food.

A: Yeah, and not even Ruza husband went out. She knows all those guys from black market, they were bi -- they were butchering animal at home, and bringing, they would ask it -- Mrs. Rose, what you wanted to bring us next week? She say give me two kilo of stew meat, and then give me some meat that I can use for baking and whatever they wanted, I'll need a f-five pounds of potato. And the guy would go ahead bring it -- deliver a supply like for a whole week. But not to house. We -- that we didn't want to do or show anybody. It was always a meeting place where the guy had the stuff and other people came. This he trusted, because he was afraid the authority will know that selling on black market without the points [indecipherable] you know.

Q: Right, right.

A: So -- and we were never -- I -- this is -- this shows you the blessing, the -- during the whole war, was never hungry a single day.

Q: I was going to ask you. Never hungry.

A: Never hungry. Not only I was not hungry, for most of it I ate like a king. My mother were making a strudel and she was making all kind of cake, and she was making kochen, and she wa -

- you -- you name it. And we were making goulash and the paprikash and the -- a-a-and the now curl and all -- all the home cooking because we had -- we could do -- we had the flowers, we had the meet, we had the -- we had lots of veal and we had lots of pork also. One thing we didn't have it, lots of fish, except river fish. Lots of catfish.

Q: A lot of catfish?

A: Yeah, it was come from Po River, which was not too far.

Q: Right. Did you miss not being in Croatia, or --

A: I never missed Croatia to this day. When I go back home, and my friends which are, by the way, very good to me when I come in, they very [indecipherable] or -- oriented, like a big Croat, not anti-Semitic, but in spite being my friend, and really th-they are good friends. To give you idea, I -- I -- Zagreb from Milan is about 280 miles, and my friend didn't think a single second, I tell him my connection flight to Zagreb, I have to go to Milan catch flight. It was a very bad connection with the train, you have to change two trains, you have to go two o'clock in the morning. He says, what's your problem? He drove me from his apartment in Zagreb to the airport in Milan. Very few people do favors like this. Never thought of a single second, said what's the big deal? I'll drive you to the airport. And he did. And many other reasons. Whenever I come I stay in his house, and you have this [indecipherable] atmosphere.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: His wife cook. Now, his wife -- his father, or my friend doctor, used to be sh -- town's cobbler, not Jewish. He was making custom made shoes for farmers and for the big market once a month, he had a excess supply. Woman used to come buy the shoes, they were high shoes with laces, wi -- were selling, and he was quite well to do. And no bank in Zabno. So for any business dealing with -- need the extra money -- my father, like you would need 50,000 diner, or -- or --

or 100,000 diner, or -- or -- or -- or his neighbor, who was a shoemaker have to pay for leather, finish leather and sole leather --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- and he needed a cash on the hand. [indecipherable] close to my father, and say look, I needed 35,000 diner, and my father with -- had no receipt, no nothing, [indecipherable] and went to [indecipherable] for years. He just went ahead, cause all -- if he had the cash, he give it to you. Nobody would dream [indecipherable] give you money. And we went til the -- til we had to go, that -- that we had to leave. And -- and we were always very friends and -- when we were growing up. The doctor is about two years older than me, so of course, he was like a leader of this little group in -- in Zabno. We were all big soccer fans and playing soccer and so on. And whenever we go, when I return home, it's so sad, and it's so funny, and so blessing, that we go to the old stomping ground that we grew up and he drives me around and say remember what we did here, remember what kind of -- we pul -- we -- you reminiscing what you youth, and --

Q: Right.

A: -- and his eyesight is going bad right now, and very bad, he used to be general surgery. He -- he graduate for Heidelberg in Germany, and didn't come back to Yugoslavia til the -- Tito made him. Tito told him, I extended your visa so many times. Now -- or you come back to Yugoslavia, or I'm not going -- take away your citizenship, then you cannot come at all. Being that you have a family, come back. Why do you think -- they show you how Communist government in itself is stupid, instead of using this expre -- expert surgeon in the hospital in Zagreb, they put him behind the desk.

Q: Mm-hm. So -- so why wouldn't you have missed all of this when you were in Italy? Is it because you --

A: Well --

Q: -- I asked you whether you missed it, because you're --

A: -- I didn't miss it because all I remember is the -- my childhood what I have. And I was growing. I outgrew my child day -- I was become in Italy a young -- my puberty reached me. I discovered girls. And in Italy you had all kind of girls. It was completely different [indecipherable]. I come from a little nothing town in Croatia, Sv. Ivan Zabno, end up living in Rome. I'm going from Modena to Florence and now in Rome. Now just imagine -- now this is one of the most sophisticate city in Europe. Is nothing that was not available in Rome, especially for us that we have a -- under umbrella of American occupation. I mean, we took American phony I.D.s, and we went to the streetcar, and the guys that ticket, you schlop in the -- the guy didn't know what the hell I have. I di -- refugee camp I.D. cards. I didn't have an I.D.. I used to ride on the train with the refugee I.D. card, because that was a-after one -- years. Is very difficult for somebody who didn't live in this period to -- the concept what was happen. Once Italian government normalize and took over, this picnic was over. But the life in Cinecitta didn't change for next three, four years. You know, the refugees were going back and forth.

Q: Then let me ask you something. You -- your -- your parents, in some ways, lose much more than you do.

A: Yes.

Q: By leaving Croatia.

A: Yes.

Q: Are they depressed by th -- I mean, do you notice that they --

A: Okay, okay, when --

Q: -- that -- that they're different than you are?



A: Okay, n-now let's go to Cinecitta liberation, okay?

Q: Well I'm sort of -- I'm interested both in the -- in -- cause Cinecitta already, everybody knows you're safe, now you don't know what's happened to your family yet.

A: Corre -- we -- we -- when the war -- the minute war was over --

Q: Okay.

A: -- we know who was survive, who didn't survive. We know the uncle in Wisplete married to Genta was gone. The minute we hit Rome. We didn't know it yet in Florence, okay? But in Rome, in matter of few days, we know who survived the war. What we didn't know, if we can go ahead and return home, or when, because of Communist regime in -- in -- in croa -- in Yugoslavia.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: The people took everything over. So really, they still didn't have nothing. First the Nazi took over, now the commie take it over. Now, you want me to take off from this point? My father realized from the minute that we have to run, already in 1941 that it's very unlikely we going to see anything for a long time, maybe never. So he made the peace of mind. He were depressed, yes, he know he had to start again, but the other hand, when my father was fighting for Austro [indecipherable] empire, he had his own business, which he lost it, because when Austria lost the war, he was on the other side of the border, he did come out barehanded. That's why he had to work again. He was in own -- own business. So that was second time he lost everything. So he -- that was like a repetition of the history. Each war costed them everything they accomplished. At that time Dad was not young any more, he was already 45 - 50 years old. So the -- what -- beyond -- my father was very -- he always believe in real estate, so he went -- i-it didn't upset him very much. It upset my mother much more than upset my father. Now, w-while we in

Cinecitta, the yugo -- Tito send his emissary to the camp to make a speech to all the Yugoslav refugees that it's time to returning home. A-And they invited all to a hall, and they went to look for everybody who come from Yugoslavia, and told them the war is over, now you got a free country, it's time to come home.

