

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Ada Ustjanauskas
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PREFACE

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ADA USTJANAUSKAS

November 17, 2008

Beginning Tape One

Question: Well, this morning we are conducting an interview with Ada Gens Ustjanauskas and following her life story. Thank you very, very much, Mrs. Ustjanauskas for coming and talking to us. This is going to be a very broad story with many different components, and many different people who are in it. It will be a -- a glimpse into at least what happened with one person in a very tough part of the world, in Lithuania. And I would like to start, as we often do, at the very beginning. I'd like to find out about your background, where you were born, the family you were born into, the details about your early life. So let us start with that. Where were you born?

Answer: Smalininkai. Smalininkai.

Q: And is that a village or a town?

A: I would call it a little town.

Q: And where is it close to?

A: It's close -- it's on the German border. My birth certificate is in German and in Lithuanian. It was like a style in those days, you had a baby born in Germany, and my mother was on the way to Germany. Right on the border, I was born. She didn't make it to the German border, but as I say, my birth certificate is both in German and in Lithuanian. So we have no idea about Smalininkai, we didn't live there. She just happened to be traveling through.

Q: And your birth date is?

A: October 9, 1926.

Q: And where was your mother coming from?

A: At that time my father was teaching in the high school, Jewish high school in Jurbarkas.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: That's where she came from, from Jurbarkas to have me in Germany.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about -- first of all, Smalininkai was still a Lithuanian territory village or town, is that correct?

A: Border town.

Q: It was a border town --

A: Border town.

Q: -- but it did not belong to Germany?

A: No.

Q: Okay. And was it -- can you tell me a little bit about the -- the border was to what part of Germany?

A: Prussy?

Q: Prussia.

A: Prussia.

Q: Prussia, okay. Then let's go back to Jurbarkas. What did -- what kind of a place was that?

A: I don't know. It's a town. I was rem -- I remember being there with high school for literary competition, I believe. It was a small town in Lithuania, not a big town.

Q: Was it close to Kaunas?

A: No.

Q: Was it close to [indecipherable] city? No?

A: No, no, no. We -- I remember we took a river boat to go to Jurbarkas.

Q: So you don't have any memories of --

A: No, none whatsoever.

Q: Okay. Tell me a little bit about your earliest memories.

A: Kaunas.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Father was attending -- at the same time he was teaching, he was attending university, and the only way of communication at that time was taking a riverboat. It was too strenuous, too long. So he decided to move to Kaunas to attend his studies. So, what I remember first, I remember my kindergarten. And in those days, what was known in -- not known in United States, but it was very well known in Lithuania, Montessori system kindergarten.

Q: Oh, you were in the Montessori system?

A: Montessori system, and the person who had -- who was the leading person was Professor [indecipherable].

Q: Mm-hm.

A: She started that. From the Montessori, I went to German kindergarten. And when my mother brought me to school to enter me into the first grade and they checked my abilities, they told my mother that, you know, your child doesn't belong in first grade. In first grade we use matches to count. Your daughter can write and read and count. We should put her into second grade, but she is too young, she is only four and a half years old. So --

Q: So what did they do?

A: -- to make a long story short, I finish high school at 14 and a half. I jumped three years in the meantime. I never discuss it because it's not very believable and there were only two cases in Lithuania. One was Kutraga, Dr. Kutraga's son, he was 15 and a half, I was 14 and a half. But when we came to United States, it just happened that the principal of my high school and my

first teacher lived in Hartford. I never talked about myself, but they told everybody. So they s --
this is no mystery any more, you know, no secret any more. So --

Q: But you went from Montessori school to a German kindergarten?

A: Yes.

Q: We'll come to your schooling in a little while --

A: Now --

Q: -- I'd like to come back to that. But your first memories are of this Montessori school.

A: Yeah, that's right.

Q: Do you have any picture in your mind of --

A: Oh yes, I remember. I remember, for example, during the bell, we were too small, there was a little wooden block, we could stop the -- step on the block, ring the bell by ourselves. We were to be -- to take our clothes -- coats by ourselves, hang it on a peg, the pegs were lower. Everything we had to do ourselves, and I don't remember too much about the activities, I just remember that I hated to drink cocoa because it had a skin of milk on the top. That I remember very well. So, we're coming now to the school.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Elementary school.

Q: Yes.

A: They told my mother that they are a little bit worried that at my age I'll start, but the-they told her, don't worry, if we see that she is falling behind, we'll just very naturally, gradually put her back, one year backwards. Well, it never came to that. So I finished second grade, I finished third grade, and then I took exams to high school.

Q: And this was you were still in the German school?

A: No, that was already Marija Pečkauskaitė gymnasium.

Q: So that was a Lithuanian school.

A: It was a Lithuanian school. It was private.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Expensive, and I went through it. Now, after I took the exams to first class, I continued at that school. In Lithuanian language it was called pono gymnasium.

Q: Pono?

A: Pono.

Q: Mm-hm. And how would you translate that?

A: Well, we had the children of -- our cabinet minister's children, heads of department children, children of very rich people.

Q: So, the elite?

A: Elite, yeah.

Q: The elite.

A: Elite, yeah.

Q: So it wasn't the of-official name of the school --

A: No, it was not official --

Q: -- it was the unofficial name of the school.

A: -- it was unofficial name of the school. In those days the government high schools, were charging 100 litas per year. In our school it was 400. So not everybody was able to afford it.

Q: Let me take -- stop at that moment for a moment, because that begs a lot of questions, and then we'll go back a little bit.

A: All right.

Q: And th -- because the question, the first one is, how is it your family could afford it? And then the question that comes after that is, who was your family? So let's go back to mother and father. Can you tell me a little bit about your mother? Who she was, where she was born, what her name was, what her family was like. And the same then for your father.

A: Mama's father left Lithuania during the Tsar's occupation. We don't know too much, we just know that in those years, the Tsar used to send people for bringing illegal literature, from Germany, from Prussia to Lithuania. And many people tried to escape when they knew that it came close to being arrested, they es -- mostly escaped either to United States, or to South America. He left Lithuania and he settled in Montevideo, Uruguay.

Q: How many brothers and sisters did she have?

A: She had one sister and two brothers. After awhile her father took the youngest brother to Montevideo, Uruguay, and a sister and a brother stayed in Lithuania.

Q: She was born when?

A: Mama was born 1900.

Q: And her name was?

A: El-Elvera.

Q: Uh-huh. And her last name?

A: Boudraker. Boudrakiter.

Q: Uh-huh, so Elvera Boudraker --

A: Boudra -- Boudrakiter in Lithuanian, Boudraker that she used here.

Q: Was she the youngest, the oldest?

A: She was the oldest. She was the oldest. What I know about Mama; Mama finished again an elite high school in Riga, Latvia.

Q: How could that be afforded if her father had left her mother with four -- three, four children and -- and had -- and had gone to Montevideo? How could the family afford --

A: 1900's were Tsar's time.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Tsar's time. And it was call -- called Liktroich it's a famous high school. Mama was fluent, but I mean really fluent in French, German, Russian, Polish and Lithuanian. And when the war started --

Q: Which war?

A: First World War. She was working with famous Polish refugee committee. Must be in '17 - '18, around that time.

Q: Back in Lithuania?

A: Back in they -- that was still, I believe, in Riga.

Q: In Latvia.

A: In Latvia.

Q: Well, excuse me, I must go back to the other question.

A: Yeah?

Q: When you say it was the Tsar's time, nevertheless, she is a girl who comes from a family and we don't know what kept that family going financially.

A: I can't answer. I don't know whether the grandfather used to send something or not, tha -- I really have no idea. But they must have had means.

Q: Okay.

A: Because that -- that particular high school was like my high school, was elite high school and somehow they managed.

Q: Okay.

A: Now, because she worked in that famous Polish refugee commi -- assistance committee, that actually what later helped us to get to the west, that fact. Anyway, when Mama returned to Lithuania, she started to work for our government.

Q: That means the --

A: Lithuanian nu -- new --

Q: Independent --

A: -- independent government which was forming in those days. I have a very interesting picture of the -- maybe about 40 males and my mother, a lone female sitting in the middle, which -- which we received from a person who was deported to Siberia and handed a picture to my mother's nephew, who was serving in ri -- Soviet army. Anyway, Mama worked all these years during the formation of Lithuania and that's where she met my father.

