

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Nick Levi
March 22, 2007
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Nick Levi, conducted by Amy Rubin on March 22, 2007 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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NICK LEVI
March 22, 2007

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Nick Levi, conducted by Amy Rubin on March 22nd, 2007. This interview is made possible by a grant from Carole and Maurice Berk. This is tape number one, side A. Would you please begin by telling me your full name as it is today, and your name at birth?

Answer: My name is Nick Levi. My name at birth was Haim Levi.

Q: And can you tell me when and where you were born?

A: I was born in northern Greece, in the city of Kavála on July 24, 1921.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family, about your parents and also if you had any siblings.

A: No, I was a sol -- only son. My parents were Menachem and Simcha Levi. My mother used to go under the name of Allegra. I did not have a family in the city I was born. My whole family on my father's side was in Salonika and on my mother's side was in the United States.

Q: So you didn't have any other family members in the town where you were growing up?

A: No. Not in the town where I was growing up. I had cousins and aunts and uncles in Salonika, about a hundred kilometers from my place where I was born.

Q: And would you mind spelling the names of your parents, including your mother's maiden name?

A: My f-father's name was Menachem Levi, my mother's name was Allegra Ashkenazi.

Q: So tell me a little bit about your childhood. Did you remain in Kavála for most of your childhood?

A: I remained in Kavála all my life til 1940, when I went to Athens at the university as a medical student.

Q: So tell me -- before 1940, tell me about your childhood in Kavála. Can you describe it to me?

A: It was a very happy childhood. The Greeks are very, very nice. We never f -- had to hide our being Greek -- our being Jewish. I had a very, very good life and as a matter of fact, even today I still correspond with my friends in Greece, the Orthodox friends, the Chr-Christian friends that were left alive.

Q: So growing up you had a combination of Jewish friends and also non-Jewish friends?

A: Had a combination of mostly non-Jewish friends, and very few Jewish friends.

Q: Tell me about the Jewish community, how large was it in Kavála?

A: The community must have been around 3,000 people. We had our own community center, we had our own Jewish school, elementary school, and everything was more or less independent for us, except being part of Greece, as far as taxes being paid and going into the army and filling all our ja -- obligations as Greek citizens.

Q: And what about your home and your neighborhood, was it a Jewish neighborhood?

A: No, we were not segregated, we lived in a Greek neighborhood, but we never felt different.

Q: So did you ever, before 1940, while you're living in Kavála, did you ever experience any anti-Semitism?

A: Not at all. Exactly the opposite. As a matter of fact, being the only Jew in the last year at my high school, I was elected president of the si -- of the class.

Q: So tell me about your schooling, did you ever go to any kind of Jewish school, or was it always public schools?

A: I finished my elementary school in the Jewish school that we had from the community and the rest of my education was like all the other Greeks in Greeks elem -- government schools.

Q: Okay. And can you describe to me a little bit more about Kavála, for somebody like myself, not knowing much about the place, can you give me a description of that town?

A: It was a city of about 50,000 people. It was close to the famous Philippi, about 10 kilometers from where Alexander the Great and his father had their -- their palace, in the past. It was a tourist city. It was a beautiful city. Most of the people devoted themselves in the manufacturing and exporting tobacco.

Q: Did your father work in that industry?

A: My father had his own business, he was part of the industry, he used to provide the -- the manufacturers with all the -- with all they needed in order to export the tobacco leaf.

Q: And did your mother work outside of the home?

A: No, she did not.

Q: So describe to me your home. Can you remember what it looked like?

A: We were only three people, and it was a very happy home. That's all I can say.

Q: Was it large, was it a house or an apartment, what -- what was it physically like?

A: Was originally an apartment, then it was a house.

Q: So you moved, or you mean you expanded the place?

A: We just moved, we did not expand, we also remained the three of us.

Q: So you moved a couple times then, in your childhood?

A: Twice.

Q: And was there a long history -- you said you did not have other family in the area, so how did your immediate family wind up in Kavála?

A: Well, my father used to manufacture chocolates. In 1928 they decided to build a factory in Kavála. And my father went there representing of the company. We stayed there -- the fact that it

was burned in 1930, but my father changed his profession and he got involved with tobacco leafs, and was very happy and successful. We decide to st -- decided to stay in Kavála.

Q: So, when you were born, were you -- was your family already living in Kavála?

A: No. I was born in Kavála, and I went back to Salonika, and we immigra -- or, we moved permanently to Kavála in 1929.

Q: So you had a few years of your early childhood in Salonika?

A: Yes. As a matter of fact, my first year, educational years, was, surprisingly enough, in the German school in Salonika.

Q: What kind of memories do you have of that -- that year?

A: As far as I can remember, very good memories.

Q: And did you have any feelings of -- feeling anti-Semitic experiences there?

A: No, that was Germany before Hitler. I'm talking the 40 -- yeah, talking about 1920's. When Hitler came, we were already in Kavála, that was 1933.

Q: So, can you tell me a little about the personalities of your parents? I want to try to get a -- a sense of them, you know, just describe to me, you know, maybe as a youngster, as a childhood, from that perspective, what your parents personalities were like.

A: Well, my father was community minded. He was the president and the representative of [speaks Greek here] in Kavála. He used to take care of the poor Jews in the community. They used to call him [speaks Greek here] de Kavála. The Jewish counsel of Kavála. My mother was very, very religious, and I was raised in a religious environment.

Q: So tell me a little bit more about that, maybe -- maybe what were some of your favorite holidays as a child, and -- and were you, you know, were you particularly interested in religion yourself?

A: Yes, I was. We used to go with my father every Saturday to the temple, and we used to observe all of the holidays. And up today, myself and my wife continue to follow our religion and celebrate our holidays with our whole family.

Q: Do you have -- do you have memories as a child of favorite holidays?

A: Not exactly. Mostly Purim, was a very joyous holiday.

Q: And what were the languages that you were learning as a child?

A: I was born as a Sephardi Jew, and automatically our language was Ladino. Then, in high school, I learned French. After high school I took English and I mastered, more or less, the language of the time. Spanish came automatic. Greek was amassed. So, actually, between one year old and 20 years old, I mastered five different languages.

Q: And were you ar -- also studying or familiar with Hebrew?

A: Yes. That was automatic on the f -- on the s -- on the Jewish, you know, the community school that I attended the first six years, from age six to 12.

Q: Now what about your Bar Mitzvah, what kind of memories do you have of that?

A: Very joyful, but not like here. Not spending like crazy, just have the family, have the friends, and celebrate in the synagogue.

Q: And at that time you were -- you still had mostly non-Jewish friends around that time of your childhood?

A: Yes. As I told you, we lived in the more or less Greek neighborhood, Orthodox neighborhood and all my friends, up to today, most of them were Greeks.

Q: Do you remember the address, by any chance, of either one of your homes where you grew up?

A: Yes. It's a very funny thing, as I told you, our city was 10 kilometers from Philippi, and the street name wher-where we had our home was Bucephalus Street, the name of Alexander the Great's horse.

Q: Is that where you had both of your childhood homes, on the same street?

A: No, no, no, this was after we moved in our own home. Originally I was born in a -- we were in a -- in an apartment, and as I told you, then we went to k -- Salonika, and after the few years we moved to Kavála, and we had our home in Bucephalus, or Bucephalus Street.

Q: Do you remember the actual address of the home, the number?

A: I think it was number 10, I'm not sure.

Q: And what about, did you go to one particular synagogue during your childhood in Kavála?

A: There's only -- there was only one synagogue in the city.

Q: What was the name?

A: Beth El, as far as I can remember.

Q: Okay, now are there any other sort of childhood memories, anything in particular, any fond memories, anything that really stands out for you when you think of your childhood?

A: In 1935 or 1933, I'm not sure about it, there was a revolution in Greece, where part of them and their -- the Prime Minister Venizelos was democratic and part of them was Royalist. Kavála choose part of the democratic part of it, and the Royalists won the civil war, they bombed the city and they destroyed our synagogue. What I remember is that after 1935 or '36, when there was a dictatorship in Greece and this Metaxas, my uncle kiv -- came from Salonika and rebuilt the synagogue.

Q: What was your uncle's name?

A: My uncle's name was Maurice Ashkenazi. He -- he was my mother's first cousin.

Q: So how did the synagogue get destroyed, it was intentional to destroy --

A: No, no it -- Kavála was bombed, and part of the bombs destroyed the synagogue. Was not intentional.

Q: So were your parents involved or active in any political organizations?

A: Not Greek political organizations. They were involved very much in Zionist organizations.

Q: Any in particular, the names of them, that you remember?

A: Not exactly. I just remember [speaks Greek here] because my father represented them in Kavála and used to raise money, funds for them. I don't remember another organization.

Q: And then were you active already as a, I don't know, teenager, or even before? When did you -- did you get active with a Zionist organization as well?

A: Well, not til after the war. At the age of 18 I went to Athens at the university and then the war came, th-the German occupation came and everything was --

Q: And also I just wanted to find out, the community, the Jewish community in Kavála, was it entirely Sephardic or a combination?

A: Entirely Sephardic.

Q: And your -- you kept kosher at home?

A: Yes, we did.

Q: Okay. So now, before you actually left for Athens, just to think about the year 1933 when Hitler and the Nazis came to power, did you know anything about this? You were still in Kavála, and how old were you at this time?

A: Are you talking about 1933? I was 12 years old.

Q: Did you hear anything, or were your parents talking?

A: Yes, we knew everything in Greece. As a matter of fact, most of the Greeks were against it -- against Germany, and against the dic-dictatorship, especially my city, that even in 1933, as far as I can remember, had a Communist mayor.

Q: So what do you remember? What were some of your earliest impressions, what you heard at that time?

A: Everything that was happening to the Jews in Germany, and we were very much worried about it.

Q: And did you hear a few years later, in 1938, did you hear anything about Kristallnacht?

A: Yes, we knew about everything, and more or less we were ready, because we knew that Greek's turn was coming, that one way or the other, we'll be invaded.

Q: How did you get the information? Was it through radio, or how were you learning things?

A: Through radio, through free newspapers, through contacts with the outside. We were free to vo -- to -- to travel, where there were no restrictions at all. We were free people, and we're very happy people. We had also a ki -- a king who is so pro-Jewish. And the -- the government nek -- never took any measures against the Jews or made any discrimination. As a matter of fact, we had at the Greek congress, a Jewish representative, and also a Jewish senator.