Q: Right.

A: No -- th -- from my father went to the guy who was a colonel with a big, red star, and the -- all this red leather as I remember like today, and he told him, "Druze, Kamarade Bergl, it is your duty to return home." And my father tell him, "Druze, Kamarade, what you going to give me back?" He said, "Don't worry." He said, "You come back, you will work." He said, "Druze, I didn't ask you if I will work. I ask you what will you give me back." "Everybody got the same thing." "I didn't ask you what everybody got. Will you give me my property back?" "Don't worry, you will work in your property." "Again you avoiding my answer." He says, "Don't worry, we going to come pick you up next week, you all go back home, you'll be very happy." Well my father told him screw it, I'm not going to go ahead and deal with this stuff. And when they come next week to pick up people who are willing to go, my father didn't show up.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So he send his goons with the red star, couple of soldier that he had on the truck, to look for my dad. So it's -- my dad come over there, and he tell him, "Why come you're not ready to go?" He says, "Well, first of all -- first of all, Nazis took everything from me, now you took everything from me. To go back to what? That you employ me in my own factory? I -- I got a better future, I -- I'm not going to do that." And he says, we come -- the Commie ca -- tell him, "Comrade Bergl, you see this star? You see decoration?" Say, "I fought for your freedom." And my father say to him, "Mr. Colonel, I got to tell you something. When I fought for your freedom

as Austro-Hungarian soldier, you were not even a vision in your father's eye. So don't tell me what will fight for freedom." I said oh my God, we'll never go back home. But you know, if you go back to Yugoslavia, they will arrest you.

Q: Right.

A: That was the end of any possibility us returning.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: That when we apply for immigration to America.

Q: Uh-huh. We need to stop the tape.

End of Tape Four

Beginning Tape Five

Q: When this comrade guy from Croatia --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- is trying to convince your father to go back, and he refuses to go back --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- what year are we talking about now? Is this --

A: I can't tell you exactly, we come in the camp in 1945, this happened about end of 1946, beginning of '47, but I don't know exactly. We left the camp in '47 --

Q: Right.

A: -- but as we -- chronologically you advance, I will bring it to this point, but I think this -- this happened shortly before we left the camp, because at this point we realize that we are not going back home.

Q: Right, right.

A: And we saw the ca -- Cinecitta was not solution, and I was now behind i-in my schooling.

Q: I -- I was going to ask you about that.

A: Okay, now can -- can we go back --

Q: I -- I --

A: The first year that I arrive in camp --

Q: Mm.

A: -- that was the August of 1944. By December of 1940 minister Italian of education pass a special ruling with all the refugees who couldn't be going to school, or were forbidden going to school, they can make exam no matter what level they finish when the war started, three years at

the time. Then my father hire some tutoring for Italian and some other subject, chemistry. But math, languages, history, geography, Ruza husband tutor me for my exam.

Q: Hm, Pawel?

A: Yeah. He's -- he's tutor me, a f -- and Winkler, the friend that's still in Kansas City.

Q: Right.

A: He tutor us both for these subjects. And -- and the exam was to be taken not in Rome, but in Castel Gandolfo, this is some -- a residential [indecipherable]

Q: Right.

A: Cinecitta was much closer to Castel Gandolfo than downtown Rome. So when the man -- when ministry assign us for this exam, they send us to Castel Gandolfo, and there where I took my three years of my junior high, and then six months later I took what it takes to go f -- three additional years.

Q: And you passed all those.

A: Yeah, it was very tough, it was very iffy because it was lots of cramming to do, and when you c -- study so intensely for a short period of time -- and oh, forgot most important part, Ruza husband tutor me in Latin, mandatory in Italy. Latin, oh, you had to take it first three years of junior high you had to -- you had so much Latin you think you want to be a priest or a pharmacist. Because in Italy, in Europe, til 20 years ago, every prescription was in Latin.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: It's not like here.

Q: You had never studied Latin before.

A: Never, never, so Ruza probably -- he -- he was such a fantastic innovator, that to realize that these young guys, to -- to go [speaks Latin here], you know, it's a verb. That's very hard to cram

all that you need. So he improvise kind of off color stories in Latin that he made us translate in Italian because he know that will sink in. Like he would say the -- I cannot tell you on camera, but it was very funny story. Like, he gallo -- this is not off-color by the way, he [speaks Latin here]. Here is the rooster sitting on a tree and saying cuckoo-re-koo. But then he come -- that's how we started, then to get us more interested, he come to more color and it worked, because we come intrigued, you know, what the hell it means, and -- and we managed to squeeze in -- in my examina -- then when we left the camp in 1947, after three years of Cinecitta, and my father said look, now you have to decide to do, and where you want to go to school. So my father left, he made a couple of trips to northern Italy, to figure out where we want to stay and live in Italy, and he come up with Lake Como. He said was not the big city like Milano, is not the big cit -- Rome. The life [indecipherable] is happy go lucky, beautiful surroundings, sweet [indecipherable] next door. So we went over there, and I enrolled in architectural college [indecipherable] in Como. And that's when I started studying, and I went -- I was short one year when our paper come because I was trying to catch as much extra credit as I could, because I know sooner or later you come for America. But I didn't manage to do them all, because I was short, I think, about four or five hour of credit. And when we ask postponement for one year, American embassy told us we can postpone, but you go in the bottom of the list.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And my father would not go to bottom of the list. And I was looking forward to go to the bottom of the list. I was not in hurry to go to America. A matter of fact, I told my father, you know, you -- I'm not going to States. And my father said, "You know, I want to tell you something. First of all, I want you to know you're in Italy. In Italy, til 21, I'm running the show. If I have to go to Italian police to put you on the boat in Naples, I will do it. So don't make a

mistake.” And I know he would have done it. So I finally give in, and -- and then we went to the Camp Obanioli when --

Q: Why didn't you want to leave?