Q: That was one of my questions.

A: That's where she met my father. They were fighting. It was, if you know, Shirvintu Yedraichu Baras. That's the place where the biggest fights for independence were taking place.

Q: In what years would you say? Was that 1918, or --

A: 1918 --

Q: 1918.

A: -- yeah, 1918. This was if you -- if you not familiar with Lithuanian history, at that time we had to fight the [indecipherable] army, the Bermontas Soviet army, the Polish army, and we had front on three sides. The f-famous battles of Shirvintu Yedraichu were the most difficult to conduct over there. That's -- that's where the officers were sent for a couple of days, like we call

in this country for recreation. To relax couple of days and go back to the front. That's where she met my father.

Q: So he is now introduced into the picture.

A: Yes.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about him, his family, where he was born and so on?

A: My grandmother on father's side had five sons. No daughters, just five sons. Youngest one died in his infancy and the four sons grew up. Papa was born in a farming village called Illovieciai, [indecipherable] not too far from the city of Siauliai.

Q: Mm-hm. Was he the youngest, the oldest?

A: He was the oldest one.

Q: And what year was he born?

A: One asa -- 1903.

Q: So he was younger than your mother?

A: Three years.

Q: I see. And his name was?

A: Jacobus.

Q: Jacobus. And his --

A: I'm not used to this Jacob Gens and somebody. Was always Jacobus Gensus.

Q: I see. And his brothers, what were their names?

A: Next one was Salavonus Gensus.

Q: Salomon? Solomon?

A: Yes. Next one was Ephraimus. We used to call him Froizim, it's shorter.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And the fourth one was Rudunus. Rufka.

Q: Reuben.

A: Reuben.

Q: What kind of a family was this? What was their -- how did they make their living?

A: All I know, that while the grandfather was not too sick, he was -- he had very, very bad asthma. Until that time he was trading with -- what do you call it? [indecipherable]

Q: Trading crabs? I don't underst -- it was --

A: Something -- the small ones.

Q: Oh yeah, little crabs.

A: Little crabs, right.

Q: So it was some sort of seafood?

A: He sold some sort of seafood.

Q: Okay.

A: And that was a big enterprise.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But the --

Q: It's interesting cause it's not a -- not anywhere near the ocean.

A: Well, but you know they -- somehow they managed to bring it in.

Q: Yeah.

A: All I remember, that twice a year I would stay two weeks each for Christmas and two wits -- weeks each for Easter in Shonay --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- with my grandparents. But at that time already grandfather did not leave the bed.

Q: So he was ill.

A: He was very ill. It was a very -- how should I say, normal Lithuanian family. Both grandparents were blonde, blue-eyed. Neither one looked Jewish.

Q: But it was a Jewish family.

A: Jewish family, right.

Q: Yes.

A: All sons attended Lithuanian schools, all sons attended Lithuanian universities and it was, to them it was a n -- normal thing. They felt Lithuanian.

Q: Was it a religious family?

A: No.

Q: And do you know why? Do yo -- would -- did that question ever come up as to why it was not a particularly religious family?

A: The question never was an issue, because my mother's family was n-neither. So --

Q: So both -- and your mother's family was what -- what -- what would have been her religious background, had it been a religious one?

A: Oh, a Roman Catholic.

Q: A Roman Catholic.

A: Yes.

Q: So, in other words, your mother was Roman Catholic, your father Jewish, but neither was --

A: Jewish, and there was no clash, no, not at all.

Q: Not -- and -- but there was also no great adherence to --

A: To -- to one anoth --

Q: -- one another's traditions.

A: Yes.

Q: I see --

A: They never changed religions. There was never a conversation, would you get baptized or would you accept ju -- Judaism, never, never. And I was left alone. They never pushed me into one direction or the other. In those days in Lithuania, all our birth certificates were religious. Mine was not. I had the German birth certificate. It was like we didn't have civil -- Lithuania didn't have any civil ceremonies, only --

Q: But it see --

A: -- only religious ones.

Q: But it is am -- it is an interesting kind of irony, if you were born in a border town that is still within the territory of the state of Lithuania, yet your birth certificate is in German --

A: German --

Q: -- and it's civil.

A: Yeah.

Q: It's a little bit strange. Something --

A: It's -- it is strange.

Q: Yeah.

A: You don't have it usually, because it -- today you could -- you don't have it in Lithuania any more, it's not that the church gives you birth certificate. Today it -- you go to city hall and get it. But in those days Lithuania didn't have it. So that's why I escaped all that, you know, big issue. It never bothered me, and it never bothered my paper -- parents.

Q: So you didn't -- you didn't go to any Catholic religious --

A: No.

Q: -- classes, you never went to any --

A: No.

Q: -- Jewish classes.

A: We had -- we had -- we had the acr -- rabbi, we had the Lutheran and we had the Orthodox and we have Roman Catholic priests teaching at the high school. The -- quite a few of us stayed away from religious -- not only Jewish children who were in school, but also the -- we had some Orthodox, we had some of a -- Lutherans, who didn't attend either. So we just spent that hour, you know, waiting outside.

Q: Oh, so you're saying in the public schools, there was a li -- religious class, is that ri --

A: Oh yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Oh yes.

Q: And whatever religion you happened to belong to --

A: You had to -- you -- you -- if you wanted, you had --

Q: Did your parents tell you the story of how they met? Did you ever learn --

A: Oh yes.

Q: Okay, so tell us the story of how they met.

A: It -- I ha -- I remember Mama telling that my father approached her, and she had -- she didn't know him at all, and she was kind of trying to -- not get rid of him, but tried not to get into a conversation, there was -- there was no proper introduction or anything. And he was very persistent. She had no idea about his nationality or his religion or anything. And somehow -- somehow they started to date. I know only one thing, that at that time my father was engaged.

And Mama only told me that she remembers looking through the window, seeing grandmother come to that place where h-he was stationed at that time.

Q: His mother?

A: His mother. And she -- he told her la -- later on that she was trying to persuade him to drop -- see -- whoever he is seeing and come back to Siauliai when he'll be able and to stay with his fiancé. She did not persuade him. I don't know Mama's year of marriage, but if I was born in '26, probably must have been married somewhere around '24 - '23. You see, in those days, in Lithuania, I think in the entire country, you couldn't count to 10 to find mixed marriages. It was very, very unusual. It was even worse than in those days in United States if you had a black and white marriage. It was unheard of.

Q: So this is --

A: It was unheard of. I think what -- what make my mother decide to -- to do it, first of all, I would describe him as -- not as a Jew in Lithuania, but a Lithuanian of Jewish extraction.

Q: Is that how she saw him?

A: No, she saw him who he is, but I mean, that made it easier to get into the marriage.

Q: For her?

A: For her, I think so.

Q: And for him?

A: For him? They were not religious people, so that didn't mean anything. And what they did, they also have a German marriage certificate. They did the same thing when I was born, but by coincidence over there, they did the same thing --

Q: So where did they marry?

A: They married also on the border, with a German document. So they didn't have to use either religion for their marriage certificate.

Q: So it was a civil ceremony?

A: Civil ceremony. Lithuania didn't have it. That eliminated changing the religions, either this or that, and so we lived happily ever after.

Q: But let me get back to this a little bit. Even if the families were not particularly religious, and your parents were not particularly li -- religious, you mentioned that your paternal grandmother had tried to dissuade your father from marrying your mother.

A: Yes, but his fiancé was also Lithuanian.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: So that -- that was not an issue of religion, that was an issue, don't drop --

Q: I see.

A: Yeah.

Q: Don't drop the first one.

A: Yeah. Mm-hm.

Q: And were -- were your parents accepted by the in-laws?

A: Absolutely. Absolutely. My father's -- my grandfather on Father's side adored my mother. Adored. I mean, exactly in the word, adored my mother. Mama helped to put his brothers through universities. Mama took them in. They stayed a long time with us. And on Mother's side there was exactly the same situation. Exactly the same situation. You mentioned before my father's brother. My mother's brother found my father's brother in Vilnius on the street. That's how we got in touch. So it's -- it's a -- they were very close. Both families were very close.