Q: But you did feel some concern that maybe some of these anti-Jewish measures might eventually come to Greece. Did your family ever talk about wanting to leave Greece?

A: No, we never thought of leaving Greece, except 1938, when we decided to come to the United States. But as I told you before, we were aware what's happening all around the world, we were very much worried about the problems in Palestine where the Arabs has revolted against England and against the Jews. We knew what was happening the Jews of -- of Germany, and we had decided at the time maybe it was time to come to the States. What did happen is that we got our

quota for our -- or our visa to come to the United States 1939, and at that time the war had started already, so we couldn't move any more.

Q: So tell me about when exactly did you go to Athens to study?

A: I went to Athens in October 1939.

Q: So this is after the war began?

A: No, it was before the war. The war in Greece started in 1940.

Q: I-I'm sorry, I wanted to just talk about for a moment, just the beginning of World War II with Poland.

A: They just -- the war had started in Poland already.

Q: And what did you hear and what did you know about that?

A: Now we were always talking and were always very, very enthusiastic and hopeful that the French and the British would take good care of the Germans.

Q: So then it's October, you said, of '39 when you left for Athens?

A: Yes.

Q: And tell me what you were going off to Athens to do?

A: I was studying medicine. I was in the first year of medicine, at the ye -- University of Athens.

Q: And what was that experience like? Did you make a lot of friends again, mostly Jewish, or non-Jewish?

A: Like everybody else, I was very happy about it. I was grateful that my parents could afford the e -- the expense to send me there. I had no qualms about my future.

Q: Did you know what kind of doctor you wanted to be?

A: No. The first year the main thing that we learned was anatomy and chemistry. It was a preliminary for the medical profession.

Q: And did you ha -- were there other Jewish students with you at medical school?

A: There was only one Jewish student with me at medical stool -- school. The name was Mittrani, and she was killed during the German occupation up in the Greek mountains, as a partisan.

Q: And while you were in Athens did you -- was there any anti-Semitism there?

A: Nothing at all. Nothing at all. What it was was a fear of the Greek -- of the war that was coming very close to Greece. As a matter of fact, the year after, 1940, October 28th, 1940, the Italians attacked Greece. Greek defended -- Greece defended itself, and to a certain extent we were able to win against the Italians. That prompted Germany, in April of 1941 to conquer the whole of the [indecipherable]. And how you call -- and occupy Greece.

Q: So what was -- what were you seeing and experiencing directly about all of this in Athens?

A: In Athens, nothing. We were very happy, and we thought it'll never happen. As a matter of fact, it's well known historically that the night before the Italians attacked Greece, there was a big party given by the Greek government where the ge -- the Italian ambassador was part of the crowd.

Q: But you were still in Athens, I believe, when -- did the Germans come into Athens, or --

A: No. I left Athens in 1940 with -- when the war started against the Italians. The Germans came to Greece in 1941, six months later. The university was closed, there was no reason for me to stay in Athens.

Q: I actually thought that you had stayed in Athens until the Germans came, but you didn't.

A: No, I did not.

Q: So you -- you had chosen -- the school had not yet closed, but you chose to leave?

A: No, the school closed as soon as the Italians attacked, because almost everybody went to the army, were drafted.

Q: And you were not?

A: No, I was not drafted, I was too young. To be drafted in Greece you have to be 21 years old, and at that time I was hardly 20.

Q: So tell me what it was like when you returned. At that time did you return to Kavála?

A: Yes. Everybody was afraid, everybody was making plans, and everybody was trying more or less, to save his family, to stay together.

Q: So what happened next? You returned to Kavála and then what happened after that?

A: After that the Germans came in, and we figure that Kavála was a very small city, we might as well go to Salonika and we went to Salonika.

Q: You made that decision after the Germans came in?

A: My father made the decision, yes, after the Germans came. In 19 -- in April 1941 we went to Salonika. Salonika was occupied by the Germans already.

Q: And what about -- had Kavála been occupied by the Germans?

A: Well, the Germans divided Greece in three parts. Part of Greece, the southern part was given to the Italians. The northern part was kept for the Germans and the part of the north of Greece that was an exit to the Mediterranean was given to the Bulgarians, who at the times were allied with the Germans. That was one of the reasons that everybody -- but -- one who could leave Kavála, left, because we were afraid to stay under the Bulgarian government.

Q: Why?

A: Because there was an experience from World War I that the Bulgarians had occupied the city, and th-the -- i-it was only torture and -- and -- and fear, and [indecipherable] killing people. So everyone who had an experience from before -- not us, before, in '21 we were not in Kavála, was telling us what it means to be under the Bulgars. So we decided to go to Salonika.

Q: So at that time you actually thought it may have been better to be under the Germans?

A: We figured at the time we'd much better to be in the Greeks -- in the big city so we'd be more protected.

Q: And that was not just a fear of what the Bulgarians might do to the Jews, that was the general population's fear?

A: No, no that was the fear that the Bulgarians insisted that this part of Macedonia belonged to them, and we shoul -- we shouldn't be Greeks, we shouldn't speak Greek, we shouldn't have our own associations. We should turn around and more or less be like a -- like a secret police, and denounce our fr -- our Greek friends. That we were not ready to do.

Q: So describe to me what it was like when you arrived to Salonika and where did you live?

A: We rented an apartment next to my uncle, and my father started from scratch all over again, doing his business with the tobacco people.

Q: And when was this that you made the move?

A: We made the move in the end of April 1941.

Q: And it was possible at that time for you to move around and do these things on your own?

A: Yes, it was just the beginning of the occupation, moving was still free. I think the restrictions came sometime in June of '41, but don't quote me, I'm not sure about the date.

Q: So in Salonika, tell me a little bit about the neighborhood there, was it a mostly Jewish neighborhood?

A: Was mostly Jewish.

Q: And can you give me a sense of the size of the Jewish community in Salonika?

A: Well, I think at the time were about 70,000 Jews. It was a big community and more or less we had our own neighborhoods without being a ghetto. We were free to move, we had Greek Orthodox living with us, but mostly were Jewish.

Q: And do you remember the street where you lived?

A: Yes, the name of the street was, street Saron de Poru 18, was exactly i-in front of the Salonika Jewish community.

Q: Yes. And what part of the -- is there a name to this district or part of Salonika that you lived in?

A: Right now, I wouldn't know.

Q: At that time?

A: At that time nobody touched it til the deportations started.

Q: So, what were the very first things that you were aware of that the Germans were doing in Salonika and specifically, you know, anti-Jewish meas -- measures.

A: Re-Restriction of traveling. Taxes that we couldn't afford, restrictions in business, and the most important, something that even today I cannot explain, there were about 150 German Jews that's came to Salonika at the expense of the Jewish community that took over the functioning of the community, where the community council was jailed.

Q: Sorry, what was the last thing you said?

A: Was the elected Jewish community council was jailed the t -- by the Germans, including the chief rabbi.

Q: You're saying these were German Jews who already were living in Salonika?

A: No, these were German Jews that came in Salonika after the German occupation and I still in my mind say they were not Jewish, or they were part of a -- I don't know what, because we were forced to maintain them, to feed them, and when the deportations started, they were the shupos, the -- the Jewish --

Q: Jewish police?

A: Jewish police that the German imposed.

Q: Wa --

A: They -- they didn't tou -- they did not touch them.

Q: What was the name? Was there one?

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Nick Levi. This is tape number one, side B. Just want to continue to find out a little bit more from you about your family's financial situation. How -- were you well off as a family?

A: We was well off in [indecipherable]. My father had two associates who were Greek Orthodox, and one of them was very, very influential in the local government. As a matter of fact, in 1941, when the Germans were ready to attack Greece, my father was able, with his associates, to rent a ship and transfer all our assets to Athens because we were sure that if something happens there, Athens will not be touched, will not be bombed. So our luck was that when the boat arrived in Piraeus -- the name of the boat Stilianis -- Piraeus was bombed, the boat was sunk. All our assets were destroyed. We had insurance with Lloyd of London, however the insurance was in Greek dollars -- mon -- drachmas. So after the war, one billion Greek drachmas wasn't even worth an dollar. So we lost everything.

Q: When was this that this ship was taken with all your assets?

A: In April 1941, when the Germans attacked Greece, they bombed the port of Piraeus, because it was an expeditionary force of British, who had come to help -- to help the Greeks. As a matter of fact their stand was in Thermopylae and then they did [indecipherable] into Crete, and from Crete, when they lost Crete, they went back to [indecipherable]. So the Germans were bombing all the ports of Greece at the time, and our luck, which ship had to be sunk there.

Q: Is this a very unusual story? Do you know other families who did anything like this?

A: No, it's very, very unusual, because at that time to get a ship was more than [indecipherable], it was influence, and you know, having people help you.

Q: So this was actually a ship full of money, your money?

A: This was a ship with all our assets. In other words, all the merchandise that we had in Kavála, we transferred to Athens and we were left without anything. That's why it's said when we went to Salonika, my father had to start from scratch because we were penniless.

Q: Do you remember this being a very difficult time?

A: Very. Very difficult because at that time is -- the only business in Greece was the black market. There was no food, there were no utilities, and everybody had to fend itself, and we used to live on coupons. But my father had many acquaintances from the past and he was able to start his business all over again.

Q: And he was doing the same kind of business in Salonika?

A: Exactly the same business.

Q: So, I asked you this a little bit before, but I was wondering if you remember more details about the very earliest measures that the Germans took. You said there were restrictions on business. If you remember any details --

A: As soon as they came, there were restrictions on business, and restrictions in traveling, about two months after they came. In 1942, they started giving -- imposing taxes to the Jewish community that was very hard to be kept -- to be. And then, on, as I told you, in July or August 1942, we had the concentration at the Liberty Place, where people were cheated -- were t -- was, you know, t -- tortured, and most of the yonkers -- youngsters were taken for hard works in the south of -- of Greece, and were separated from their families.

Q: Can you -- can you walk me through a little bit more of the details of that incident, because it is a -- a well known incident, and I want to know your memories. What do you first remember?

Were you told that you had to go to this -- this place?

A: I didn't have to go personally. The people that I knew, my cousins, my parents, my friends, had to go on a Saturday morning in this particular place, called Liberty Place, stand in the sun in August, for a whole day, beaten and humiliated, segregated, and then sent back home.