A: Because this concept of a Euforia, and a l-land of milk of honey, it was baloney. I know that America established with the hard work. It was not such a thing as free lunch. I was smart enough, I was not -- I didn't have a mental delusion. I was looking for what it is. Here I was -- my father was working his rear end to go ahead and send me to school, my only preoccupation was to make a decent grade, which I tried to do a little bit by studying, but a lot by cheating. And I become a expert -- if I would study so hard as I study how to cheat to pass a test, I'd be a genius. Innovation that you -- is unbelievable. I don't know if that interested you, but I want to tell you, the -- my math -- can I imagine I'm studying architectural engineering, I'm trying to cheat on math. I mean to tell you, it's mind boggling. But my professor of math, he liked me a lot. He took such a personal interest in me, that if I would ditch classes, he would take a Como paper and see what movie I'd be hiding, and actually after classes, he would come in the movie, dig me out and give me a big speech, aren't you ashamed, your father is working on the bicycle selling the soap from one little town to the other so you can go to the school, and -- and he flunked me. And he tutor me the whole summer for free. You cannot be engineer if you don't know the math. Til the last test. Now, we already know we have to leave for America, so we figure out I'm going to get at least the paper in order so I can continue in the States to get my degree. And I know I can never do it, because I know it would be a very difficult test. So the friend of mine who was really [indecipherable] in math, and we had at the same time a German test, so he was Italian guy who di -- his father had a visual optical audio store. So I told you what -- tell you what I do. You help me to get me two hearing aids, and I will help you with the

German test. So he brought me bunch of wire, I sit in the last row and I run a wire through my sleeve, through the steam pipe down in the basement, and I had a little mike in my hand, and my fa -- my friend down in the boiler room. So as soon as he wrote the -- our test on the blackboard, I wrote it -- you know, I -- I -- whispered to my friend down in the boiler room, it took him exactly 10 minutes to develop the test. And I was so delighted that I copied it, now is a problem to get out of this gizmo that I got. So I took a knife, I cut the wire -- because I was wired clear down to the basement, and once you go ahead and -- and I was so excited that I send my -- instead of hanging to the paper and breaking my head, blah, blah, blah, I turn it to him. And then my pr -- my fres -- my professor, and he looked at me, he says, "Zdenko, are you sure you're done?" I said, "Yeah I'm done." He se -- he let me go. Rest of them took additional hours. Now ca -- we come back to the class and he says, "You know, guys, I'm embarrassed. You took one hour, two hours, here Mr. Bergl, 45 minutes. Now Mr. Bergl is a smart guy, he's going to come to the blackboard and show us how he done it." That's the end of the show. Flunked me. There were made a -- make up exam in September, and one month later, was November we were on the way for America. But he -- he helped me enough to pass the test. Now fast forward 25 years later, I'm coming to Como. I invite my professor for lunch with my father and my mother. Meet my wife. And my professor tell me, he says, "Zdenko, I'm teaching there for 45 years, I know the kids cheat. Please, how did you do it?" And then I told him.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: 25 years later he waited to tell him how I cheated. Now I come to the States, I couldn't start right away back to the school because I couldn't speak English, not one word. I enroll in the engli -- English classes through the Jewish social services, and then the army came, and my both -- both folks got sick, my mother and father, and they got the co -- help through the Red Cross,



with the commitment that when I come up from service we will pay it back. So when I come back, forget about the school, I had to go work because I had about -- in 1943, I had the 5,000 dollar worth of debt.

Q: Oh my.

A: So I had to go back to work, and I -- I had to choose a profession, because I didn't want to go have to work some manual labor or something. So somebody suggests why don't you go in some high technical field that is growing, heating and cooling. And then I went, join the labor union, and went on apprenticeship program, and I made a good living doing this, was very happy with it. And I never turn back to --

Q: The school?

A: -- the school because it took me too long -- now I was already 26 years old, so I wasn't about to go he -- back --

Q: But I suppose in some ways we're all lucky that you didn't go back to school with all your cheating.

A: Well, to me -- to -- to -- the fact it is that I was clever enough that I realized that you want to become a good -- you had to have a -- be good with the math.

Q: Right.

A: And I realized that I will never be good in math. I will do -- be good in lots of things, but math is not my thing. So I said why should I be a bad architect?

Q: Right, right.

A: You know, because there's no future in it. But they should give you one funny thing -- in the same school that I went in Como, I met lots of guys til the day that I had to depart for America. Eight months ago I'm reading on my internet Como paper every night. So somebody's writing

something about American who went to Como, is [indecipherable] and some of them like it. And I write to the Como -- to -- to -- to the newspaper, I says, you know, I was raised in Como, I went to the school in Como, and to me to come to Europe and not to visit Como are like going to a candy store and don't buy candy. And I signed my name. Next day I get a phone call from a guy who graduate from the thing, become a very famous architect in Como. He told me, "Zdenko, you were in school with me." And I was supposed to meet him this year, I was supposed to be matter of fact, this month in Italy. It didn't work out because my wife caught pneumonia this winter.

Q: Yeah.

A: So we couldn't go. But the guy -- I didn't hear from him from 1949.

Q: Amazing, isn't it?

A: And -- and he read my name, he recognized right away --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- he say, you know who I am, says yes. He said, my name is Berlusconi, and -- and I have my own company, my son is working with me. He said he's also graduate techni [indecipherable] school, and I have a little piccolo azienda. It's like a small enterprise that we are running, me and my son. So it's -- it's funny.

Q: That's a great story, hopefully you'll see him.

A: Ju -- yeah. So it just show you --

Q: Tell me about your meeting with Evelyn in Cinecitta.

A: Cinecitta.

Q: Cinecitta.

A: Cinecitta.

Q: Cinecitta.