Q: I'm a little confused about this incident of finding one another on the street. At what year are you talking about?

A: They went 40 -- what is it, 40 -- 40-something? When he came from Vorkuta.

Q: Oh, you're [indecipherable]

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay, so you're talking about after the war now --

A: After the war, right, yeah.

Q: -- where they found one another. Let's still stay in the 1920's, and did you know your maternal grandmother?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Yes.

Q: And so you spent time with your mother's side of the family as well as your father's side of the family?

A: Well, my mother's side of the family was in Kaunas.

Q: Ah, okay.

A: Yeah. It's only my father family who was in Siauliai.

Q: All right. So you moved from Jurbarkas to Kaunas --

A: To Kaunas.

Q: -- with your father --

A: Right.

Q: -- as he finished his studies.

A: Right.

Q: All right, so he was -- he was going to university as you were growing up.

A: Right.

Q: Okay. What was -- are there any memories of your childhood with your greater family together, with your -- with your grandparents, with your uncles, with your aunts, anything that you can ti -- that you remember, that sticks out?

A: Well, during the Easter break, my father's family always had a Seder. Even so, the youngest uncle couldn't stop laughing during the ceremony, but it was there. I remember big, big crates of matzo, silver dishes which were stored from year to year, I remember that.

Q: So you participated?

A: Oh absolutely. Absolutely. During Christmas, I remember that their neighbors had all this very big Christmas celebration, they were Lithuanians. So I spent a lot of time for Christmas with the neighbors who had children my own age. Otherwise I just loved going to Siauliai to be pampered by three uncles and grandparents.

Q: And your uncles were younger? They were all younger brothers of your father?

A: They were younger brothers. When I was finishing attending last years of high school, the youngest brother was a student in Belgium. So the age difference was not such a shocking one, yeah.

Q: Okay. Well, thank you, we will go to the --

End of Tape One

Beginning Tape Two

Q: Well, it's unusual. It's -- it's unusual what you describe, because there is a certain irony, or let's say contradiction. On the one hand, in your family, both your very nuclear family of your mother and your father, and then the larger, extended family, you say that there was a great deal of closeness and that the in-laws liked the other partner very, very much.

A: That's correct.

Q: But in the larger society, you're saying you could count on the fingers of -- of both hands how many couples were in mixed marriages. So how do you explain that? How do you explain th-th- they got on so well within, but were in an environment that was very unlikely?

A: Well, there is a -- two words in Lithuanian terminology. The words are Savanoris-Kurejas. These are the people who fought for Lithuanian's independence and put Lithuania on the map. These people were privileged society. We had privileges. For example, if I would have chosen to go to a high school, free. My conservatory, music, was free. My ballet school, state ballet school, was free. They were given as many privileges as they could. Papa was one of the officers' corps, who fought at the f -- with the famous first pulkas regiment, probably. They were one for all, all for one.

Q: So he was a Savanoris-Kurejas?

A: Yes, was Savanoris-Kurejas, absolutely.

Q: And what is the literal translation of those words?

A: A volunteer -- oh, kurejas is -- e -- it doesn't sound in -- in English it doesn't make any sense. Here we understand volunteer army. They -- they were volunteers. They put their books in high school, they went to fight.

Q: I see.

A: They went to fight for the country.

Q: Were there --

A: So he was accepted in the society as one of those volunteer fighters for Lithuanian independence, without any attachment of religion. And that officer's corps, that solidarity that -- with the officers, later on proved how the solidarity worked between them.

Q: I see. I see, so that was one of the reasons why your -- you were able to attend more elite schools as you were growing up, as you said, and -- and have some privileges, because of that.

A: Well, I didn't use privileges for the free high school.

Q: Okay.

A: University was free, also. Even so, the other university students had to pay. All these volunteer fighters had privileges for their family. I didn't use it. I just used it for the conservatory and for the ballet school, but I didn't use it for the high school, and I was too young to use it for university.

Q: How is it that your father came to join the army and take part in this -- in these battles? What was the ethos, what was the -- the motivation that propelled him?

A: I think it had to start with his parents. My grandmother Lithuanian was very strange dialect. We don't talk in towns in that dialect. It's a dialect --

Q: Your Jewish grandmother, you're talking about?

A: My Jewish grandmother, yes. In translation we would call it lowlands, Zemaitji, or it's normally, in geographical sense, it's called Samogitia. She came from part of Lithuania closer to the Baltic Sea. And naturally we understand them, but they have a very heavy accent. Which is very pretty, by the way. And my grandmother, my father's mother, taught me all old Lithuanian songs. All Lithuanian folklore things. It was I got from my father's mother. My mother's mother,

again, came from St. Petersburg and Riga. She was not so much engrossed in Lithuanian, you know, language and so on. Everything I have, it's from my father's mother.

Q: That's th -- also unusual.

A: That's very unusual, but you see, that's -- that's what it is. I am the product of two -- two lenk -- two nationalities, two religions and I fit and -- in here, and I fit in here.

Q: Were your grandparents though -- outside of your family, your lo -- your nuclear and your extended family, did your parents, or did you experience any kind of prejudice? Any kind of difficulties? Anything that made it awkward, that there was this Jewish Lithuanian union and that you were the child of it. Did they experience anti-Semitism?

A: They or me?

Q: Both.

A: Neither. Neither. The only first time in 1942, I had a very good voice and the conductor in Vilnius in the symphony -- what we had in Vilnius, we had a musical outfit, I -- if I would know the name -- anyway, I joined the choir and the conductor was my music teacher in high school, and couple of days after we had rehearsals he met me on the street and he said, Ada, don't come any more. I was told who you are. So be careful, and don't come in any more.

Q: And this is during the war --

A: That -- that -- during the war.

Q: When there's already a ghetto --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- in Vilnius. I see.

A: Yeah, that was the first time that I experienced somebody telling that.

Q: But during your growing up years, before the war --

A: Never, never.

Q: Did it -- when you were with Lithuanians though, not Jewish Lithuanians, but Lithuanians, did you hear any kind of -- general kind of anecdotes or -- or sayings, or ways that would diminish, let's say, somebody who was Jewish?

A: You know what? The class of people that I attended the school with, was above it.

Q: I see. So you say it -- it did exist, but not in the milieu that -- your circle --

A: No.

Q: -- you were in.

A: No.

Q: Okay. Did your parents ever talk about such things, about any difficulties that they might have heard of, or any things that were harder for them to take because they were -- they had made other decisions?

A: No. What helped a lot probably, is that Father always worked for Lithuanian institutions, [indecipherable] Ministeria, Minister of Justice. And then Lietukis, the organization -- do you know what Lietukis is?

Q: Tell us.

A: Okay. It's an organ -- it's a association of Lithuanian co-ops. It was all over the country. Every little town, every village had a co-op. And that outfit had in their hands entire import and entire export of the country.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: It just so happened that my father was in the imports of oil, gas and my husband was in the other part of lithua -- export from Lithuania. It's just a coincidence. So he always worked with Lithuania and France, and with -- he was always in that atmosphere.

Q: There are articles that are now appearing in -- in Lithuania that explore, for want of a better way of putting it, the rise of anti-Semitism in the 1930's in the country. And a number of these articles talk about comp -- competition and a competitive kind of conflict of interest between organizations such as Lietukis and inde -- whether they would be Jewish independent [indecipherable] --

A: That's correct.

Q: -- companies and so on.

A: Absolutely correct.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about that?

A: I can't tell you too, too much, but I know that my father tried to introduce Lietukis to his Jewish -- to the people who had business in their hands, people who were Jewish. He was trying to explain that this is the country you're in, let's move more towards a Lithuanian site, doing business with Lithuanians. And you see, this is again in answer to your question did he ever feel, he was trying to get the -- to get the Jewish merchants take more merchandise from Lietukis. He was very much against using Russian language in Lithuan -- in Jewish society. He was very much against. He traveled all over Lithuania during the fin -- Finnish Soviet war, giving lectures --

Q: In 1939.