Q: And how -- why was it that you did not have to go that day?

A: Number one because of my age, and number two because as a Spanish citizen, I was neutral, and supposedly the Germans expected our neutrality.

Q: Well, first of all, can you tell me what your age was at that time?

A: 1941, I was 20 years o -- no, that was 1942, I was 21 years old.

Q: And what were the -- so you said that the ages of the men who were brought there, what was the ages?

A: The ages was from 21 to 50.

Q: I just want to back up a moment, because you referred to being a Spanish citizen.

A: Yes.

Q: Can you tell me, in whatever details you remember, when exactly did you get this citizenship?

A: Well, we left Spain in 1492. We kept our citizenship since then. One of my relatives -- and I don't want to brag about it, happened to be Don Isaac Abravanel. He kept his citizenship, he left Spain, he kept on being representative of the Spanish government, even during the Inquisition. And through him we kept our citizenship til we came to the United States. I came to the United States with a Spanish passport, and I changed my citizenship when I became an American citizen.

Q: So does that mean that both of your parents, as well as you, were always Spanish citizens in Greece?

A: My parents wer -- yes, both my parents, by marriage, were Spanish citizen. My father was Spanish citizen, my mother was -- Ashkenazi was one of the part of Jews that came 600 early -- 600 years earlier to Salonika from Poland, and they kept the name Ashkenazi to distinguish themselves from Sephardi.

Q: So -- so your mother was not Sephardic?

A: No, wa -- my mother was Sephardic, after 600 years.

Q: S -- and -- and so your -- your citizenship, you were never Greek citizens, is that right?

A: Sure. No, I was always a Spanish citizen. I had the right to choose a citizenship when I became 21, but at that time, Greek was o -- Greece was occupied already by the Germans.

Q: So you were born with Spanish citizenship?

A: I was born Spanish citizen, and I be -- it was always Spanish citizen all my life, til I change my citizenship when I came to the United States and became a u -- a U.S. citizen.

Q: I was just wondering if you can explain, since it's hard for me to understand, was there a reason that your parents knew all along that they wanted to keep Spanish citizenship?

A: No, a family tradition. Just a family tradition.

Q: Even though they felt very Greek, I would imagine.

A: Oh yeah, oh yeah. They knew nothing about Spain, except the language.

Q: And can you tell me, and anyone else who might listen to this, a little bit more about this famous Abranel?

A: The Spanish what?

Q: Abra -- Abravanel? I'm sorry, I may not pronounce it correctly.

A: Okay, a little bit of history. When Isabella and Ferdinand conquered Spain, they had two councilors that were Jewish. One was Hasdai ben Shiprut and one was Don Isaac Abravanel.

They were very high on the ca -- ca -- in the Spanish government and they were very appreciated by the kings. From this too, isibi -- Isaac -- Hasdai ben Shiprut decided to convert and stay with Spain. Isaac Abravanel decided to leave the country. He didn't want to convert, he didn't want to live under the Inquisition. So Isaac Abravanel up til today is being honored by the whole Jewish community, where the name of Hasdai Shiprut almost disappeared.

Q: And your -- was it on your father's side or mother's side?

A: My father's side.

Q: And this is something that was long established, so nobody needed to prove the relations?

A: No, not at all. Was never questioned. As a matter of fact [indecipherable] documents from the Cortez, the Spanish congress, signed by the king of Spains, testify the citizenship of my father.

Q: So now we go back to 1942, Liberty Square, I believe you were telling me about this, and was your -- was it obvious -- when did it become obvious that your Spanish citizenship might help you?

A: From the beginning, that is, the Germans entered Greece, they always made a difference between the Italian citizens, and the Spanish citizen and the Turkish citizens because the [indecipherable] neutral and the Italians were allies. So the Italian citizens, the Spanish citizen and the Turkish citizens were not touched at all. But --

Q: So --

A: -- but we still couldn't travel, and we still couldn't choose our own profession or our own status.

Q: Was your father's business interrupted by the German's measures at that time?

A: Well, my father's si -- business started all over again after the occupation. We had lost everything with the sinking of the boat.

Q: But was he still able to work when the Germans were there?

A: Well, his bi -- his business was privilege for the Germans because they were stealing all the tobacco from Greece, and sending them to gr -- to Germany for -- for free, and my father was the business that provided the materials to [indecipherable] and export the tobacco.

Q: So he was able to continue his business?

A: Yeah, he continued til 1943, that we were deported.

Q: What were some of the things you saw about other Jewish families who could not continue working? What did you see happening around you?

A: Their hardships, that they have what to eat, they couldn't move, they couldn't congregate. They were slaves that were in -- th-that were occupied, they were not free.

Q: And they had to give up their jobs?

A: Most of them had to give their jobs, yes. Have to give their jobs, and the Germans took all their proceed -- all their merchandise and everything they had. It was a terrible situation.

Q: Did you -- so tell me, since you did not have to go to the Liberty Square, tell me what you learned from -- you said -- did your father go, and what about your uncle?

A: My father didn't go, my uncle was too old, my cousins went.

Q: And what did they tell you about their experience?

A: They didn't have to tell it because we were in the middle of a city, we saw it happening.

Q: You saw the gather -- the round-up?

A: Yes. We saw everything that happened.

Q: So that day you were somewhere close by, but you didn't have to be part of it. Was that --

A: Well, I was not part of it, and I was part of it, because personally I was not, but family-wise, my whole family was part of it. There was no distinction. The citizenship was, how you call that? [indecipherable] something happen. We didn't choose it.

Q: And what happened to your cousins? Were they taken away?

A: Well, they all re -- perished in Auschwitz, from the first to the last one, and my uncle.

Q: Now, I read about -- when this roundup occurred, I read about the fact that the Germans requested a large sum of money as ransom. Can you explain this?

A: I don't remem -- I don't remember how many billions of marks they requested at the time.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit from the start what -- what that was about?

A: Well, what was about, it's one way you oppress the Jewish population, because they thought they wouldn't be able to make their demands.

Q: Well, what was the ransom for? What were they saying to the Jewish community?

A: No explanation. No explanation at all. They needed the money, they should raise the money for them, period.

Q: Was this supposed to, in return, save some of the men from being sent to labor battalions?

A: That was in a way thought, but right away they started with the -- the extreme measures, with putting the [indecipherable] on the Jews. By moving the whole population into ghettos, and a few months later, in March, the deportations started.

Q: Well, before we get to that stage, about the ransom, I also read something about the Jewish cemetery in Salonika. Do you remember what happened with the cemetery?

A: That was completely different. The Germans said that they needed materials to fortify the city. And being that the German -- the Jewish cemetery was full of marble, and good materials -- was a cemetery that was six or 700 years old, they decided that they needed the materials. They

contacted the Greek government that was -- at the time was at quixli -- a quisling government. And the government said that the f -- you destroy the cemetery, will be a good favor for us because we can expand our university. And this is what happened. Today, where the Jewish cemetery was, is the University of Salonika.

Q: Did you see the destruction of the cemetery at that time?

A: I saw the destruction of the cemetery and I was part of it in a way, because they gave the Jewish community a small place for a cemetery outside the city, and the people that could afford to do it, had to move the remains of their relatives to the new cemetery. Part of my family contributed into removing the remains of my grandmother from this cemetery to the new one, and the graves at the time was meant to have six people, six remain of people in one grave. My grandmother is still buried on the new cemetery in Salonika.

Q: And I had read, but it sounds like you're saying it was not connected, I had read that the destruction of that cemetery was related to the ransom that the Germans wanted.

A: It happened way after the ransom. The loot that they took from the cemetery was not part of the money that we told to -- to raise and pay the Germans. Com-completely different. It was not even at the same time, was later.

Q: Now, I also read and was wondering if you were aware of this at the time, the Jewish archives and libraries in Salonika were confiscated, were taken.

A: I don't remember that. [indecipherable] it's true, but I don't know when was it.

Q: And I also heard about the threat of starvation and many people were -- were suffering a great deal.

A: The -- the starvation was general. Was not just the Jewish. As I told you, we had coupons in order to get certain amount of food every week and quite a few families, Jewish and Orthodox,

no distinction there, chose many times not to report a death, to go to the cemetery and drop there the corpse, in order to save the coupon, so they can have some extra measure of food. To tell the truth, I mean, you cannot describe what was happen, but this was not just the Jews, was general. Was the whole population.

Q: And -- and why had these conditions come about? How did they come about?

A: Lack of imports, lack of commerce, lack of cultivation, bef -- por -- people were afraid to go to the -- to the fields. Lack of fear. The -- the partisans [indecipherable] if you left the city you expose yourself, because they were there to -- to hit and kill as many Jews as they could -- that's many Germans as they could. There were many, many, many reasons for it. I could keep on enumerating to you an awful lot of reasons why the population was starving.

Q: Now, you mentioned partisans, were you contact with, or did you know any partisans?

A: Was in contact with parti -- no. We knew about them, but personally I didn't know any. I knew my friend that I told you were in medical school, who went to the mountains as a partisan and was killed there.

Q: And the ransom that was required fro -- by the Germans, did your family have to pay anything personally?

A: We participated, but we did not have to. After all, we were not Spaniards, we were Jewish.

Q: What was your -- at -- at this stage, before you are taken and moved, as I understand, to the ghetto, which we'll come to, but at this stage, what was your daily life like?

A: As Spanish citizens, we did not have to move to the ghetto. What happened is that where we lived became part of the ghetto, but we did not have to move. We kept our apartment, we did not move at all.

Q: Well, before that happened, what were you doing? You were a young man, but you were already over 20, what were you doing on a daily basis?

A: I had a business with a friend of mine who was also a Spanish citizen, name is Zaga Tenyo, who used to produce --

Q: Some drinks, tea?

A: Dri -- drinks. And the name of the factory we had was called Olympic. There was drinks in envelopes that we used to sell.

Q: And this is something --

A: Soft drinks.

Q: And this is something that was going pretty well, considering the circumstances, or --

A: Considering the circumstances, it was doing very well.

Q: And had you already -- were you hoping someday to go back to medical school? What was your state of mind like?

A: Yes, definitely, definitely. I was thinking to continue my studies, but it couldn't happen, because when it ca -- when I was ready to go to school, I was already 30 years old. I had lost 10 years, between the concentration camp, going to Morocco, going to [indecipherable], going to the Israeli army. 1939 became automatically 1949.