A: Well, every -- it was a little group [indecipherable] Jewish yentas. Now you know what's a yenta. She's going to probably come and ask me to spell yenta. That was my mother, Winkler's mother, Evie's mother, and all that, that in front of the building they were living is a little park with the benches. So all those ladies in their leisure time, under these pine trees, they were observing the traffic, who is coming, who is coming, who is waiting, who -- who is cheating on who. They were like a executive committee. And Evie, of course was always -- her mother keep a very close eye on her, where she is going. And I was hanging with Evie's brother, with this Winkler and all of them. And my only job in Cinecitta is make to Evie miserable. And we -- like we went to a beach, and Evie's laying on the beach with clothes on. I went to kiss her, she went ballistic. And I didn't kiss her in any romantic way, I just know that she's going to be pissed, and it worked. And you know, as long as we were in Cinecitta, I absolutely was romantic. Only later when Evie left for America, after I was already going to school in Como, and I never thought that we are going to make a connection again. It happened purely accidentally because when we arrive in New York, week before Thanksgiving, or few days before, of 1949, Evie said that -- I don't know how she tell the story how we met. The fact it is the "New York Times," ran a picture of my family in the front page, like an [indecipherable] with the valise, cardboard valise, the refugee for Naples, because most of refugee coming to New York were from Bremenhaven. We were from Naples. So they have us there, it just purely accidental. And Evie's mother saw the picture, and then she start calling Jewish services, and we didn't continue for Kansas City because my Uncle Radon was living already in New York. So we were his houseguests for two weeks. And as soon as she find out that we are living in Manhattan, Heinz, Evie's brother come to pick us up and the first Thanksgiving in America, we passed it with Evie and his family. And

then I went to the army. Now, when I went to the army, and I didn't keep in touch with them -- I visited them occasionally, New York with her brother, but nothing, nothing, nothing to do with Evie. When I was drafted, like year and half later, and I'm in Fort Lee, Virginia, in the desert training, every weekend we go -- jumped in the car -- matter of fact, you know, in army post you have this Saturday morning parade, and I figure a way how to beat this parade. Was a Brooklyn Jewish kid, his name was Marda from Brooklyn, he had the car. So Marda we go to Brooklyn, I get a ride, he says, you get a ride if you go to the first sergeant and you get a pass for me. And I come very good with the first sergeant, he -- he -- his name was Ara Bernasconi. Italian guy. So I was kind of -- got thick with him, and I didn't have no problem getting passes. Problem it was get out of the parade Saturday morning so you could not leave til noon. And if you leave Saturday noon for New York, Saturday's gone. So I started a limp -- you know, during the -- I don't know if you're familiar with the parade, it's so funny. When you go in front of the review stand and the guy say, eyes right, so everybody start eyes right, and you do too, I start limping. So I broke the whole cadence, can you imagine? All the guys going the step, I start limping. So the viewing general told the camp commander, so he said, "That's kid is sick, why you make him march?" So he talked to my first sergeant. He said, "Okay, sir, I will fix it up, I'm not going to let him march no more." I was out. You know?

Q: So you -- so you didn't?

A: Ah, yeah. And -- and I took Martin with me. So he had the car and we went every Saturday, already seven o'clock we were on the way to New York, through the New Jersey turnpike, wump -- you didn't have all the roads you have now, and it was ea -- we had to go through downtown Washington.

Q: Right.

A: But was no problem at that time to get it.

Q: So were you spending time with Heinz and then s --

A: Oh, straight to -- I was more time at Evie's house than mine. Then I discover, hey this girl is not bad, you know? And maybe while I had a girlfriend that I left in Italy, not that I was romantically involved. I was hanging out with her brother, and her mother was figure it out that we would be a good match. And where I was stationed -- well, I'm trying to fast forward that, I don't want to. I don't want to get ahead myself. Evie was not interested in me, I was more interested in Evie at this point. She had -- a matter of fact had a boyfriend [indecipherable]. And then I had to leave. I didn't -- they send me oversea.

Q: Right.

A: And in that period that I was oversea, I didn't have no contact with Evie, I didn't --

Q: You didn't write to her?

A: No, no. I -- very little contact with her brother, but -- and my friend Winkler was already in the States living in Kansas City. And still I didn't come back. And soon as I come back I went -- there was Christmas 1943, her brother invited me for a New Year's Eve party.

Q: You mean '53.

A: '53, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: So I went from -- from Kansas City for New Year's Eve party, and I discover a even more prettier Evie. And I start giving her hard time, and try to courting, you know, la -- was a very hard thing going because she was not interested in me, I think she was more interest give me a hard time. But her mom was interested in me, and her brother was delighted. And then finally went back to Kansas City, and I said, look, it's a very long distance relationship. So I start flying

every two weeks, TWA from Kansas City to New York. That time you had to fly by the way of Chicago, and they had the constellation propeller plane.

Q: Yeah, right.

A: So it took you six hours. And then I -- I rushed from work, I arrived in New York International, her brother pick me up. She is watching Brooklyn Dodgers, doesn't even say hello. She ignored [indecipherable] not only she didn't pick me up. I said what the hell I'm doing here? And she -- I talk to [indecipherable] Carl Furillo and Roy Campanella, I -- I remember a few of those names from the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Q: Right.

A: She was such a baseball fan. Right now she couldn't care less, but that time she was a big fan [indecipherable]. But I was doing it on every two week basis, and that become very expensive. I was in the hock in a matter of six months to TWA something like 3500 bucks. 1953.

Q: And your intention was to see her --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and her intention was to --

A: Her intention to avoid me. And I wou -- then finally when she upse -- accepted to marry me, I said we will do it down the line like 12 months, another year or some [indecipherable] two years. And I told her, you know, that will not work. You can stretch it as long as you want, but I cannot fly [indecipherable] to New York. And when she be -- we fast forward what that we got married the following Fourth of July. And that's year -- that was the end of the picnic for Evie, then she got stuck.

Q: So did you just wear her down?

A: I think I did to a certain point wear her down, yes. But you know what the funny thing is the -  
- when I was in Japan, and I was thinking of her because when I was [indecipherable] in  
Virginia, she was looking pretty good to me. At a certain point I write to her and say, you know,  
I would like to have with you a little more meaningful relationship. And if you keep putting off,  
you don't have to -- I don't care. I got a different girlfriend in Italy. [indecipherable]

Q: Right.

A: What do you think was her a-answer?

Q: Go ahead, marry her.

A: That's what she said. The funny part it is that we were married already three, four years, and I  
have the picture of Italian girl in a kimono that I send her from Tokyo. And I have it in a frame  
behind Evie picture, Evie is in the front. And she is living with me now already three years.

Q: And she doesn't [indecipherable]

A: And she doesn't know the gir -- til one day she was cleaning and dusting the picture. When  
she found that picture behind hers, sh -- oh, that was -- I think that was the biggest fight I had  
with her since our marriage. Really, really upset.

Q: Did you remember that that picture was there?

A: No, completely forgot.

Q: You forgot?

A: Completely forgot. Completely. But that's one of the -- you know, one th -- one of the  
episode.

Q: Right.