A: -- right, giving lectures about the [indecipherable] Mannerheim's fight with the Soviets. And from his side, he didn't see himself as a Jew, he saw himself as a Lithuanian patriot, when you [indecipherable] those people.

Q: And did he talk about what kind of reaction this type -- these efforts were having? Did he make headroad? Were there -- were there some of his Jewish colleagues or friends who were not part of Lietukis who accepted it, or did he talk about what his experiences were?

A: Well, it wasn't easy to persuade. You know, the merchant is a merchant and they have their local how do you -- how would say it, local ways. But he managed, he managed to pull quite a few to buy from Lietukis. That what it was, buy from Lietukis. My father was an expert, he published a book which Mama was afraid to -- to keep around when the Soviets came, about the all kind of merchandise in connection with oils and gas. Everything connect -- in connection with that area. And that was his last work, absolutely. So that's -- that's all I can tell you. And he was the only Jewish person in the entire country in Lietukis, the only one.

Q: And why would you think that was?

A: Because nobody regarded him as a Jew.

Q: So if they ha-had regarded him as a Jew, he wouldn't have been accepted?

A: But he wa -- he was a Jew --

Q: I know.

A: -- everybody knew it. But nobody -- nobody regarded him as a Jew.

Q: What I mean to say is if there had been somebody else who had been Jewish and did not have the same, let's say, point of view as your -- your father, but had wanted to be part of Lietukis, would they have gotten such acceptance?

A: No.

Q: And the reason being?

A: Because he was a Jew.

Q: So there was anti-Semitism in the country, and quite --

A: Officially no. Officially no, but in the -- in -- for example, my father's next brothers, Salomonis, Solomon, he was the only person in Lietuvos bankas, the bank of Lithuania. Again, another example. So you could get through, if you were accepted by Lithuanian community as one of ours. Not as a Russian talking Jewish person, which was the style of our Jewish population. That's why it was so difficult to s-save sometimes, children, because they spoke Russian and they spoke Yiddish and they didn't speak Lithuanian. That was a tragedy that really was an -- a very important factor. Many children could ha-have been saved.

Q: You're talking now about the war.

A: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: About the -- the ghetto and the Holocaust. Let me go back a little bit again to World War I just for a question. Your father joined the -- the military and fought for Lithuanian independence. Were there other Jewish people that you knew --

A: Yes.

Q: -- Jewish men that you knew --

A: Yes.

Q: -- who did the same?

A: Yes. There was -- I don't know the number, but I remember during the parades with -- when we used to have big military parades, it was suba -- [speaks Lithuanian here]

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Like I see in my -- you know, I saw a film in United States and my father was in that film, too. I see the -- I would ca -- probably say about -- about a hundred, they were all fighters for Lithuanian freedom.

Q: So this [speaks Lithuanian] would be translated as a Jewish --

A: The Jewish volunteers --

Q: -- volunteers --

A: -- for Lithuanian independence. Were Jewish fighters. Jewish fighter, volunteers for Lithuanian independence.

Q: And there were at least a hundred people --

A: I -- I see -- I see the parade in -- I see in my eyes, yeah.

Q: And that was a --

A: It could have been more because the parades was always in Kaunas and there -- others in the other villages in other towns who probably -- not always used to come to Kaunas. But there was quite a few.

Q: I'm -- I mention this because the -- one of the charges of -- of Lithuanians against the Jewish community is that the Jewish community in Lithuania sided with the Soviets when 1940 came around. That's the charge. And I remember talking to a number of survivors who would say there were people who fought for Lithuania's independence, and that was not acknowledged, as they were being driven to the pits to be shot. Is that sort of experience, that -- can you address that at all?

A: In life there are two groups of people. There are richer people, there are factory working element. Well, you cannot deny it, you have pictures, you see who stood in our main street accepting Soviet army. You see the pictures, you don't have to be told. The people with red flags standing and greeting Soviet army were the element -- factory element. Jewish factory element. The people -- the richer element, in percentage, was deported to Siberia -- higher percentage than Lithuanians. I don't mean number, I mean percentage. So now you adjust these two factors. No intelligent class was willing to huh, Soviets are here. That was not the case. The factory class,

yes. What remembered in people's memories are the red flags and who are the red flags. Only they, when those people stood with red flags, my father, Mama and I, we all worked -- walked to [speaks Lithuanian]

Q: The War Museum.

A: The War Museum.

Q: In Kaunas, mm-hm.

A: Where for the last time -- I don't know if you're familiar, every evening the invalids came from the building, they paraded through the grounds and there was a ceremony. Whoever came to that, that day to the place, we were singing the Lithuanian national -- national anthem, everybody was crying. It was unbelievably mova -- m-moving scene. So you see, you can't blame the -- you can't blame the whole Jewish nation, same way you cannot blame the whole Lithuanian nation for what happened.

Q: It is a bitter moment though, for those who would have been volunteers. It's a bitter moment for everybody, but in particular the people who had volunteered for Lithuania's independence to then be called traitors and not have that counted at all.

A: I don't know if you want to make a -- okay. Attorney Gornionskis from Kaunas --

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: -- was one of those. When the Soviets came, he took his f-family, moved to Vilnius.

Q: He was a Jewish volunteer for the [indecipherable]

A: Yeah.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I'll tell you very quickly, because we are too far away. When the Lithuanian hapunes --

Q: Who would this be?

A: You had to be Lithuanian in those days. Hapune come from a word hapun. Hapun is to grab.

They were called in Jewish language, hapunes. These were the Lithuanians with the white --

Q: Armbands?

A: Armbands.

Q: Balta raištį.

A: Balta raištį. Came to his apartment and a Lithuanian officer was living in the same apartment and Lithuanian officer told him -- he was active officer in Lithuanian army at th -- th -- in those days, is that Mr. Gornionski, do not answer the door. They see my name on the door, don't even come close to the door. And whatever, hide in my room and lock the door. Don't even leave my room. When the hapunes came to the apartment, Mr. Gornionski put his wife and two children in the Lithuanian army officer's room, and Gornionski said, oh for God's sake, I am the volunteer with Savanoris-Kurejas, they are not going to do any harm to me. So he opened the door and his appearance was extremely Jewish. You couldn't take him for anybody else. And the Lithuanians taunted, oh come on, you such and such. So he said to him, look, I am a volunteer fighter. I fought for your country's independence. That's why you have a country today, because of people like me. And that made the man wild. He started to beat him there, to the pulp. So that was the reaction between one and the other. Now, how do I know all about it, is because of something very similar happened in our place. My father said to Mama, please go to see what happened to Gornionski. Because there was an aktion when those -- when --

Q: So this was in 1941?

A: '41, yes.

Q: Right when the Nazis are invading --

A: Right, yes.

Q: -- during those first weeks.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And this is what happens to -- and did he die, Mr. --

A: Well, I'll tell you what happened. So at -- Mama went and Mrs. Gornionski opened the door and she told Mama what happened because she could hear everything, even though they were locked in the room. Mama ran to Lithuanian military commandantura, Lithuanian military headquarters. And Gornionskis had very, very good friend, Songila -- I have to remember the name. I think Majora Songila, if I'm not wrong. Songila -- whatever he was doing, he dropped everything, he ran to Lukiškės jail, where everybody was taking, to Lukiškės. He went all over through the hundreds of people that were already brought and he was screaming, Gornionskis, Gornionskis, Gornionskis until he couldn't scream any more. He couldn't find him. So whether from be -- being beaten so badly he just passed out, or whether he was so overcome with what happened to him that he didn't react, Major Songila couldn't find him.

Q: So he died.

A: We don't know -- well -- well, naturally he died. Naturally they -- everything from the Lukiškės was taken to Paneriai and shot.

Q: That's a bitter moment.

A: It is a bitter moment, but you see there's again an explanation to -- to all of that certain explanation. This was about two -- two -- two, three weeks after deportations to Siberia. Now, you're too young to remember. I remember. Deportations to Siberia brought a lot of anger.

Q: But why should it be directed against the country's Jews?

A: The red flags of the people on the alley of liberty, [Lithuanian]. People don't forget things like that. People who worked in personnel departments of each institution, kadroskidos, they were in the hands of certain nationality.