Q: Now, before the ghetto was established, what -- what do you remember? Were there increasing measures, you know, th -- against the Jews, and when -- when is this now, what year and approximately what month?

A: We're talking about ninet -- beginning of '42, and beginning of 1943. The Jews could not move into their own city, could not travel, could not work. At night they had to go back, they

couldn't go out at night. They couldn't even go from one borough to the other because they were prohibited to take the tramways.

Q: Did this apply to you or not?

A: No, this did not apply to me, I never wore a [indecipherable]. I was never told to live in a ghetto. I happened to live in a ghetto because that's where I lived when they established the ghetto.

Q: So -- so you were saying you never had to wear the yellow star?

A: No.

Q: And then neither did your parents, right?

A: Neither my parents. That's why we were able to take the bus and to take the tra -- the tramway, because nobody could distinguish us as Jews unless they knew us from before.

Q: So tell me about what you remember in any sort of details when the ghetto was created.

A: I don't know. What I remember is that they created the ghetto, they were the conquerors, and they created the Jewish police to more or less supervise any [indecipherable] that the Germans had imposed and also in a way, take care of -- so there'd be no crime. Actually, we were a population very pacific. We never rioted, we never stole from our -- from one to the other. We live pacifically there, waiting to see what's going to happen.

Q: Did you have interactions with the Jewish police?

A: Yeah, we were all Jewish.

Q: No, I mean did you personally have any, you know, communication or interactions with Jewish police?

A: Yes. My cousins were Jewish police.

Q: Well, they probably treated you well because they were your cousins.

A: They didn't have to treat me, I was free, as a Spaniard. I was not treated as a Jew.

Q: So was there anything throughout this period of time --

A: And -- let me explain something more. The reason that many people paid money and tried to become Jewish police, because there was a rumor flooded by the Germans that the Jewish police will not be touched, will remain where they were, and will not be deported. So people were [indecipherable] were fighting to become Jewish police.

Q: How did your cousins become th -- Jewish police?

A: I don't know.

Q: And what were their names?

A: My great cousin was David, my second one was Solomon, the third one was Henry, and I don't remember the name of the fourth one. This was on my uncle's side. On my aunt's side, there was only one that was her -- his name was Maurice -- Maurice Seedis.

Q: So none of the -- none of the restrictions applied to you at -- at this stage.

A: No.

Q: And yet, just by virtue of where you were already living, you were included in the ghetto.

A: Was include in the ghetto because we happened to be there, and we were there [indecipherable] Jewish because all the [indecipherable] family was part of our life. We were living with them.

Q: So did your -- did anything change about your living conditions once this became a ghetto?

A: Well, the salvation was there, as I though it was part of the Jewish life and the Christian life. The traveling from one city to the other was not permitted. Traveling at night we were afraid. We tried to help as much we could our Jewish families and the whole Jewish community, and --

Q: Was there --

A: -- [indecipherable] period.

Q: -- was there anything -- so you were able to help others who -- you know, did not have the Spanish citizenship?

A: We were able to help them money-wise because both my friend and myself continued in our business of the so -- of the soft git -- drinks.

Q: So what did you see -- what was changing around this time, if anything, for the other Jewish families, once they were in the ghetto?

A: [indecipherable] what can I say -- tell you. What was changing was the fear, period.

Q: And were you also fearful, or were you feeling that, with your citizenship you would be okay?

A: No, there was no guarantee, as a matter of fact, even with the citizenship, finally we were deported.

Q: Was that something you were worried about at that time?

A: Yes, everybody worried about it.

Q: When did you first hear about -- the -- the first deportations, when -- do you remember hearing about those?

A: First deportation was in March 1943, I think it was the 23rd of March.

Q: And you knew about it right away?

A: We knew about it because we saw people pi -- taken from the ghetto and sent to the railroad station in order to be deported. It was not a secret.

Q: The -- if you can explain to me -- cause I looked at a map and it looked like it's not just one area that was a ghetto, that was in a few different sections.

A: There -- there were five ghettos and each ghetto went to the railroad station one at a time and sometimes half of the time because there were 23 deportations.

Q: Is there a name to the section, the district you were in?

A: No.

Q: And were you close by to --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Nick Levi. This is tape number two, side A. You were just telling me about this situation with the partisans and the Germans. Can you tell me again?

A: Well, the situation in Greece, like every occupied country, people were against the Germans and most of them became partisans in the mountains. When the Germans had to travel by railroad, they used to brought -- put in front of the locomotive, a wagon with Greek hostages, just in case there was a bomb in the railroad tracks, so the wagon of the Jewish -- of the hostages will be blown up, and not the Germans. Also, when they had any skirmishes with the partisans, and one of two Germans were killed, in the morning of the [indecipherable] they used to have lorries, and [indecipherable] the city, and pick up for every German that was killed, six people that peacefully will go into work in the morning, and execute them. So, it's impossible to describe the fear we lived in, regardless of citizenship. When they picked up cit -- when picked up hostages, they didn't ask you what citizenship, they didn't ask if you were Jewish, you're just one of the hostages, period.

Q: Did this happen to anyone you knew?

A: Yes, quite a few of my friends were killed this way, were executed this way.

Q: And were any of the non-Jewish Greek population able to help Jews at this time?

A: It was impossible. The only h-help they could give to us, it's either to hide a Jew, or to take their belongings and hide them, hopefully to give them back to them when they come back, after the war. That's the only thing they could do for us.

Q: And did you know of situations like that?

A: Yes, I know a situation like that, where quite [indecipherable] precious things were given away to Greek friends, who unfortunately, after the war, they didn't -- not all of them gave them back to the Jews. Most of them had a famous saying; I'm sorry they didn't kill you too. So they were [indecipherable] not anti-Semites, but they were humans. Whatever they could loot and keep, they kept. Maybe we're Jews who would have done the same thing. Who knows?

Q: Did you ever i -- did you ever experience anti-Semitism from the Greek population?

A: No, not even today. As I told you, I still correspond with Greek friends that, as in Athens, or in Salonika were very good friends, and we keep in touch with their families and with our family.

Q: Now, while you were still living in your home, were you able to continue observing, you know, holidays and did -- were -- were you able to go to synagogue any more?

A: No. The synagogues were closed and occupied. Most of them became stables of the German army. We could not, of course, bake matzohs or things like that for Passover. We kept it quiet in the house, we used to do our prayers, and that's it.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit more about, and did you ever have any interaction at all with this -- with this Rabbi Koretz?

A: No, I never did.

Q: Did you have strong feelings about his role?

A: Yes, I do, but I keep them for myself.

Q: And what about the Germans, did you have any interactions with the Germans occupying at that time?

A: I had interaction with the Germans that were sent to us from Germany, the 150 people I told you before, because they were part of the shupos, and they used to interfere with our lives.

Q: In what ways?

A: In all ways. We were not free. We had to do what they told us to do.

Q: So -- and that was usually coming from the German Jews, not from the -- the Germans in charge?

A: From the German Jews. You know, it's a funny thing. The Germans sent to Salonika six people, only six people. And these six people recruited the Jewish police, and the 150 people that come th -- came there before, and did the whole job of deporting close to 100,000 people, just with six of them. It's fantastic, the way they were organized.

Q: Did you ever see the six who were in charge?

A: Yes, we saw them, they circulate. As a matter of fact, was a fat one named Vincent -- Vincent Cheni, who after the war was executed.

Q: Did you know the names of the others at the time?

A: No, I'm afraid I don't. If I knew them, I don't remember them.

Q: So now, back to the deportations. When -- when these began, what else were you seeing?

What -- what -- were the people immediately around you being taken, or was it different groups of people?

A: They were taken in groups of people, and when the time came for the people around me, they were taken like all the others. There were no exception.

Q: So, at that time that the people around you were taken, you were taken with them, as well?

A: No. We were not touched, because we didn't wear the [indecipherable] and we were Spanish. We were left in our apartment without being touched at all.

Q: So do you remember when the people in your section were deported?

A: That must have been sometime before Passover, between April and May, 1943.

Q: What were you hearing and what were -- what was everybody being told as to where these deportations were going?

A: They were told to bring the money with them, to exchange the money to zlotys because they were going to Poland, where Germany had decided to establish a Jewish state and were concentrating all the Jews of Europe there. And people believed in that because the Chief Rabbi was the first one to disseminate the -- the rumor, and they were going like sheep to the new place, where they go -- were going to have a Jewish state.

Q: Were they told where in Poland?

A: They didn't say the location. I th -- I think they mentioned the word Kraków, I'm not sure about it. And that's it. They gave all their money, they came happy back with zlotys and then they were put into -- into wagons, animal wagons, locked there and transported.

Q: What was your impression of -- of this idea? Did you believe this?

A: I had a good friend who was the secretary of the Greek governor of Macedonia, who kept on telling me all the time, don't believe what they're telling you, try to escape. Go away. Don't stay here. I didn't listen to him.

Q: You -- you --

A: The -- the Greeks knew what was going to happen, but they couldn't tell us. They were afraid of their own lives.

Q: So did -- was there some part of you that did believe what the Germans were saying?

A: I believed what the Greeks were saying. I didn't believe what the Germans were saying, but by Jewish tradition, I couldn't leave my father and mother, so I had to stay with them.

Q: Did you at all discuss with them the idea of escaping?

A: Yes. We didn't know about the crematoria. Don't misunderstand me. We didn't know about the concentration camps. But we knew that where they're sending them was nothing good.

Q: So you had not yet heard of the name Auschwitz?

A: We heard the name Auschwitz when we arrived at Bergen-Belsen. When we arrived at the camp, there was a group of Polish Jews that are concentrated there because they were Argentinean citizens. They told us what happen. They told us the extermination, we never believed them. It was impossible to believe.

Q: So when you saw others around you being deported, and you were not being deported, did you think for awhile that you would never face the deportations?

A: Well, we were told by the Spanish consul that they were making arrangements to take them to Spain. So we were looking for them, we were given passports. We -- part of our money we gave to the Spanish embassy to keep for us, and we were waiting the day that we'll be sent to Spain. Then it came in July 1943 that we were called -- actually our parents, the heads of families were called to a -- a synagogue named Beth Saul in Salonika with instructions, and instead of instructions, they were taken to the railroad station and we were told to follow them and join them there. So I took my mother and myself and we went to this place, called Baron Hirsch, to join my father.