A: But the friendship that we develop in this group, like Winkler that I mention several time, and his brother-in-law that was running the kitchen, we become such a tight group that it continue. Because Winkler start working for Joint in Rome.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And we become like Elkia Eliskovich, which was general manager of Joint for Rome in Italy, which was picked up by the office in Paris, which was running whole refugee thing in Europe. She liked Winkler, and she put him under her wing. She didn't know how young was the Winkler, but after awhile -- now I'm -- I'm already in Como -- and she said, "You know, Henry, I'm go o -- I need to open office in Milan. How would you like to run my office in Milan?" And Winkler figure I'm in Como, you got a deal. And within two months Winkler and the whole family was in Como with us. And he was commuting every day to Milan.

Q: Right.

A: And he is the guy who put us, you know, to go -- when the all papers come, were supposed to come, he's -- I wanted to go the same place where he goes. So Winkler was -- drew the [indecipherable] Kansas City. And we couldn't switch it, so we -- we both agreed to Kansas City and then Winkler father got sick, he couldn't leave with us at the same time. And then I brought him back. I send him papers and the money to come to America in 1952, before I went to the army.

Q: Before you went to the army, yeah. When -- when you discovered after the war, the extent of the brutality and the murder in Europe, was that -- that must have been shocking to you.

A: Yes. We know that was lots of people dying, but th-the horror of the way those people were deported, the -- wi -- nobody knew exactly what was going [indecipherable] war but not



completely going. The thing only come out when I start meeting lots of those people who survived the camps, and their story, more than the press.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Even told the "Stars and Stripes," -- that was an army newspaper, they didn't co -- didn't hide it, they really brought the atrocity the way they were. And then yes, we were all surprised, because we couldn't believe such inhuman -- inhumanity is possible. We didn't know what happened in Jasenovac.

Q: Right, right.

A: -- til after the war. We know that people got killed, but the way, I mean, not-- Croatia Nazi were worse than the German Nazis. I mean, they were absolutely inhumanely vicious. Dying every -- you know, you are dead, you're dead, but those guys what they done, the way they killed the people is absolutely horrendous what they done.

Q: Yeah. And when it -- when you thought about that, there you were living, it sounds like, a very privileged, protected life --

A: No question about it.

Q: -- in Italy.

A: No question.

Q: And here -- if you had se --

A: You -- the -- it cou -- would -- would boggle our mind that something possible like this to happen. Even Italians -- even Italian Fascists -- Fascists, hard core Fascists couldn't believe it.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: If you were not in it, you know, when German -- I believe that the German, as overall, didn't know what was going in camp, to the extent that it happened. They know they were killing Jews.

And they know there were camps there, even they said they didn't know. But nobody can imagine what is happening.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Nobody, because they ca -- they the -- at least -- at least [indecipherable] there were Jews in charge of extermination of Jews. This is special group of people.

Q: Do you consider yourself a survivor?

A: I -- I -- I think -- I don't [indecipherable] concept to put it. Yes, I'm definitely a survivor, privileged survivor.

Q: Mm.

A: No question about it. When I hear what happened to other people -- we had it so many close calls it was really mind-boggling how come we didn't fall in the trappies of this phone call -- i -- of this close call that we had. But the way I lived, the way we survived, the privileges we had. The shower, warm water, food. I mean, come on --

Q: Right.

A: -- I mean, when I hear about the -- Evie in the caves, just few miles down the road from me, where I was leading relatively good, dangerous but good and safe -- not safe, comfortable life, then you know, it's terrible thing what she went through it as a young kid.

Q: Right.

A: I'm never -- you know, I was never to exposed it. Not -- you know, it's a different thing eating and eating good. And we were eating good. I mean, you know --

Q: You weren't just surviving.

A: No, we were not just surviving, by all means. So -- and I become such a [indecipherable] Italian, on a general thing, because you got a good people, a bad people in any group. But the

Italian always -- i-in the majority, as a people, they're unbelievable people. Italians jealous, they envious people. Like if you were very wealthy in Italy, they could be jealous about your wealth.

You don't have nothing --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- they will give you the shirts off their back. Now you will find occasionally somebody, Italians are always worrying, they're always hoarding because they never think is enough. What happened to Evie, when those farmer, they would like to give her food, but they figure maybe tomorrow they will need it, because they are not sure.

Q: Right.

A: Not that they want to see her hungry, but that's how some Italian -- sometimes the Italians work. Is not always even handed.

Q: Right. We need to change the tape.

End of Tape Five

Beginning Tape Six

Q: I wanted to ask you about your parents. Did they get sick right when you went to Korea, or is this before?

A: That the only time that my father -- oh e -- oh, excuse me, you're talking about sick.

Q: Yes.

A: My father got sick while I was in Korea.

Q: And they both got sick at the same time?

A: Yeah, m-my mother had the acute pancreitis and my father heart attack.

Q: Really?

A: And my mother was fighting this cute -- acute pancreitis til the day she died. A matter of fact, I remember that a physician come and told us -- I almost knocked him right on his tutu -- tell me -- she goes tell my father -- h-he did, he said, "You know, she got maybe two, three days left." She lived til she was 96.

Q: Ninet -- 96 years old, she was --

A: Yeah. And I say, how can you tell the heart patient --

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: You see, what happened that the regular family doctor was not available. He was on a vacation. He was the guy who operate on her, her surgeon [indecipherable]. So the only one available in Menora Hospital in Kansas City to see her, was him. But you figure he's a surgeon, he should know enough about the pancreas, blah, blah. So he told her what a critical thing he did. And she use pancreatinis medicine on a regular basis, she didn't have no problem with it. So that's the period, yeah, they happen -- they were sick while I was in the army --

Q: Right.

A: -- and the -- now don't forget, once I got United States army, Joint -- Jewish welfare was through giving you support. They were obliged for five years, but once the army took over, then it's the Red Cross duty.

Q: Really?

A: The Red -- yeah, Red Cross is a back-up for American service, for all the branches of service. So Jewish welfare didn't do nothing to -- with them no more. Then the Red Cross come in there.

Q: And they helped your parents?

A: Yeah. They di -- supported them til I didn -- come home. But they told me ahead that they was going to expect to me at one point --

Q: To pay it back.

A: -- to go pay it back. They don't make any timetable, but said, you know, they helping other people, whatever you give us back is going to help somebody out tomorrow. And we felt morally obligated to return this money.

Q: Right, sure.

A: And I figure longer I wait, harder it is going to be, so I figure I'm going to get a good job. And I -- that -- so I picked up --

Q: And that's when you went to --

A: -- yeah, go in the trade, and I paid it off quite -- relatively quite fast, I paid him back within three years.

Q: Wow. And your father, did he maintain his health after that first heart attack?