Q: So you --

A: All that added up to the outburst of hatred. They didn't look at the time, were you pro or contra, it just mass, the whole mass was experiencing that hatred.

Q: How is it that your parents didn't, or your family didn't? You father didn't, or his -- his uncles -- or did they?

A: How -- how did we -- what do you mean?

Q: Make it through those first few weeks.

A: Well, that was all [indecipherable] officer's help. See, the -- I -- I tol -- I mentioned that, it probably belonged to that famous first regiment. The closeness of the officers was unbelievable. When the Soviets came in 1914, Papa was the first person from Lietukis thrown out of job. Not only thrown out of job, but not given right to live in Kaunas, and not given right -- not given the labor book. So for awhile we couldn't understand what's going on. We never had anything to do with the Soviet Union. But after a few days, people started to see what's going on. So Mama said to my father, you know what? Go to Vilnius. His brother, who was bor -- working in Bank of Lithuania in the meantime was transferred from Siauliai to Vilnius, so she said, go to Vilnius --

Q: This is brother who -- which was --

A: Salomonis.

Q: Salomon.

A: Yeah. Solomon. And he went to Vilnius. He tried to get a job in Vilnius. Whenever he would put his name and go through Kadroz Kiduz, that office of political personnel, he couldn't get the job.

Q: Why?

A: Why? First of all, he was an officer. Secondly, he went all over Lithuania talking, giving speeches against Soviet Union.

Q: In the Finnish German --

A: In the finni -- fi -- fi --

Q: -- in the Finnish Soviet war.

A: -- Soviet war.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And secondly he was not a class that they want to have. In those days, when you opened our main newspaper, on two pages were hundreds and hundreds Lithuanian army personnel out of work, out of work, out of work. They would tell all these officers are out.

Q: Which newspaper was this?

A: That was still the first days [indecipherable] Aidas, but then it change already to different names. But they gave a list of, in alphabetical order of each and every officer that used to serve in Lithuanian army.

Q: So that means during the Soviet time, that is in 1940, this echo of Lithuania newspaper was still being published.

A: From the beginning. From the beginning it was published, but then they changed the names, yeah.

Q: I see. My point though, is I'm trying to understand is that even with the Soviet takeover, a newspaper that was not Soviet controlled was allowed to be published and allowed to have the names of people who were unemployed listed there. That's unusual, if I'm understanding it correctly.

A: The -- they knew we -- what -- don't forget there was a -- a -- the -- they formed a Lithuanian pro-Soviet government. So the government had no choice. If they were told that all the officers' corps has to be out of the army, they had to do it. So that's where the -- all the officers were listed. If there exists a fi -- somewhere you know, in archives, the newspapers from that area, you'll find it. So you say how come. So anyway, to make a long story short, Father couldn't get work in Vilnius. It happened that he met one of the people from his fighting years who was a head of health department in Vilnius. Pulkanikas Colonel Usas. Usas saw him on the street and say hey, what are you doing here in Vilnius, you're in Kaunas. So my father explained to him that yes, I am in Kaunas, my family is in Kaunas, but I can't -- I don't have right to work in Kaunas and I don't have right to register in Kaunas to live. So I came to Vilnius to see maybe I can do something in here. So Colonel Usas told him look, we'll do something different. I will not put you through that political personnel department. I will hire you as chief accountant and you'll be listed as a daily worker, a laborer, so you don't have to go through the political process. And Mr. Usas kept my father, as he said, in the health department, protected him as much as he could. And when the Germans came in Vilnius, the regulation that no Jew is allowed to work for a government office came not immediately. So, every morning, when Jews were already wearing the white -- not -- not yellow stars yet, the white armband, white and blue --

Q: Jews were wearing a white and -- white --

A: Yes, white and blue armband -- armband. So Mama used to take my father to the health department --

End of Tape Two

Beginning Tape Three

Q: Okay, so your father was working in the health department in Vilnius, i-in -- in the -- what is the capital city now.

A: Right.

Q: The Germans arrive and his protector, whose name was?

A: Pulkanikas Colonel Usas.

Q: Usas.

A: U-s-a-s.

Q: Okay, experiences some sort of difficulties or pressure. Can you tell us about what happened?

A: Which one of them? My father's experiences -- pressure, or Colonel Usas?

Q: Well, isn't it that ker --

A: They had --

Q: -- whoever -- whoever is --

A: -- okay.

Q: -- yeah, what happened?

A: That was a law. It was a law advertised on every pole, on every telephone pole, and not only on the poles, we used to have such a -- that structure, on every couple of cor -- ca -- corners of the street, where you would announce concerts, operas and so on. Everywhere was the new regulation issued by the -- signed by the new Lithuanian government, that no more Jewish extraction people are allowed to work for a state institution. That was a law. And Usas had no way to keep him any longer. He kept him up til that time.

Q: And this is in June or July of 1941?

A: That's right, that's right.

Q: And so it's -- if it's issued by the Lithuanian government, do you mean the Lithuanian provisional government?

A: Provisional government.

Q: So it's a provisional government directive, not a German directive?

A: It was -- you know, it's difficult to tell today, because there was regulations put out by the German military headquarters, by Germans. We used to call Gebiets commissar, the ca --

Q: Regional commissioner.

A: Regional co-commissioner for Baltic countries. I can't tell you exactly now which one is which, but anyway, Usas or -- Colonel Usas told my father that the only thing I can think what to do in this situation, I'll appoint you as a director of the Jewish hospital. At least you'll be safe for awhile as a director of hospital because, he said, I believe the Germans will not shut the hospital. They are -- they will be afraid of epidemics, typhoid or whatever, so you should be safe in the hospital. And -- my father never had anything to do with hospital or anything, but he said well, this is the only thing I can do at the time being, unless you want to go into the hiding. And at that time my father said he is not thinking about hiding. He'll go with his entire family, which at that time was quite a few in Vilnius, he'll go and take the position of director of the hospital. And he stayed in the hospital for quite awhile.

Q: Now at this point, I'd like to leave that for a moment.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: I have a question about Colonel Usas and -- and it's one that's -- that it bi -- sort of like rouses my curiosity. Here is somebody who was a -- let's say a comrade of your father's from the officer corps of the Lithuanian independent army, who survives, let's say, a Soviet purge. In other words, his is not one of the names that's on the list of those who are unemployed, who ends

up in Vilnius during the Soviet rule and is able to offer your father protection. And then lasts long enough to still hold that post when the German come -- Germans come in. How is that possible with a person of such a background, to be able to do this?

A: First of all, he was a doctor [speaks Lithuanian here]

Q: Ear -- ear, no --

A: A -- he was a doctor ear, nose and throat.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So he was not just an administrative person, he was a doctor. So when the Soviets had those lists of officers out of the army, he was probably not in the regular army, he was a doctor.

Q: Okay.

A: He was a doctor. A political person, a doctor. So that's how he managed to do it. Now, you want me to continue in which direction?

Q: Okay, I would say let's go back to the 1930's --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- a little bit. We were -- we were talking earlier about your larger extended family, about your father's work at Lietukis, which was a cooperative association.

A: There's one thing I forgot to mention.

Q: Okay.

A: We had a paramilitary organization called Sauliai.

Q: Okay.

A: Not Siauliai, but Sauliai, s-a-u.

Q: What does that translate as?

A: Para -- nothing.

Q: Oh, para --

A: Paramilitary organization. And my father was one of the leaders of that paramilitary organization. The members wore a uniform similar to army uniform.

Q: Was it like a national guard?

A: Something like national guard. The problem is that it was a very patriotic paramilitary organization which unfortunately, when the Germans came got a very bad review. It wasn't before.

Q: Did it -- was it a deserved review? What did they do? How did they --

A: Kill the Jews.

Q: Well, let's -- what did they do, yeah.

A: Killed the Jews.

Q: Oh, they killed the Jews.

A: Mm-hm. But, I haven't seen, and I don't know, but this is, if you will look into whatever is written, you will find. So you see, Father was a head of that organization in many places. So the Soviets couldn't digest him. Plus he's going all over the country, talking about the Finnish war. And he was known. Father was a member of Jewish -- a Revisionistic organization called Brit ha-Hayal.