Q: He had already been taken there earlier?

A: No, no.

Q: So you knew that he was going to be there at some point?

A: We knew he was going to be there because we were told from the embassy to be there. But the thinking was that we'll be given our passports back and we'll travel to Spain.

Q: You -- you gave your passports to the Spanish embassy?

A: Yes, we gave the passport to the Spanish embassy. We were deported, we were put in cattle wagons like all the other Jews. And at the end of July --

Q: Do you want to take a break? You want to take -- you want some water?

A: If I knew this will be the -- the interview, I would never agreed.

Q: I think you were starting to tell me about the time when you were taken from Salonika.

A: Yes, we're --

Q: Oh -- sorry. Something happened to the recording. I think it's okay.

A: We were put in cattle wagons like all the other Jews that went with us, and we were transferred from there to Bergen-Belsen. It took about three weeks from Salonika to arrive to Bergen-Belsen, and of all the hardships that I remember and the -- and the hungers that we went through, one date remains in my mind, and this is the 13th of August, 1943. Our convoy had stopped in Nuremberg, and at that time Nuremberg had a raid from the British and American air force. What I remember is a miracle. The Germans locked the wagons, went to shelters, and the bombs kept on falling on the railroad station all around us, and miraculously our wagon was not touched. August 13, 1943, and three days later we arrived in Bergen-Belsen.

Q: And you had told me earlier that you believe you were something like the 22nd deportation from Salonika?

A: I think it was the 23rd deportation from Salonika. The very last one.

Q: How many other Greek Jews -- I guess they all -- everybody had Spanish citizenship with you? How many were there?

A: We were about 300 all together.

Q: And this was a group you already know -- knew many of these individuals?

A: Yeah, we were acquainted during the -- the German occupation. This happened '43, and we knew each other from 1941, when we arrived Salonika.

Q: And the three weeks journey you were in -- you were always in the -- the train, the cattle car.

A: [indecipherable] the train, locked in, yes.

Q: What kind of food were you eating?

A: Don't ask. The best ans-answer is, don't ask.

Q: I also wanted to ask if you knew anything -- I -- I was reading about in the s -- back in the Salonika ghetto, there was a doctor who escaped. Was that something that you knew about? His name --

A: You talking about Dr. Matarasso?

Q: This -- I don't know if -- this name is spelled C-u-e-n-c-a.

A: Oh, yeah, I -- for God's sake, of course. He came to the United States, he wrote a book, the name of the book is Birkenau. His name was Dr. Manashay.

Q: Is this -- is this the same one? I -- I read about somebody -- I read about this, on March 18th, that Dr. Cuenca -- C-u-e --

A: Doct -- Dr. Cuenca was one of the doctors of Salonika, yes.

Q: Did you know about his escape in March of '43, from the ghetto, apparently?

A: No, I don't.

Q: No.

A: I know about Dr. Manashay.

Q: And -- and what happened with him?

A: Dr. Manashay wa -- survived, came to the United States and died in New York. But he wrote a book, the book is named Birkenau, that unfa -- unfortunately, I gave it to somebody, never returned it to me.

Q: Now, when you -- when you were taken from Salonika, you didn't know where they were taking you?

A: No, no. We knew -- we knew that we're going to Poland. We didn't know we're going -- we're being taken to Germany.

Q: And you no longer thought you were being taken to Spain?

A: No, that was finish because we didn't have passports, we had nothing.

Q: And did you have the ability to take anything at all with you?

A: Only what we had with us, period, nothing else.

Q: You just had to walk away from your home and just leave everything there?

A: That's right.

Q: And you never saw any of those items again?

A: Not any more because I didn't go back to Greece after the war.

Q: So, were you -- were you familiar with the negotiations that I guess were going on a great deal, about the Jews like yourself with Spanish citizenship.

A: We heard about the negotiations after we were liberated from the camp. We were told that j -- the Joint Distribution Committee was trying through the Spanish government, to liberate as many Jews as possible. Being that our names were known, because of our passports and our ci -- citizenship and everything, we were selected as the ones to be taken out of the camp. When we went to the -- to germ -- to Spain, we learned that the whole thing was done through the Portuguese Red Cross, through a gentleman who was in charge at the time, a representative of

the Red Cross in Spain. His name, I think was Sakura, who took good care of us when we arrived in Spain and was responsible for taking us from Spain to Morocco, because the agreement with the Spanish government was that only a certain amount of Jews will be allowed to stay in Spain, and in order to accept new Jews, they had to leave. And the funny part of it is that out of Spain we were Spanish citizens. In Spain itself, we were [indecipherable]. We didn't s -- have a -- have a citizenship. We were not recognized as Spanish.

Q: Now, to go back to Bergen-Belsen, what was it like when you -- what are your first impressions when you arrived?

A: No impressions at all. Confused.

Q: Well, let me just phrase it differently, then. If you could just tell me what you saw when you first arrived.

A: When we arrived to Celle, the city of Celle, Bergen-Belsen's full name is Bergen-Belsen by Celle-Hannover. When we arrived in Celle, they took us out of the wagons and they marched us for about two or three kilometers to the concentration camp. We did not know where we were going, we did not know the name of the place. All we saw is barbed wire, barracks and towers with people with machine guns, and do -- and fiercely dogs. When we got there, we was separated from the families. The women went to different barracks, the men went to different barracks and that's it, period.

Q: Were you able to stay with your father?

A: No -- with my father, yes, but not in the same barrack.

Q: Do you remember any name or section that you were in in Bergen-Belsen?

A: No.

Q: Do you thi -- I have a map, do you think you'd recognize?

A: Yes, I would.

Q: Let me see. I don't know, this is from '45, I don't know if it's the same layout.

A: No, we lived in 1943 -- 1944 actually.

Q: Did it look this way?

A: No, we were not at the crematory. The camp commander was here. I'm trying my best, maybe I'm wrong.

Q: That's fine, whatever you remember.

A: No -- oh, no, no, no, no, no, now I remember. When I see the latrines, I remember where we were. The latrines were here, our barracks were here. Yeah. I remember the cellar, where they used to bring the vegetables that were feeding us. I remember the latrines, yes, yes. Our barracks were here.

Q: And was there a -- a name to the section --

A: No.

Q: -- that you remember?

A: No, that I can't remember.

Q: Cause I -- I read about the group of -- of Jews with Spanish citizenship, that they were in the neutrals camp. Does that make sense to you?

A: Neutrals camp?

Q: That you were considered neutral.

A: Probably, because there, as I told you were the ger -- the Argentineans also. So maybe that was called neutral camp, but nobody ever told us.

Q: Who else was immediately around you in your barracks?

A: People that we came together, the 300 from Salonika. About 50 people from Argentina, or Argentineans, but actually from Poland, who unfortunately they must have gotten that citizenship through paying money or whatever, they -- and very few of them survived. They were not recognized as Argentineans by the Germans, whereas we, from Salonika, were s -- survived from the first to the last one. There was no doubt about our citizenship.

Q: How were you treated?

A: We were not treated, period.

Q: I mean, how -- did your -- did the treatment of -- of --

A: They used -- they used to bring food once a day through the other Jews that was prisoners in the camp. The food, I don't want to mention it. We had to eat it one way or the other. One day a week, usually every Friday, we used to go to the showers to be cleaned and to have our -- our clothing been disinfected. We went to the showers, we took our clothing, men and women together in the same place, naked. We had about five minutes of shower, and 75 minutes naked waiting for our -- our -- our clothing to come back from the -- I don't know how they used to call, the place where they disinfected them, and then take him back to the camp.

Q: And besides Fridays, what else do you remember about the daily routines?

A: What I remember, twice a day we used to have what they call the appel, or the appelle. That's five o'clock in the morning and the evening, where the German commandant would come with his shi -- with his ga -- dog, and ask from the [indecipherable] -- from the [indecipherable] out of the camp, how many died tonight, how many died today? Count them, make sure that nobody was missing and taken back to the barracks.

Q: Were people dying right around you, where you were?

A: People were dying, but not in our section, because in our section we didn't have to work.

People that had to work, with the -- with the food they were given, couldn't rest too much.

Q: What were you doing -- you weren't working during the rest of the day, were you staying in the barracks? Where were you?

A: Abso -- absolutely not, I think, staying in the barracks, period. And I was lucky enough to have a book with me, and I read this book maybe 10 times. 10 or 20 times.

Q: Do you remember -- do you remember what the book was?

A: Oh yeah, it was a Bible. The Bible in Greek. I'm an expert on the Bible now, you can ask me anything you want, and I'll give it to you. I memorize it.

Q: Did that help you in any way in terms of praying, or in terms of religion?

A: Not in praying, it helped me very much in making sure I don't go crazy. It helping -- it helped me in spending my time sane instead of, you know, depressed and -- and whatever you call it. Yes, it helped me a lot.

Q: Was that unusual? Did you know anybody else who had a Bible with them?

A: Not that I remember. Not that I remember.

Q: And was that one of the only things you brought with you, then?

A: That was the only thing I happened to have with me by -- by coincidence or mistake. How very surprised [indecipherable] today, that they didn't take it away from me.

Q: And did you pray while you were there?

A: Everybody prayed without hope.

Q: Did you have a sense that you were being treated differently than some of the other prisoners at Bergen-Belsen?

A: That we knew because we saw the other prisoners going to work every morning and coming back every evening. And we knew that we were not working. And that's help us a lot, except that we were living with the fear that we'll never get out of it, because from the amount of food that they give us, we couldn't last forever.

Q: Are you able to tell me what you did have to eat?

A: What we did where?

Q: Wh-What you ate. What -- what they gave to you.

A: Stuffed cabbage. Every week, half a potato. Five grams of bread, and a little bit of butter and milk that we did not eat ourselves or drink ourselves, they gave it to the young children that's happened to be with us, because among the 300 of us, there were infants. And we tried to preserve them as much as we could.

Q: Now when did you -- were you able to see your parents at times?

A: Oh, we saw each other every day. We did not live together the same barrack, whether we saw each other every day.

Q: They were close by and you were able to go over and see them?