A: My father lived in -- he lived, God bless him, he had a two heart attack, he had a cancer surgery and -- a-and after the surgery, he live additional 12 years.

Q: Hm. And your mother lived much longer.

A: My mother, yeah.

Q: So you were all living together?

A: We were living -- we -- I never left my p -- when -- when -- when the Nazi come to Zabno, my aunt married to the doctor told my family, listen, I'm protected, I'm not worry. Leave Zdenko with me. I would never left my parents for one single second. And I never said -- even through all the time I was married, that my parents live with me. I always give them the courage, the honor, to say I'm living with them.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And I give my credit to my wife. It is not easy to go ahead and live with mother-in-law as many years she does. But my wife was very smart. For loss of the privacy, she ha -- got a butler and a cook. We left for the morning -- in the morning, we didn't make the bed, we didn't have to worry what is for supper. We know we are cu -- we went in a gourmet restaurant every day til they were able to cook and take care of us. We didn't shop for grocery. My father does the -- everything. If he had any wishes, if I would say listen, Mother, make me Punschtorte -- you know what's a Punschtorte?

Q: No.

A: That's a brandy cake that I love --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- also Viennese. Or make me Sacher torte, or Dobish torte, or --

Q: So you do --

A: Pish -- n-not only -- or Cremeschnitten, which are Napoleon. I mean, she was famous for it. That's how she got job in the American. And she was still -- she cooked -- she died 96, but she was still active in kitchen at 92.

Q: No kidding?

A: Yeah. So that was a payback for loss of the privacy.

Q: Right.

A: Thank God our house was big enough. So, you were -- enough space.

Q: Right.

A: But why my -- my wife is so brilliant that she made a mental rule, never be in kitchen together with my mother.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And when my mother was not capable no more to cook in, my wife took over cooking. She was sitting in her Lazy Boy chair and observing in the kitchen, every move, to the point that Evie got so upset that she closed the door, because her eyes were following every step she went.

Q: Right.

A: And then we had a -- as other -- as a pay -- payoff for me not going to live in New York, that her parents came at least twice a year. And I loved to have them, because when I -- those two cooks together, what I would tell my mother I would like to have a germtike cooking. You know what a germtike?

Q: Mm-mm.

A: That's a -- germ is a yeast.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I like a yeast sweet, made with yeast.

Q: Yeah.

A: And my mom -- my mother-in-law had a -- when she made something with chocolate, you know you are a chocolate eater. My mother would put [indecipherable] in chocolate --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- in yeast. My mother -- when you eat, it was dripping on you. So I made them compete against each other, I was sitting back there and laughing. Was fantastic.

Q: But that's an unusual set-up that you --

A: Very unusual set-up, and it worked. I used to fight with my mother-in-law that you would not believe it, because my mother-in-law was a very strong willed person. But she was not grudge holding person. I could have a big screaming match and [indecipherable] said, "Ma, I'm ready to go out, you ready?" In five minutes she's in the car with me. She loved to go in the car. Five minutes, all the argument, forget it.

Q: Right.

A: And I loved her. She was really a remarkable woman. I -- I really loved her [indecipherable]. And she would bring, you know, my nephews, with her --

Q: Yes.

A: -- when we could not afford yet for them to fly, they would come with the Greyhound bus with two kids. It's a long schlep. It is a long, believe me, but she would faithfully they would come to Kansas City to visit. I mean, the kids loved it, and I loved to have them, it was really -- it was very interesting arrangement, you know.

Q: Right, right.

A: Yeah.

Q: When did you retire?

A: I retired about 12 years ago. But the -- to the -- you want me to tell you about the story about my car.

Q: Yeah, I will, but wait a second.



A: Okay.

Q: Before --

A: Okay.

Q: When -- have you -- did you at one point decide that you would talk to kids about the Holocaust or not?

A: To -- to my nephews, you mean?

Q: Well, either to your nephews, or to schoolchildren?

A: No, I -- I never discussed the Holocaust with them, and I'll tell you exactly why. We had so many volunteer Polish that liked to talk about Holocaust, and we -- and I got some of friends which are Hungarians, and I know that the Hungarian Jews know very little about Holocaust. Because when most of Jews who were dead, Hungarian were still in Budapest til 1945. So they come on too late. It is true they paid a dear price, because Hitler had to get rid of them very fast. Now, the other Jews, if they young and strong, they had a chance to work in the camp, or some labor. But Hungarian Jews, he was trying to kill them fast as he can because Hitler was running out of time. But when those Hungarian Jews who didn't go to the camp was pick up by the Holocaust -- Holocaust, and explained the horror of it, and didn't experience it, they are hypocrite. So I felt if I would go try to go ahead, how can I compare my suffering with those people who come from Poland, so -- from other country, they already -- or Austria? So, it was not my place to speak there. I was invited, as a matter of fact, to speak to a Jewish retire group next month on 14, which are doctors and the engineers and lawyers in Kansas City, about again, survival in Italy, the Italian Alp. But that's a different chapter, because they were never -- they never any -- any idea. But I would never be presumptuous enough to explain the horror of the camp, because I were not there.

Q: No, no, I -- I al -- I meant, would you -- were you asked to talk about Italy?

A: Nobody --

Q: I mean most people don't even think about Italy, right?

A: No, no, nobody.

Q: Right.

A: This is what be -- upset me more than you can believe. They buried this fact, all they know Mussolini, and the Fascist, and r -- and that's all they know. It is so much behind the surface, that is not fair to Italians per se, as a whole, you know, because you cannot -- you don't have a -- you've got bad Jews, too, you've got Jews who were putting other Jews in the [indecipherable] in the -- in the -- in the crematory. So -- but you cannot make generalize. You know, you got exception to every situation. I don't think the guy was shoveling body in the -- i-in the damn h-high temperature to be burned, that he done it because he hate the Jews, he was trying to survive.

Q: Right.

A: So h-he -- is all depend from what perception and what concept you are looking at it. But I did -- they did ask me to speak to schoolchildren, and -- and is very interesting, and I can tell you, Kansas City, I'm very proud to have invitation all over. And all the right religious group, they make sure that Holocaust is not forgotten. It is amazing. Right now in Kansas City we have a third generation of Holocaust survivors speaking about it. We have -- those guys something in common with me, they were not the camp, either. But they were privileged to say my grandfather. I don't have that. See, except for my -- one of my mother brothers, who got caught in Split, like I told you [indecipherable]

Q: Right.

A: Nobody else got burned in this Holocaust.

Q: Right.