Q: What is that? Tell us about that.

A: The -- the Jewish people have Zionistic and Revisionistic. This was a Revisionistic organization.

Q: Was it not for patriation to Palestine? Was it --

A: Zionistic organizations were more for patriation to Palestine. Revisionistic were also s-same, but the ideologic -- ideology was different. And --

Q: How was it different?

A: I was too young to tell you about the difference. I think they were more supporting bik -- Revisionistic movement was movement for the richer people. Zionist movement was more movement of working class. I must have been around four or five years old and my father organized a military camp for members of the Brit ha-Hayal. He always felt that Jewish people don't have that military drive, let's do it and there was a big camp organized, and in that camp I learned a lot of Hebrew songs, which I happen to remember today. And th-they were pro-Israel, but I don't know how they are [indecipherable] at that time. See, Israel at that time was British. So they tried to use pressure somehow to get it out of British clutches.

Q: Did you visit him at that camp?

A: I was in the camp, Mama and I, we was -- we were in the camp. Yeah, no-no -- no other families, just Mama and I.

Q: And what do you remember from it?

A: What I remember, I remember morning drills that they had, marching like army. You tried to induce the -- you know, it's always been said the Jewish people are so often this and that, and he said it just the contrary, but you have to give them an out, somewhere how to do it, see.

Q: Mm-hm. So, training.

A: Training.

Q: And was it -- was it well attended?

A: Oh yes. They lived in there a -- for a month.

Q: And how many people do you think were there? Do you -- would you rec -- what was it, a couple of hundred? Was it fewer, was it more?

A: I-I wouldn't say couple of hundred. You see, i -- in my memory I see them lined -- lined up for the morning revai and so on. I couldn't tell you how many they had, but there was quite -- quite a group. Quite a group.

Q: And this had nothing to do with the Lithuanian military at all?

A: No, no, nothing.

Q: And the idea of it was that it would be a pr -- a force that would be part of the movement to Israel, the movement to be able to establish Israel?

A: You can't establish Israel in those days. You can't think about establishing, because it was in British clutch.

Q: Yes.

A: It was Palestine. But they did work towards it, which -- which -- I don't know how they did it.

Q: Did you know many of the other people who were at -- like --

A: Who were in the camp?

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes I did, but you see, I was four or five years old.

Q: Yeah.

A: I remember they had in our town, in Kaunas was Mr. Dushnitsky and Papa was under Mr. Dushnitsky.

Q: I see.

A: So yi -- one was a leader, he was an assistant. And I remember that after the camp they needed a worker in Lithuanian embassy. And there were two people as candidates. One was my father and another was, I can't remember now his last name. So anyway, he got that position in that Lithuanian embassy in Palestine.

Q: Oh, so there was a representation of Lithuania in Palestine?

A: Yeah, there was, there was, yeah.

Q: And so the other person got that --

A: The other person got the job, yeah. That -- what -- you see, I was too small to remember too much about [indecipherable]

Q: What languages did you speak at home? What was your language between your father, your mother and yourself?

A: Just Lithuanian.

Q: Just Lithuanian.

A: Just Lithuanian.

Q: And were other languages sometimes spoken in your house?

A: Oh yes. A lot of ad -- parents had a lot of friends from the army who were officers from the Russian Tsaristic army, incorporated into Lithuanian army.

Q: Okay, so former Tsarist officers --

A: Former Tsarist officers, right. And he had the very, very, very clo -- I -- I would say probably the closest friends. Now let me see. It was Kanaz LaPotion, Kanaz -- what -- what we called him in -- in English. [speaks Lithuanian]

Q: Ah, Grand Duke.

A: Gran -- Duke.

Q: Grand Duke, yes.

A: Duke LaPotion, yeah. But when LaPotions were visiting us, they always spoke Russian.

Q: I see.

A: Because their Lithuanian was good, but not so good. His was good, his wife's not so much.

Q: So this was part of, let's say, the ri -- White Russian --

A: White, white Tsaristic --

Q: -- Russian refugees who had --

A: -- refuges, right, right.

Q: -- who had come from Soviet --

A: Now Mrs. -- Mr. LaPotion's brother, Kellanos Shablavinskas was the -- was attached to our president of Lithuania.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So this was our group, th-the LaPotions, the Shablavinska, but they, because of the w-women, who don't learn so quick -- the men had to learn the language, but the women didn't, they spoke Russian.

Q: I see.

A: But otherwise I never heard Russian in the house.

Q: But your mother spoke Russian, so it was --

A: Oh, she pa -- she spoke perfect Russian.

Q: And when did you learn it?

A: You know, I cannot answer the question. I sometimes think to myself, when and where did I pick up the language? We used to spend summers around Kulautuva.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But a lot of Jewish families used to stay in summer --

Q: Where is Kulautuva?

A: Kulautuva is past -- on the river Nemunas, past Kaunas.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Not far away. I imagine those children must have talked Russian, I must have picked it up there. But, in 1940, when the Russians came in, I was graduating and they pushed us to learn Russian in that one year. They expected us to pick it up. We didn't know the alphabet, we didn't know how to write Russian letters, but we were given ins-instructions every day. We sat in high school til seven o'clock at night. They had --

Q: You were how old then?

A: 14.

Q: 14. And so you hadn't -- your knowledge of Russian to that point had been in verbal conversation rather than --

A: Just verbal, but not during my growing years, I didn't have anyone to talk Russian.

Q: Okay, so it was not --

A: Yeah --

Q: -- there was no academic formal background --

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

Q: -- there was no -- all of a sudden you have a crash course.

A: Yeah.

Q: Before we get back to 1940 I wanted to, you know, talk a little bit more about those 1930's.

Did you have -- when you were growing up, who were your closest friends your age?

A: My age?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: The -- the closest friend was the daughter of our minister -- minister what int -- in-interior.

Skučas, [indecipherable] Skučas.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: That was my closest friend.

Q: So it would be his daughter.

A: [indecipherable] his daughter.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: When the Russians came in, Skučas took his wife and daughter to the border.

Q: Of?

A: Lithuania and Germany. They let his wife and daughter across, the Lithuanian guards wouldn't let [indecipherable] Skučas across. He was in the ultimatum where the Russians put the ultimatum to our government. They said that they want to have arrested Mr. Skučas and Mr. Povilaitis, both from Ministry of Interior. So they took Mr. Skučas back, he was arrested. When I met Mrs. Skučas in Florida, she asked me, Ada, do something, try to find out. Maybe some Jewish people sat with him somewhere. Maybe anybody knows, whatever there is, we have no idea what happened to him. We are read in the paper that he was finished, but no details, no place of burial. And I told her, Mrs. Skučas, I say, we have the same problem in our house. We don't know exact date, we don't know where, we have no burial and we have no place where he is, you know, same thing. So I sympathize with her as much as, you know, because she went exactly what my mother went through. And that was my closest friend.

Q: I see. I see. Did you have friends who were part of the Jewish community?

A: Yes. They lived not too far from us, and we were friends since probably the age of four or five. We played together -- we played together with her. For some reason I renamed her Lucia. Her name was Judith. I never liked the Judith name, I renamed her Lucia, so that even her parents, when I was there, called her Lucia. And --

Q: What language did you speak?

A: Lithuanian.

Q: I see.

A: Yeah.

Q: So they were also more assimilated.

A: Nope, very Jewish.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Very Jewish, very Jewish. And that's a house where I heard a lot of Jewish language. Her mother was very famous. She had an atelier. Seam -- seamstress.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: She had many workers in the atelier, and those workers gradually went to Palestine. They used to get the landing permits somehow through the zionis -- Zionist organization, and they went to Palestine. So Lucia, I lost track of her when the Soviets came. And then again, after the liberation, I met her in a theater. It was a very difficult moment, and for her and for me.

Q: Why?

A: Well, she lost her father, I lost my father. I had no idea that she's alive, she had no idea that I am alive. It -- it was a -- very difficult for me. But anyway -- so otherwise I didn't have Jewish friends, no. But she had to be -- she was in an e -- two houses away, so we always played together. That's the only -- but otherwise in the Jewish society, no, it didn't happen.