A: They're close by and also my father in a way, was privileged at the camp because my father was a German schoolteacher in his -- when he was young, World War I, and the German help him a lot. This is part of [indecipherable] like to say about the Jews of Greece. As long as you want to know what happened to them, it's a disaster. The Jews from Greece were deported to Poland exactly when the crematoria were established in 1943. Before that the Germans used to execute the Jews. They didn't have the crematoria ready yet. When they arrived in ger -- in Auschwitz, they had three things against them. Number one, that the Germans wanted to feed and drive the crematorium. Number two, that because there was Ladino, they didn't know it --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Nick Levi. This is tape number two, side B. Okay, please -- please continue.

A: So the third part of it was that -- not being able to communicate. The people that were on top of them took the bread away to serve the -- to forced labors. Was slow -- steady but steadily they were exterminated. That's why part of them, they became Sonderkommando, because the moment they arrived there, the Germans were looking for people to use in the crematory. Of the population of Europe, or Jewish population of Europe that perished during the Holocaust, the percentage of Greek Jews that perished is the most elevated, the maximum one. I think about 86 percent of the Jews from Greece perished in the Holocaust.

Q: Did you -- did you know any German, and did that help you in Bergen-Belsen?

A: Not at all. I didn't know one word of German.

Q: But your father did?

A: Yeah, my father used to communicate with them, not that it help him, but --

Q: So, did you ever communicate with the Germans at Bergen-Belsen?

A: Absolutely no contacts at all.

Q: And so do you even have memories of particular commanders there at -- at the time, or SS?

A: [indecipherable] I remember the commander with his dog. I don't remember the name.

Hauptman Spherer or something like that.

Q: What would have been -- so the language you were speaking most of the time while you were there was Ladino, or what was the language?

A: I used to speak most of the time Greek. Ah -- my language was Greek. Forget that we were Spanish citizens, we were Greeks after all. We were born in Greece, and we deported from Greek. We knew Ladino among our families, but outside our homes we used to speak Greek.

Q: What's the language you speak today the most, at home?

A: Here at home? Five languages at the same time. Ladino, Spanish, Hebrew, Greek, French, and who knows what else?

Q: And probably English.

A: Hebrew -- and Hebrew. English I'm not gonna mention. [off camera remarks]. We've been here more than 50 years.

Q: You were telling me about the crematoria at Auschwitz, but what did you -- did you learn about at Bergen-Belsen --

A: I'm not going to answer to that. I know about the crematory in Bergen-Belsen, but most of the people -- the crematoria there were -- were Russian citizen -- occu -- pri -- prisoners of war. They executed an awful lot of Russians there.

Q: So in your -- in your barracks, as far as communicating with others, were they -- were they all Greek in your barracks?

A: Yes. Our barrack was only Greeks. Spanish Greeks. The whole barrack of ours was isolated. We never -- we did not get in touch with the other Greeks in Bergen-Belsen and we did not go to work. The only way we had a contact with them is when they used to come and bring us the food in the morning and we were forbidden to talk to each. The Germans didn't want them to know what was happening in the other camps, because maybe they knew that sooner or later they had to send them to Greece, to send us to Spain.

Q: So you weren't hearing that much, or did you hear from other places about what else was happening?

A: We heard from other places what was happening through the Argentineans that came from Poland, and we never believed it.

Q: How -- how was your health during the time you were at Bergen-Belsen?

A: Except for colds, very good.

Q: And were your parents healthy, relatively speaking?

A: Same thing, same thing. Same thing.

Q: And were you required to wear the uniforms?

A: No.

Q: Did you continue any religious observances while you were there?

A: No.

Q: What were you thinking about at this stage for the future? Were you at all hopeful in any way, or -- or -- or not? Did you somehow remain hopeful?

A: I gave you the answer before. We were positive we'll never get alive from the camp, so we never gave it any other thought, what's going to be our future.

Q: So, tell me then how it came about when you learned that you were going to leave the camp.

A: Well, one day a Spanish consul came to Bergen-Belsen, and told us that they made arrangements to take us back to Spain. He gave us our passports and he said because transportation was very limited, he was going to be in two -- two convoys. So I happened to be on the second one. First about 150 people went ahead of us to Spain, and then the remaining of us went to Spain about two weeks later.

Q: When was this?

A: That was 1944 already. I don't remember exactly the month.

Q: You were in Bergen-Belsen approximately for how long, do you know?

A: About eight to nine months.

Q: And do you know -- did you later learn why you were there for that period of time? Do you know --

A: Yes, we were told from the Spanish government, that they had no choice. The Germans wanted us to be isolated for a certain amount of time so we couldn't communicate with the allies and tell them what was happening in Salonika [indecipherable] fortifications and other strategic things. We didn't swallow it, but that's the answer we were given.

Q: So when you were --

A: In other words, we were told after the fact, that we were not in a concentration camp, we were in a transient camp.

Q: But at the time it didn't feel that way.

A: Of course not. Of course not. Who knew what was happening in the outside? We were completely isolated.

Q: And were there times where you were worried that you might be sent specifically to Auschwitz? You had heard about Auschwitz at this point.

A: Yes. We were always worried about what was going to happen to us. We knew about Auschwitz, and you knew out -- about the crematories in Bergen-Belsen. So what was there to think about?

Q: So when you then heard that you were going to Spain, did that give you a certain amount of hope?

A: Not til after we transferred from there and we were in Spain. We couldn't believe it and we didn't believe it til we actually passed Port Bo into the Pyrenees and arrived in Barcelona.

Q: What was the journey like? How long did it take?

A: Very long. I think it took about two and a half weeks. And then we waited for about two days at the Pyrenees in the frontier because two our people had died, and the Germans wanted to make sure that we sign affidavits that they didn't kill them, that they were natural deaths.

Q: Who was transporting you then, at that time?

A: The Germans. Everything was done by the Germans. We -- we sp -- went through the whole of France, from Hannover all the way down to Port Bo in the Pyrenees with Germans. And we signed affidavits before we entered Spain to the Germans.

Q: So each one of you, you had to sign personally?

A: I think the -- the man in charge is the one who signed, who, being a Jew -- his name was Izrhazi -- being a Jew was also before the war, and during the war, the consul of Spain in Salonika. He was traveling with us and he is the one who certified that they were not killed.

Q: I -- I just remembered reading that -- that also this Rabbi Koretz was at Bergen-Belsen, were you aware of him being there?

A: Yes. We were of it. We were very aware of it and that's why we hate him much today. I'm positive he was a collaborator, that's why he survived. His family survived, all of them. He is the only one who died. And he died from typhoid and maybe from old age.

Q: So, during the transport, were you with your parents the whole time?

A: Yes. We were with our parents, we were well fed. We had no complaints, except what as I told you before, to the last minute, we didn't know where we were going. The fear was there.

Q: So, if you could tell me now, what happened next? You got to this point where somebody had to sign these affidavits and then you actually entered Spain?

A: When we entered Spain, we were under the auspices of Joice Kestelyn -- Joint Distribution Committee, under the [indecipherable] or whatever it is, of Samuel Sakura, who happened to be also the representative of the Portuguese Red Cross in Spain. We were distributed into hotels. We were taken bi -- care of it. We were, all of us examined to find out if health-wise we were bi -- perfect, that nothing was wrong with us, and we were given as a matter of fact, pocket money, so we won't suffer. We stayed in Barcelona about six months, and if it wasn't for Barcelona we wouldn't be alive today. We were treated royally. No complaints at all. Now, the reason that we left Barcelona is because, as we found out later on, there was an agreement that General Franco will not accept too many Jews in Spain, there had to be a certain amount. So they organized a convoy, they took us from Barcelona through Spain to Cadiz, and from Cadiz with a convoy, we were taken into Casablanca, that other time we were liberated from the Germans, and the Americans were occupying Morocco.

Q: Who -- who's they? Who is taking you?

A: What do you mean, who's they?

Q: Well, you were saying they took you from Barcelona to Casablanca --

A: Joint Distribution Committee, the f -- Samuel Sakura. Everything was happen in Spain, happened through the Portuguese Red Cross, as far as I know.

Q: A-And the Joint, you're saying, both --

A: The Germans were not there any more.

Q: No, no, no, but the Joint.

A: The Joint was financing the whole thing, yes.

Q: How large a group were you at this point?

A: We were 300.

Q: So you were all together again.

A: The same group. Always the same group. We're 300 there, we're 300 in Morocco.

Q: And where did you stay in Morocco, what was the situation there?

A: In Morocco we was taken to a beach outside Casablanca called Fidella, where there was a refugee camp of the United Nations. We stayed in this camp, in the tents, I believe for about seven or eight months, and then from this camp, we were taken with a convoy through Argeus, from Argeus to Italy, from Italy to Gaza in order to be repatriated to Greece. By that time it was already 1945.

Q: Do you know the month when that was?

A: No, the only thing I remember is that when we got to the concen -- to the refugee camp in Gaza, the name of the camp was Lucerite, Greece was not liberated yet. The Greek army in exile with a -- with the King George was still in Palestine, they were not in Greece yet. The exact month, I cannot remember.

Q: So that's why you were sent to Palestine, or --

A: Were sent there in order to be repatriated to Greece, yes. We went to a Greek refugee camp, but was under the -- not the command -- under the auspices of the United Nations. The camp was called Lucerite, and the name of the camp -- the name of the people that were running the camp for the United Nations was URRA, United Nations Rehabilitation and Refugee Administration. One thing I have to say that being that I knew English, I was [indecipherable] and hired by the United Nations to help the administration [indecipherable] living constantly in the camp.

Q: Well, the first -- the first U.N. camp that you were at in -- in Casablanca, near Casablanca, what were the conditions like there? Who else was living there as well?

Q: The conditions were excellent except that we lived in camps, and we lived in tents. Our guards were Italian prisoners of war. They were the -- the best people you can ever see in your life. They were human, they were good, they helped us in everything. We had no choice at -- but to say thanks to them.

Q: And you were there for a long time, it sounds like.

A: Oh, we were there at least six months, I don't remember exactly how long.

Q: And -- and who else was part of this camp?

A: I try to forget that. There were some people that we did not associate with them, who were liberated from Spain and came with us to the camp that were part of the Lincoln brigade that fought Franco during the chi -- during the Spanish Civil War, and they were imprisoned from 1936 til ninet -- til 1936 yes, til 1943 or '45, that they were sent with us to the camp.

Q: Was this a large group?

A: Yes, there was a large group, and I'm not going to say a word about them. They were good people, good people.

Q: And there were others already at this camp in clasa -- Casablanca?