A: Now, my father's side, in Serbia, they're killing the first four days the Nazi got in Serbia.

Q: Yeah.

A: First four days.

Q: Serbia was a rough [indecipherable]

A: Nobody on my father's side survive. Nobody.

Q: Nobody?

A: Nobody. Nobody.

Q: So he was alone.

A: He was -- when the war finished, the only Bergl is left alive. And there were four brothers, no sisters, four brothers. Remarkable thing it is, by the Jewish community where I have i-in Croatia, that there were very few Jews in comparison to other countries. But th -- all very successful Jews. I would say is, in Croatia that 80 percent of Jews were self-employed in some kind of business, along with 20 percent working for somebody, or for some enterprise. And then a -- in most of community, wherever they live, th-the excellent relationship with Jews. It was not an animosity like Poland that when you go in front of church you went pah, pah, pah. That didn't [indecipherable] but it -- it was a very, very tight relationship, right through the whole country, even Bosnia. Now, you had some Jews here [indecipherable] you have in -- do you have them here too?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: You have a Jewish [indecipherable] in Israel. But as a whole that we could really feel? No, no, no.

Q: Right. Were you --

A: You know --

Q: Yeah [indecipherable]

A: -- excuse me, I want to tell you something which is amazing.

Q: Mm.

A: And is a compliment to the Jewish race. From 1947, through 1955, now I'm -- I'm giving you this window because 1955 include Hungarian revolution, when Hungarian Jews start coming to United States. In this period in Kansas City come 270 families. From hodgepodge of all the countries. Almost all of them were self-employed. I wouldn't say more than 15 percent was in group like me, working or learning -- but not big enterprise, some more, some less. Some of them immensely successful. But what I'm trying to bring a point about the welfare. We all went to the school from first day we arrive, to learn English, working at nighttime. I restrain from any group coming in the United States want to change the system, or improve the different language in our educational system. I don't care from what country you come. If you want to preserve your heritage, f-fine. You want to teach your kids so they are bilingual, fantastic. But don't mess around with a system that works. That's why we went to this school. And sa -- same Jews now, they were they -- they were -- you know, I had th -- have the blessing of advanced learning, education, faculty and all of them. Most Jews in Kansas City, they were so illiterate, and so Jewish oriented, if they picked up "Kansas City Star" in their hand, it didn't have a picture, they will hold it upside down. Can I tell you more than that? Only Hebrew. And yet, every one of their kids is college graduate. From surgeons to doctor to engineers, to professional -- is absol -- mind-boggling. So it is a land of opportunity. Those pi -- you know, those parents are so ignorant in comparison to their kids and grandchildren, is mind-boggling. But they were willing to work. I don't care what work they performed. They were very, very successful what they were doing.

Never on welfare. I don't know a single Jewish in Kansas City that's went on welfare. They accepted from Jewish community to get started only, but every one of them was very anxious to go on. I don't know anybody who did not send their kids to college. I never see -- every si -- every one of our friends, the kids have. And some of them from prestigious universities. So it is something in willingness to work. Jews are not lazy people. And they have a hump to pick up and go from nothing.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: You know, even to this day, when I socialize with my friends, and I know they are much smarter than they are. I mean, bias to show how much smarter I am than they are. Instead of bringing them down, I bring myself, lots of times to their level. I'm more comfortable with it. And -- and sometime when I say something tremendously stupid, I don't want to make them feel that way. I try to explain as gently as possible where they making a mistake.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And I'm very proud of my heritage where I am, and I cannot emphasize enough. I'm not a very religious person, I'm not a very observant person, belong to a shul. We don't go there [indecipherable] not even [indecipherable] imagination as much as the shul. But we, you know, with the Jewish holiday, we try to be part of it, we observe the Jewish holiday, always someplace for New Year's Eve, or the other Jewish holidays. But heritage is very important. And I -- I -- I tell you, Evie had lots to do with it, because she come from Vienna, from different, much more Jewish surrounding than I do. I was dabbling so much -- that's why I had such a close relationship with my Gentile friend in Croatia. It was beautiful. You know, when they write to me for holidays, send us matches. I'm sending matches all over Croatia, they love it. When the -- when is a -- they don't know when holy day, when is the matches season?

Q: Right. You wanted to tell us a story about bringing your Cadillac to Croatia.

A: Well, see, when I left, when I was not quite 13 --

Q: Mm.

A: -- my dream it was -- when you lost everything. I mean, everything my father worked. I said one day I'm going to come back and show these people the Bergl family still got something. So as soon -- when I go -- bought my first car, and a -- I left in 1941, and didn't return til '72. 31

years pass. And I say I have to make a big entrance when I come. I did some still

[indecipherable] ship's traffic between New York. I had a friend who might drive my car in New York, I -- my f -- parents loved to travel by ship. So they took a car with them on the ship, me and Evie, we flew to Genoa. We sit down in the car, I put American flag on my antenna, and I drive in my hometown. Within 10 minutes the word spread, Jew is back.

Q: Jew is back?

A: Yeah, Jew is b -- not in a derogatory manner, you mean -- s-so they come to us, says listen, we took everything away from you, you didn't have nothing. How did you do it? So I said listen, it's very simple. We apply to go to America. Once we arrived in New York, the Jewish committee from New York waited for us. Give us a key from the car, give us a key for the house [indecipherable] is in the book. They says, here with us, you're welcome to America. And the guy say, you kidding. I said, no, it's very simple, all you have to be Jewish, hand you everything. Jews are waiting for you with -- to give you stuff. And the guy -- those farmer were just shaking their head. Should I tell them they arrive in America sweeping floor? Would that impress him? No. And I wanted to do the impact, and it worked. And they bought it. They actually believed it.

Q: Did you ever tell them that wasn't true?

A: Never te -- never told them. Well, later on they could s -- draw their own conclusion through the years, because I came many times back, with a little later on confusion because I didn't take my car, but I rented the car, one time a Mercedes, one time a Volvo. So I come there all different cars in -- you know, when I came to my hometown. But this first -- I wanted to make a splash the first time I came.

Q: Well, you certainly made one.

A: And I di -- with American flag, y-you don't [indecipherable] you don't have any idea, communist Yugoslavia and I'm have the guts to fly American flag. I'm -- when I was driving to capital of Zagreb, the police stop and pa -- let me pass, they thought I was American embassy. That big -- like [indecipherable], there's nowhere to put me. On tollbooth they didn't know to charge me as a car or as a bus, it was so huge.

Q: This was a Cadillac in 1972?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: And where did you put the flag, in the front?