Q: Did you hear some of your other playmates at school make fun of Jews?

A: No.

Q: Di -- no.

A: Nothing. Not -- not in that class of people. We were -- I'll show you the pictures. We had a very large number of Jewish students who excelled, so that from the side of teachers you would never hear anything like that, never.

Q: So this is at that elite high school that you went --

A: Elite high school, right.

Q: -- that you went to.

A: Yeah.

Q: I see.

A: Yeah.

Q: And of course if you have a larger number of kids who are Jewish then it's unlikely --

A: Unlikely.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. What were -- you know, as the 1930's were progressing, you were getting older and older, from childhood into young teenager.

A: Right.

Q: What are your memories from that time? A --

A: Wonderful.

Q: In what way?

A: Wonderful in every way. In every way. I -- I was playing piano. I entered Kaunas Conservatory. I was very skinny, so my parents decided that I need more muscles, so they put me in the ballet school. But our ballet school does not compare to American ballet school. Six days a week, every day, just Sunday off.

Q: Oh my.

A: That was a state ballet school. So, between ballet and conservatory and sports, I had no time to be bored or anything. I had a wonderful time, and I was very good in sports also. I loved to ski. I have a silver medal in Lithuanian ski competitions in the senior group --

Q: Where there are mountains?

A: Yes -- not with mountains, cross country.

Q: Uh-huh, okay.

A: Cross country s -- right. And I was good runner. So can you imagine having all this and to do the music lessons at home? The high school lessons didn't bother me, I was very good at that, but the music, you had to do it. So there was no free time. I had the wonderful time, wonderful friends. The skating rink, all they had to do was run down the hill to backyard into the skating rink. I have plenty of pictures from skating rink with all my friends. And since I was the youngest, I always was the smallest one, but that didn't matter.

Q: When did world events, particularly those events in Germany start entering your consciousness? Did peop -- you know --

A: Never.

Q: Never.

A: Never. Some of my mother's friends -- and my mo-mo-mother's and father friends went to America cause they had t -- families in America, but they went only when the Soviets came, via Japanese help, you know, the Japanese consul?

Q: Yes.

A: Yes, with his help, they went. We heard a lot of what was going in Germany because we used to spend summer in Palanga, and in the late part of 30's, the German -- Germans used to come to

Palanga and they used to tell us more or less what's going on. But we never thought it concerns us. We never thought that Hitler one day will take Klaipėda and so on and so on.

Q: Do you remember when that happened? When he did take Klaipėda?

A: What was it, 30 --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Okay, it started with the big -- big case of Sass and Neuman. Lithuania caught the spies Sass and Neuman and put them on trial.

Q: Whose spies were they?

A: Germany.

Q: They were German spies in Lithuania?

A: German spies in Lithuania. They were put on trial and I think since that trial, the atmosphere between Germany and Lithuania started to get worse and worse. And then one day Hitler put an ultimatum and that's when all the Lithuanians ran out from hi -- Žemaitija, from Klaipėda region, to Kaunas.

Q: So, from the Memel region, Memel is Klaipėda --

A: Mem -- Klaipėda, in German [indecipherable] yeah.

Q: -- in German, uh-huh. And -- and so there was an exodus?

A: Exodus.

Q: I see.

A: Absolute -- absolute exodus.

Q: Did you know any of these people?

A: Oh yes, oh yes, they entered our high schools, they entered our society and everything.

Q: Did they talk about what they had experienced?

A: They didn't experience anything, they just ran. It was an exodus to run.

Q: Oh I see, so they lost their --

A: They left --

Q: -- they left their homes, they lost their --

A: -- yes, they left everything. But it still didn't give us even th -- if you talk to the German population, many of them say they didn't know a lot. We didn't know a lot either.

Q: Right.

A: Nobody thought that a civilized nation like German nation will be able to do atrocities of the kind that they did.

Q: When you would meet people from Germany in the resort town, in Palanga by the ocean in the summer times, and they say they were talking about what was going on there --

A: You know what was the main talking?

Q: -- do you remember what they say -- what?

A: Food.

Q: I see.

A: We have no butter. You have shortage of this, this and that. That was their main thing coming to Palanga.

Q: Really?

A: They never mentioned political pressure, see? So we had no idea. We -- we knew that it's not as good as it used to be before, but our Jewish people still kept going to Germany for trade. The visas were open, you could go in and back. So you see we didn't -- we didn't know. There is a book by a Lithuanian writer, [indecipherable]

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I have the book. In that book she describes the survival of two Jewish girls.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And when I was reading that book I figured, uh-oh, I think I know who she is. She was in my school. Her father had factory, I know the name. And somehow, when I was vacationing in Maine, I came to talk about the book with one of Lithuanian singers from Canada, and -- Kabliss. And he said, oh you're right, that's her. But she doesn't have -- she has nothing to do with people from that times. And just why, what's wrong? I -- he said, I don't know, but she doesn't want to know anybody, she only keeps in touch with the family who saved her. So, why did we come to this now, I can't understand.

Q: I don't remember, but it was something to do --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- with the -- with what you know what --

A: Oh, oh. Her father -- she was attending ballet school with me, and I remember her father going to Germany and I remember her father bringing her beautiful, black shoes. And th-that's why I remember [indecipherable]. Her father kept going to Germany back and forth in business. He had the big stocking factory.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And he just went and came back. Nothing -- nothing to -- so that's way -- when you say that, did we know? No, we didn't know.

Q: No sort of premonition?

A: No, no.

Q: And now let's go east. When did you get a sense of Soviet Russia?

A: When they entered.

Q: And not before.

A: No. Before, I used to stay very often with the Skučas family, and I remember once at the dinner, he had the conversation with his wife, the Russians started to tell us that couple of Soviet soldiers have disappeared. And he said it -- it's an awful provocation. But in those days he didn't think that it'll come -- that'll be a reason for the Russians to tell that they are coming to liberate Lithuania.

Q: So the provocation is on whose side? The Russians are provoking the Lithuanians?

A: Right. That we did something to a couple of their soldiers and the soldiers disappeared, as if.

Q: I see.

A: See, that was -- that was the beginning.

Q: And that's the first premonition you have --

A: That is pre-premonition that there's some -- and then they introduced -- no, they introduced Soviet bases, basi, bases for Russian soldiers. They were not going out of the way, so they stayed on the base. And that's when they said that couple of soldiers disappeared from the base and never returned. And that was a main thing, as if, to liberate us.

Q: And how did you -- how did -- well, we'll come to that in a little bit, but ho -- you were by that point 13 - 14 years old.

A: 14.

Q: So I'd like to get a sense of what do you remember, what do you experience. How did it affect you in particular?

A: Oh yeah, I'll tell you.

Q: But it can be in the next tape.

A: Okay.

Q: Okay.

End of Tape Three

Beginning Tape Four

Q: Okay, so what ha -- a-after you remember this dinner conversation with the ministry interiors talking about the strange situation of the Soviet Union saying their soldiers have gone missing here, and then bases are established within the territory, what was your next memory of what happened with independent Lithuania or life as you knew it, basically.

A: Nothing until they crossed the border and marched into Lithuanian territory. Nothing.

Q: And do you remember that?

A: Oh perfectly.

Q: What happened, how -- what did you see? What is what -- what's in your minds -- mind's eye?

A: The -- the Russian army, on little horses. Most of the riders slanted eyed, was the [indecipherable] nation --

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: -- marching through our Avenue of Liberty in Kaunas, straight. And that's when I told you Papa took me and my mother to the Museum of War, and we spent with a crowd of people there. We couldn't stand any more that pressure, watching the Soviets get into the country.

Q: You mentioned earlier that there had been factory people and alluding that most of these had been Jewish who stood there with red flags. Was it no -- only Jewish people? Were there any Lithuanians?

A: Well, there are many pictures.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And when you look at the pictures, you can see the percentage. So I don't want to answer how many or not how many, just look at the pictures, and there is a -- different features of these two nationalities.

Q: How did life change in your personal relationships with the people that you knew? Did any go -- did -- did any surprise you and -- and let's say become part of the new system?

A: Not from my close friends, but I want to tell you, out of 30 students, of the 30 pupils at the time when the Soviet entered, we graduated nine. It was all what's left from 30.