A: No, no.

Q: It was created basically for your group, you think, or --

A: Maybe there was a group before us, I don't know. But the maximum were there, we must have been about a thousand people, no more, no less. I doubt it very much.

Q: What was your state of mind when you were at that place? Did you have a good deal of hope at this stage?

A: We were liberated, we were hopeful, we were told we are going back to Greece. What will be my state of mind? We were very happy.

Q: The war wasn't over yet, right?

A: No. I'm talking 1944. There where wa -- the war was not over yet. We left Casablanca -- we leave Morocco in 1945, where at that time the -- the [indecipherable] has taken -- had taken place and the Germans were no place to be seen.

Q: So you think it was approximately -- you're not sure exactly when in '45 you would have left Morocco?

A: No, we left the camp -- no -- May, June of '45, something, I don't -- it was before the end of the war, that's -- I'm sure it was it.

Q: And what about -- so then tell me about the next journey that you went on.

A: The next journey was by train all the way from Morocco to Algiers. In Algiers we stayed for a few days, and with the convoy we were -- that's why I said the war was not over yet, and with the convoy would take you to Taranto in Italy at the military camp of the British.

Q: You mean Torino in Italy?

A: Taranto.

Q: Taranto.

A: Taranto, not Toronto -- Torino. It's the end of the -- of the boot. It's -- one side it's Taranto and the other side I think is Bari, something. Taranto, where we were. In Taranto we stayed a few weeks, and when they had a convoy for the Middle East, we were part of this convoy. I remember it was a convoy of Australia -- Australian soldiers who went to Port-Siad. From Port-Siad we are taken with trucks to can -- el Cantara. From el Cantara we cross the Suez Canal, and we were taken to Gaza.

Q: Did you know where you were going at that point?

A: Yes. We knew we were going to Gaza, bepo -- because we thought we'll be repatriated to Greece. We knew we were going to a refugee camp of the United Nations, to be assembled and sent back to Greece as soon as Greece was liberated.

Q: How large was that camp? Who else was there?

A: The camp in [indecipherable] was a large camp. Quite a few thousand of people. Quite a few Greeks had escaped from Greece, and I do think there were quite a few from Cyprus and Libya, but I'm not sure about it.

Q: These were all Jewish refugees?

A: No. No, no, no, no, no. We were the only Jewish refugees there.

Q: So, it's while you're at this camp that you begin working as a translator?

A: Not as a translator, I was working -- working at the b -- at the administration of the camp, and occasionally because they were all Greeks, I used to translate for them, but my main function was in the office. Actually, it was bookkeeping to a certain extent.

Q: How long did you stay at that camp?

A: The camp was dismantled at the end of 1945, I think it was November, where Greece was complete liberated. And they started sending refugees back to Greece. I did not leave the camp. I stayed there for only one reason. At the time there was a civil war going in Greece, the Communists and the Royalists, and I did not go -- or want to go and get involved in a civil war. So when my time -- time came to be repatriated to Greece, I decided to stay in Palestine.

Q: Is that -- did your parents stay with you at that time?

A: Yes.

Q: And just to back up, do you remember where you were when the war actually ended?

A: I was in the camp.

Q: Wa --

A: I was in Gaza.

Q: And was that a -- a big moment. Do you remember hearing the news? Was that --

A: There were no big moments for us, we suffered so much, we didn't have the strength for nothing. We were -- we were not there to celebrate. We were thinking of constantly, what happened to our people? Who is alive, who is gonna come back? How could you celebrate? How could you think differently? For God's sake.

Q: Well, I wasn't suggesting celebrating. I was just wondering if it was sort of a turning point --

A: No, our thoughts were always with the Jews that we knew went to Bergen-Belsen and we were always thinking, who is going to come back. That was our only thought. There were no future for us.

Q: So what happened next? You stayed at this camp?

A: Nothing except I stayed in Palestine. I didn't go back to Greece.

Q: You've never been back to Greece to this day?

A: Once I was as a tourist in 1972. But I never went back to Greece to stay there.

Q: Did you find anything in Greece of your --

A: I didn't go looking for anything in Greece. In 1972 it was too late to find something. There was nobody left, there was nothing left.

Q: So, can you tell me about your time in Palestine?

A: What's there the time in Palestine? I left the camp when the camp moved from Gaza to a different place. They used to call them [indecipherable] the twe. [indecipherable] Mo-Mois river, in the Suez Canal. We were given the choice to go to Palestine or to go with them, with the

camp, with the United Nations. I decided to stay in Palestine, I didn't want any more part of refugee's camp, and I parted from the United Nations, went to Tel Aviv and with my parents started to make a living and find a job.

Q: What did you do?

A: What did I do?

Q: What kind of work, that is.

A: I was a worker on a company that used to make perambulators, they used to call them in English, babies carriages. I used to work there.

Q: And how long did you do that work?

A: Til I was drafted into the Israeli army.

Q: And when was that?

A: That was in 1947, the end of '47, when the United Nations established the petition of Palestine and the State of Israel.

Q: So, can you tell me about your army experience?

A: I was in the army before [indecipherable] in Israel. I was helping other organizations save people from Europe. I smuggle refugees into the land because be -- the British would not allow -- did not allow any more Jews to come into Palestine. I helped as much as I could. When the petition was made, like everybody else, I was draft in the ar -- drafted in the army, and I was in the army from the beginning of 1948 til July 1949, a year and a half. In 1949, when we -- truce was proclaimed and the legitimate state -- government of Israel was established, when the elections took place, I was released from the army. I was married in the army, because my wife happened to be also a soldier. And in 1949 I left Israel and went back to cu -- went to Cuba to a

cousin of mine, hoping that from there I would be able to join my parents in the United States, because my parents were given a visa for the United States, where I did not get one myself.

Q: How come? Was there a reason why you didn't get one?

A: Yes. There was a quota for it in every country in Europe. My father was born in Yugoslavia, the quota was free. The Greek quota was filled for the next 30 years. I was born in Greece, so I didn't qualify for a visa.

Q: At this point what was your citizenship?

A: Spanish. But the quota for the United States was not based on citizenship, it was based on the country where you were born. It's a funny thing, at the time there were about 30,000 Greeks asking for a visa, and the quota for the -- for Greece was 308 a year. In other words, there was a quota for about a hundred years.

Q: And when did your parents leave Palestine?

A: They left the beginning of 1946, and they came here in th-the beginning of 1946, after the war.

Q: And were you usually living with and around other Jews from Salonika while you're in Palestine?

A: No, I rented a place, and I was living on my own.

Q: And -- and how did you meet your wife?

A: We met in the army, we were both soldiers. We happened to g -- were both from Greece, and we worked together from the end of 1947 til 19 -- til 1949 where a law came that every woman that was married would get a discharge from the army. So in April of 1949, we were married and she was able to start her civil life, where I continued to the army --

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Nick Levi. This is tape number three, side A. I just wanted to correct one thing, if you can tell me about your time, I believe, in Torino in Italy, and then just explain -- I think you went to the Middle East by ship.

A: [indecipherable] a few weeks, maybe two weeks tops. There's nothing to say. We used to have the same rations as the Spanish -- as the British soldiers, very good treat. We were was -- were taken care. We had medical facilities and we were waiting, we were told, to go back to Greece. So our stay there d-doesn't leave an -- an impression on me, it was a very short one.

Q: And where were you staying while you were there?

A: Well, there were -- there were tents, like the soldiers. We're there in tents.

Q: What you were saying before was a British army camp, is that right?

A: In the British army camp, yes. All the time in Torino was the British army camps.

Q: And you -- sorry. And I just wanted to make sure, since earlier we -- you were talking about Taranto, but this was Torino.

A: Torino.

Q: Okay. And from there you were taken by ship, is that correct?

A: Today with a convoy were taken by ship to Egypt, to ca -- to Port-Siad. And we -- Port-Siad by trucks. We crossed the Suez, we went to el Cantara, and by railroad from el Cantara to Gaza. We went the whole -- the whole Sinai peninsula to Gaza.

Q: And can you tell me -- I know you were telling me how you met your wife, can you tell me her name?

A: Her name is Flora. Her Hebrew name is Shoshanna.

Q: And what was her maiden name before marriage?

A: Cohen. C-o-h-e-n.

Q: And where -- can you tell me where she was from?

A: She also was born, I think in Greece or Yugoslavia. Now -- now it's -- now it's Macedonia. She was born in Macedonia, and lived all her life in Salonika.

Q: Okay, now did you -- so now if you could tell me how you wound up going to Cuba.

A: Very simple. As I explained to you, my quota to come to United States will take about a hundred years. We had a good cousin in Cuba who lived there -- went there after the first World War. And we had a cousin there who was able to obtain for us a residency in Cuba. So we left Palestine in November of 1949. We spent one month with a cousin of ours in barce -- in geno -- Genoa in Italy. And from Genoa we went to Columbia and by plane from Columbia -- from Barankia, we went to Cuba.

Q: How long were you in Cuba and what was it like living there?

A: We were in Cuba 1950 to 1953, three and a half years.

Q: And can you tell me what it was like to live there?

A: Was a paradise. I'm talking to you before Castro. We had a good business, we used to do business. We used to import textiles from the United States and sell them in Cuba. We had no complaints, we made very good friends. We had our family, our cousins and uncles there. Unfortunately, in 1952 there was go -- they were going to have elections in Cuba, and the next dictator decided that he wanted to be the president. His name was Fulgencio Batista. He made the coup in March of 1952, took over the government, insta -- installed a dictatorship. From the experience we had with dictators, our only way -- the only thing left for us was to leave Cuba.

Q: Before that it was -- you didn't experience any -- any anti-Semitism?

A: Are you kidding, no, nobody ever asked us if we were Jewish or where we l -- where we were living, where we came from. Absolutely nothing. I can tell you off the record, you can take it -- no, you can take it off later on, that the situation was so good in Cuba that the man who wanted to be [indecipherable] senator offered us money -- we were there only six months -- offered us money to give us -- no, no -- yeah, to give us a Cuban citizenship so we can vote for him.

Q: But you did not become Cuban citizens?

A: No, no. We were not crazy.

Q: Okay. And so tell me -- tell me what happened next.