A: On antenna.

Q: On the antenna?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Very clever. And Evie was in the car?

A: Evie -- my whole family --

Q: And your fa -- your family?

A: -- oh, oh, you kidding, when we go -- that's I tell you, when the word spread that, know that when I say Jew come to town, it means Jew, the guy that we took everything from.

Q: Right.

A: You know, we left, they took everything from me. And they start asking me -- then I come with this bull story, to tell them how we acquire all the -- and -- and that's funny because I stay for about one week. I -- I have to tell you other story about this thing. When I'm driving with this Cadillac from Zagreb to my hometown, and you go through lots of small town, and you got still farmer, they use oxen to pull the hay.

Q: Right.

A: And like they would go over there, take the hay in middle of the field, hi -- hi -- farmer is in front of the oxen, and he goes to the field to hitch the wagon to take it back t -- you understand? So -- and I can't move because the oxen go slow. And [indecipherable] the grill on my Cadillac [indecipherable] to fit from the [indecipherable] when one of [indecipherable] on my hood on my car. I was cleaning for two days with tooth and brush. So I -- from now on, whenever I go from Croatian town, plenty room between me and my car.

Q: You and the ox.

A: Yeah. But was a big experience, a great satisfaction, believe me.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know, I had the blowout on the Italian outerstrada because we're going pretty fast. And finding a tire for a Cadillac, spare tire, is almost impossible, til I come -- call -- call American embassy. So I said, you know, I am looking for -- he says, oh -- the guy told me, he said, no problem, we got plenty tire in our -- all our ca -- Cadillacs on our staff, and we are [indecipherable] in our embassy. Come over here. I went to American embassy, they gave me a tire, I sign a sheet. Two months later I got a bill from State department for the tire.

Q: Hm. But you didn't have an accident.

A: Wa -- no, no, no accident, no, no.



Q: No, no, no.

A: It was -- I was not -- I was not always doing, it just happened that from the speed and load, I wa -- we were carrying -- see, I had the carrier on top of -- was temporary carrier with the straps. From the speed, the carrier broke. And in one box, I had like 200 neckties. When those neckties broke loose, the box hit the highway, and on the side of the road were olive trees. Those trees were decorate like Christmas tree with the neckties.

Q: With the neckties. So --

A: Yes. But it was experience. One time I y -- I was happy [indecipherable] and at that time was cheap, was 500 dollar round trip to Italy with my car.

Q: Wow, fabulous.

A: It was worth it, every penny of it.

Q: Yeah, right.

A: And there were -- my folks came back, there I flew to New York, I picked them up, and I drove the car and then back to Kansas City.

Q: Right. Well, it's quite an ending.

A: Now that was -- that wa -- tha-that was about the most glorious return home I can have, despite that I return many other times, and I have very dear friend and family. I cannot en -- equal my first come home.

Q: Come -- time, yeah, right.

A: Nothing. Because they really thought that they got us down, and they figure they didn't.

Q: And you've gone back to Italy a number of times.

A: Italy is for me really more important now --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- is important to my life than Croatia because my connection with Italy not only as a country, as a beauty, as in a very, very good friend, you know. It is -- it is undecipherable how close connection we have with some of the people in Italy.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And problem with Europe right now the economic situation it is, be-become [undecipherable] very expenses.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: You know. And we are retired people, we're living well, but we -- we are never unlimited means.

Q: Right.

A: And in the past when we travel in Europe, we stayed with all the friends, they insisted, the family. All that we get would require certain comfort.

Q: Right.

A: You know. To go to visit somebody house with one bathroom, four or five people in, you have to cross hallway to other room to get -- the middle of the night, you have to get dress --

Q: Right.

A: -- you can't go in your gacekas.

Q: Right.

A: You know. So it become -- it's no more pleasure. If you go in the trip, I don't need luxury, but I need comfort.

Q: Right.

A: Otherwise I don't go.

Q: Right.

A: And the lee -- I-last but not least, most of our friend live on second and third floor without elevator. And that's is [indecipherable]

Q: It's bu -- yeah, it's impossible --

A: It is not possible to do it.

Q: -- right, right.

A: And to go in hotel, a decent hotel today in Europe, I don't care if it's Italy or France or Germany, is cost you about 150 to 200 bucks. Modest hotel.

Q: Right.

A: I'm not talking about Sheraton and Hilton, or --

Q: Right.

A: -- Carillon in Paris or something like that. Or Ritz. Because if you want a first class hotel in Europe, cost you 600 bucks for a average room.

Q: Yeah. Right.

A: And this is a sin. But as long as Japanese have the money, sky is limit.

Q: Right.

A: Before Japanese in -- invasion of -- of Las Vegas, you with a nice room for 50 bucks.

Q: Well, everything changed.

A: No, I'm talking, but it's a reason why they change. But I love America. I'm so proud to be American. I become in the Midwest, a redneck American, I'm Democrat.

Q: But you're a redneck?

A: But I am a redneck American. I think -- I think so much of this country, that my word will never able on this film describe how much I think of this country.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Not only that this the greatest country of the earth, and that you have opportunity and that so many people take advantage of the system, and the system is full of hole. And the politician, some of the good, some bad, it is true. We have corrupt, we have a problem, but is not better on the earth.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Because if you compare what is any other place, you don't have perfection, you always have flaw. But I can go here in the streets, say what I think without worrying somebody shoot me. I can go in middle of Washington and say hey, Bush stink. Try to do that -- go in Germany, in today in democratic Germany and say Helmut Schmidt stink. Go say in middle of the Rome, in front of parliament that Berlusconi stink. Today, it's today. Some of his supports are going to hit you in your head. Not in America. You can say whatever you want. And I learn -- you know where I learn that? I learn it when I was in patrol in Korea, and that impress me to this day. I'm a -- I'm with the black guy from Little Rock, Arkansas. He's a leader of my patrol squad, and this guy is cursing Truman every step. That so and so in a warm bed, and wa -- and I'm here in the middle, freezing my butt, blah, blah, blah. And my friend's sergeant tell him, you can bitch as you want, just keep -- and he was carrying BR, you know what's a BR?

Q: Mm-mm.

A: Brownie automatic rifle. This like a machine gun, weigh about 70 pounds. He was a big dude. And the sergeant told him, you can bitch, you can complain, just keep going. Move a little faster. That's America. Try to do that any other army. You cannot do it. So let me conclude this interview with much thanking [indecipherable] for you and the whole crew, and God bless America.

Q: Thank you.

End of Tape Six

Conclusion of Interview