A: What happened next is that we were lucky, for once in our life. Presidents Tru-Truman passed a law in Congress admitting 50,000 deported people from the war to the United States on top of the [indecipherable] the -- the quota. Being as I was one of the deportees, I qualified, and in May of 1953, I came to the United States.

Q: And that was to New York?

A: And that's my life, that's was to New York where my father and mother were living. They were still alive.

Q: What kind of work did you do in the U.S.?

A: Insurance. I was selling insurance because I knew Spanish. I was selling insurance to the Puerto geetans -- portag -- port -- to the Puerto Ricans, to the Dominicans, but I didn't stay too long because a friend of my father had a furniture store and he needed somebody to speak spa -- Spanish so he ca-can attract the Spanish clientele. So I went to work for him as a -- as a -- not bookkeeper, how you call that? The people they give mortgages, and things like that there.

Q: Broker, or something?

A: No, no, no, it's -- it's -- the people they approve the pr -- they approve the mortgages, how you call them?

Q: Not a lender? No? I don't know, it's okay.

A: Anyway, we went there to took over the store and I work for him til -- til -- was 1950 -- '54 and -- til 1955. In 1955 he sold the store and the company that financed -- oh, financed, financed -- the company that financed the store saw the quality of approval I was given, asked me to work for them. So I went to work for them, and I stayed with them til 1956 - '57, something like that. Then I decided that I wanted something better than that. I went to another furniture company for about six months that decided to -- the man in charge decided to make his own company, so I went with him, always in the same kind of business, as a finance manager, and I stayed with them til -- and I'm confused.

Q: It's okay, it's okay, don't worry.

A: 1950 something -- no, no, ti -- 1964 -- ti -- 1964, when we built Town Craft, the company that was -- that was the partners. Yeah, we establish a company that used to sell furniture and all kinds of equipment on -- on monthly installments. So, with a little bit of a capital that I had at the time, I became again, the finance manager of the new company, being also a partner. I stayed with this company from 1965 to 1976. In 1976 through a friend of mine who used to work on gr -- eyeglasses frames, representing a Fr-French factory in the United States, I was given the opportunity to go with him, and to represent this French company from 1976 til 1991, where at the age of 70, I decided to retire.

Q: Well, thank you, that's very detailed. Y-You have a good memory. I know some of the dates are a little rough.

A: I hope it di -- I hope it didn't confuse you because I'm so emotional now, maybe --

Q: That's okay, that's okay.

A: -- s-something as far as the dates only is concerned, might be confusing.

Q: No, it's fine. I just have a few more questions and -- and -- and if you could not -- I have to keep it quiet, sorry.

A: Sure.

Q: No, I'm -- [tape break]. So, can you just tell me about your parents, how long did they live and they were always in New York?

A: Oh, my parents came in 1946 to the States. My father died in November of 1959 and my mother died in October 1968.

Q: And tell me -- I believe you have children, is that right?

A: I have two children. One is a dentist, he is 53 years old, and one is an architect, he just turned 50.

Q: Can you tell me their names?

A: The first name is from the Hebrew Menachem, his name is Meny. And the second name -- the second one is the Hebrew name for her father, who was Moshe, and his name is Murray. Meny is the dentist, married to a wonderful girl, has two children, lives in Jersey. One of a gr -- my grandchildren is in third year in Union College, and the other one is just finishing high school. They live in West Caldwell. They are very, very active in orga -- Jewish organizations. They're very, very active in their synagogue. That's why their -- my daughter-in-law asked my wife if she wanted to be the guest speaker for the Shoah this year. Now, my second son is not married. He lives very happily in Manhattan, but we are not happy that he is all alone in his life.

Q: And tell me about your own involvement, I believe, with -- with the organization, I believe in the 80's you were president, can you tell me a little bit?

A: Yeah, we went -- we came here 1953. At that time survivors from the Holocaust were also coming from Greece on the base of this law that I told you, 50,000 the pre -- the displaced people. Most of them did not speak English, did not know any professions. They quin -- they came here with the HIAS. Some of them were sent to Flint, Michigan, others were sent here. So there was an organization that in a way was trying to help them, with the language, with the daily life, with the profession, with health, that was called [indecipherable] brotherhood of America. My father was a member of this organization and we became members immediately. We became active. While the old people that build the organization in 1917, after the first war passed away, slowly but steadily, we took care of it. And in the elections in the 80's, I was elected president. I served two terms, because elections were two years, I served fer -- four years as president, and is still today very active in this organization. I'm a member of the central board of [indecipherable] and I participate in everything that I can help them.

Q: Are there other ways that you have been involved with either groups of Greek survivors, and -
- and those sorts of organizations?

A: First we -- I helped quite a few of them that decided to relocate from Greece to -- to United States. Most of them did not stay here, they went to San Francisco. I helped them as much as I could because at that time I needed help myself. And I participate in every fundraising from Israel. I have certificates of Israeli bonds for what I did for the bonds. I sh -- was member of B'nai Zion. I was -- I was helping, and I still help UJA, and as much as I can I try to keep our Sephardic tradition because unfortunately we are not as many as Ashkenazi. Our language, our Ladino is disappearing, it's not like the Yiddish. And I have a feeling that after our generation there'll be nothing left of the Jewish tradition.

Q: Were you able to teach Ladino to your children?

A: My children do not speak Ladino, I'm sorry to say that. They do not speak Spain -- French. They speak -- they speak Spanish, they learned Hebrew. They're involved with their crowd, and everything that's Jewish, thank God for it. They are more or less observant. They participate in their synagogue, and that's the best I can hope.

Q: Do you think that your -- your faith helped you through all of your experiences?

A: Ah, I'll be honest with you, no. I've kept my fa -- my faith because it was part of my life from the day I was born, but did not help me in any way, on the contrary, in quite a few instances, I suffered because I was Jewish. And I don't mean just the Holocaust, I mean here in the United States.

Q: You did experience anti-Semitism here?

A: Yes.

Q: I w -- I was also thinking maybe -- sort of larger faith in God, did that help you to get through?

A: No, the faith I had in God, I still have. I don't think it was too much, I hope it was more, but as far as I am concerned, He helps me, He exists, and [indecipherable] all the commandments I tried to follow, the si -- the rich words of our religion.

Q: And you -- you have a Sephardic temple you go to in this area?

A: Yes, we have a Sephardic temple in Forest Hills, where I belong, and where I a member of the board.

Q: Did you speak ch --

A: And by the way, on this Sephardic temple, I was in the executive for at least seven years. I've been on the Board of Directors of the temple from 1972 til today.

Q: What's the name of the synagogue?

A: Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of Forest Hills. No, I'm sorry, Sephardic Jewish Center of Forest -- I'm confusing with the brotherhood.

Q: Did you -- did you ever talk to your sons about your experiences?

A: Always. Always. As much as I tried to spare them the tales, they know the whole thing.

Q: So you were willing to share with them your experiences?

A: Oh yes. I'm always willing to share my experiences. I was willing to make sure that the Holocaust doesn't disappear after I disappear.

Q: I -- I know a lot of survivors for many decades did not talk about their experiences. Was that similar for you, for awhile you didn't talk?

A: No, I always tried not to talk about it with strangers, not with my family. Many people complain, why didn't you say what's happened to you? I don't want any part of it. I try not -- I cannot forget, but I'm trying not to remember. I [indecipherable] all right to give other people the suffering, to a certain extent, of what I went. It doesn't help. The only thing I try to do is m -- to make sure that they know -- they know the Holocaust existed, and to perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust.

Q: I hope you realize that by doing this interview that's exactly what you've done. I know it hasn't been diff -- it hasn't been easy for you to do this interview.

A: Darling, that's why I decided to give you the interview.

Q: I'm -- I'm very grateful and -- and so is the museum. I -- I realize that it's been difficult for you to re -- remember.

A: It's done.

Q: Is there -- a couple other small questions, one is did you -- or do you still receive restitution, reparations from Germany?

A: Yes, I do. From conference number two.

Q: And tell me how -- you told me this before we started the interview, tell me how you came to change your name from your birth name to Nick.

A: During Greek wa -- during the German occupation, I couldn't use the name Haim, so I became Nick. When the whole thing finished, and all my family disappeared, the few friends that were left, they were Orthodox, and they called me Nick. So when the time came to become a U.S. citizen, I deti -- decided that it was foolish for my friends to call me Nick and my name to be Haim. So I changed officially my name, the day -- the day I became a citizen, to Nick. And all my documents in the United States, from the Social Security, from my work, from my taxes, from everything are under the name of Nick.

Q: Okay, well, is there -- is there anything else that you would like to --

A: By the way, something more that is trivia, but maybe this will help explain why I use the name Nick. In the old country they used to give the name Nick -- used to give the name Haim to babies so they survive. I had a brother who died at the age of four. So, his name was David. My parents decided to put me the name Haim. When the emancipation came, the Jews of Salonika, who were very much involved in French culture, decided that Haim is not such a good Jewish name. Instead of giving the name Haim, let's give the guy a name of survivor. And the name they choose for all the Haims was Victor. Most of the Victors are Haim.

Q: That's interesting.

A: So Victor become Nicky -- became Nick.

Q: Huh. Well, thi -- but this name you ch --

A: This you can keep off the record, I mean, I don't want --

Q: It's interesting, but this name -- but you chose Nick even much earlier.

A: Be chose -- no, no, no, no. I chose Nick [indecipherable]. I chose Victor, and from Victor, Nick.

Q: I-I thought Nick was from Nicholas, a Greek sort of name.

A: Ni -- Nick -- Nicholas. Nicholas in Greek means the winner of the pa -- of the people. Nicos Laus. Laus means people.

Q: And -- and the brother you had, was he older? It's before you were born?

A: No, he was younger than me, and he died before I was born.

Q: So he was older -- he -- he was older -- he was born --

A: He died four years old, before I was born.

Q: And do you know how he died?

A: No. I know it was a sickness, I don't know if it -- it was an epidemic or what. My parents never spoke about it.

Q: Well, I want to thank you for taking the time today. Is there -- is there anything at else -- at all you would like to say to conclude?

A: No, not -- I haven't got, unless you need something else. I'm always available.

Q: Well, you've -- you've been wonderful, I really appreciate. Thank you very much, and --

A: You're welcome. You're always welcome, do you feel like coming again, and we're here.

Q: Thank you.

A: We're here, we feel that what we did today is to our own benefit.

Q: Absolutely. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Nick Levi.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Conclusion of Interview