Q: And what happened with the rest?

A: Either deported to Siberia, or cross the border.

Q: Left the country.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: What happened after the Soviet takeover? How did it impact your family in the very first instance? Was it the loss of your father's job?

A: The loss of my father's job, the closing of bank accounts and introducing the s -- how many square yards per person you were allowed to have. So we were forced, in a nice way, to accept two families to live together.

Q: What kind of a place did you have before? Was it a large apartment or a house?

A: It was an apartment.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: A-According to our code -- conditions in Kaunas it was a large apartment. Three big rooms, plus a smaller room for the servant, kitchen, bathroom and so on. So, we had a family in each room, and we were squeezed into one room. But this was survivable, this was not a tragedy. What affected more were the deportations.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about that? What happened there?

A: Father, as I mentioned before, was in Vilnius working for the health department. I was going through my last exams and then -- deportations started Thursday night.

Q: On what month?

A: June.

Q: And what year?

A: '41

Q: Okay.

A: Couple of weeks before the war started.

Q: Okay.

A: Mother couldn't get through on the telephone to Vilnius to find out what's going on. She was climbing the walls, we -- we didn't know what's going on. So she said look, I'll get the suitcase ready. I'll put Father's winter clothing into the suitcase. The moment you finish your exam, we're running to the railway station, we're going to Vilnius. And we came by rail to Vilnius. That was Saturday. Sunday morning the first bombs fell on Vilnius.

Q: So you missed the deportations, you weren't on the lists.

A: We were on the lists.

Q: You were on the lists?

A: But my father wasn't there and they couldn't find our house. The house stood in between two streets on a hill. You couldn't access it from down, because it was locked, and you couldn't find it from the top, because you couldn't find it.

Q: I see.

A: It was a very lucky and unlucky situation. Sometimes you know, I was thinking, if we would have been all together, and if we would been deported, maybe -- maybe he would survive. But I don't give much chance to it because I don't -- I don't think he would survive. Usually they -- they shot the man from the beginning. So anyway, that what happened. I had the white dress on, Mama had a light purple dress on. That was all we had, nothing. We didn't realize that -- what is coming this morning, so we thought we'll leave him this stuff in case, for deporf -- deportations, we come back to Kaunas. We couldn't get back.

Q: Why not?

A: Germ -- German army came in next morning. I mean, the war started next morning.

Q: When you were already in Vilnius.

A: We were already in Vilnius Saturday night.

Q: I see.

A: And war started Sunday morning.

Q: So deportations happening on a Thursday night.

A: Yeah, ye -- deportations happened two weeks before --

Q: On a Thursday night.

A: -- on the 14th - 15th --

Q: I see.

A: -- that's when the deportations started, yeah, two weeks before the war.

Q: I see. So you were preparing in case that was going to happen --

A: In case --

Q: -- again.

A: -- yes, yeah.

Q: And any of your friends got deported?

A: So I told you, out of 30 we were left nine.

Q: Did you talk to their families? Was there anybody left to tell you what was happening, or -- how did -- how did you experience those deportations, that's what I'm saying. If you weren't affected yourselves --

A: Trying now to tell you. You see, first night we didn't know what's going on. M -- I had my exams, and the next morning when I went to school, there were fewer of us. The first ones that were deported was our previous diplomatic ministry in Rome, Charnetskis' -- Charnetski, they were my very close friends, all three children, they had five children and all the Charnetskis' lived very close and th -- it was their daughter Lucia, I was especially close. And char -- no, Charnetskis weren't taken the first days because -- no, you're right, Charnetskis were taken the first night and they didn't show up for Friday's exam. Then we noticed next day some others didn't show up for the exam. By that time the town already knew what was going on. And you know what's very interesting? That week we had posters all over that [indecipherable] KGB choir is giving concerts in our city. And nobody put two and two together, why suddenly we have a KGB choir. See, this way they -- people saw them on the street, but it didn't occur to them that this is the help for deportations. They came under auspices of musical unit, which they -- they were musical unit. But at the same time we had ta -- ca -- th-the city full of [indecipherable] people. So now when the deportations started, the people who later on kept us for two years in hiding, they were originally from Kaunas and Vilnius, and then their parents and brother were deported, the first night. And their children were already sent to the fi -- grandparents for summer vacations. They were not --

Q: This was June, yeah.

A: June. And they took the whole family, the grandparents, the son and the two children, put them all into the echelon. Echelon came to Vilnius, but the children were not on the list, so they took the children out of the echelon and tell them, go home. So they came --

Q: Off of the train they took them --

A: Out of the train, and they went home and they told exactly what has happened, that the whole echelon is full of people going to Siberia, and --

Q: But did they know it was Siberia?

A: They didn't know what was, it was Kazakhstan, Siberia, whatever, but they knew that something awful is going on. So that was what compelled tha -- it was a huge farm, huge one -- they went right away to -- to take care of th -- of the place [indecipherable]

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And that was the first information that we had directly, what's going on.

Q: So in your memory, you remember seeing Soviet soldiers in the streets who could have been part of the NKVD tw -- choir, but you never saw a -- a -- one of the trucks come by in the middle of the night, or you --

A: No.

Q: -- didn't see any other --

A: No.

Q: -- actual instance of --

A: No, no, no.

Q: Okay. And also you wouldn't have known then, who would have been the people who informed.

A: They had lists. The lists were made by the political personnel office, [indecipherable]

Q: I see.

A: The political personnel office. Don't forget that when you looked for a job, when Soviets came, you had to give information three generations back. You, your parents, your grandparents. So they had very good information about everybody.

Q: I see. Where they lived, who they were.

A: Absolutely. And I experienced [indecipherable] one in the sports circle. We had a very highly trained group of sportsmen, and that group was supposed to represent Lithuania in Moscow sports festival. And you know between sport people, you took [indecipherable] you -- sports here, sport there. Anyway, just about a month before the departure we were told that we are going through the political indoctrination group. And each one of us had to fill out the form, giving back, again, three generations who we are, and out of the group remained about a quarter. 75 percent were not acceptable, and the leader of the group was a Soviet lieutenant from Georgia, Chechyan, he said my God, what am I going to do? I have to ship the group to Moscow and I have 25 percent of the group. So he turned -- you -- he -- he knew -- we didn't know about that sport and polit -- politics are just having something in common. He turned to the organizations, all kinds of sport organizations, clubs of the workers, factories and so on and he got people, but he had one month to train.

Q: I see.

A: He had one -- he said it's unbelievable, how can I do it, I don't know. But [indecipherable] the war came, there was no parade or anything, so --

Q: So his problem was solved.

A: His problem was solved, right. But that's how the Soviet operated, see? So by not -- by se -- sending 75 percent of the group out, you gave them a idea what's going to happen to them.

Q: I see.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. We're in Vilnius now. You're in -- in your white summer dress.

A: Yeah, in summer dr --

Q: You mother, I think, has a purple dress.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: You meet your father.

A: Yeah.

Q: You're together again.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you hear airplanes overhead.

A: Yes. Now, when we heard airplanes overhead, that was Sunday morning, I went to a line to get some bread, I was standing in a line. The bigger bombings started at night. But since my uncle was working from Bank of Lithuania, and the bank has vaults under the ground, we all went to the Bank of Lithuania to wait until the bombs stopped falling. And we found everybody who was working for the bank was downstairs in the vaults.

Q: But at that point your father was still a laborer in the health department.

A: In the health department, yeah.

Q: Your uncle still was at the Bank of Lithuania --

A: Right.

Q: -- and the vaults of the bank were your bomb shelters.

A: That's right.

Q: Okay. What happened after that?

A: Well, in the morning we went back to the apartment. My -- in the apartment was my uncle, his wife, she was very pregnant and my father's mama.

Q: So, Uncle Solomon and his --

A: Solomon, his wife and his -- my father's -- my grandmother and my father. And then Mama and I.

Q: And how large was this apartment?

A: Oh, two rooms, because it was Soviet -- Soviet time, you couldn't have any more.

Q: I see. So there was a lot of people.

A: Lot of people, yeah.

Q: And again, let's take it further. In the next several days, next week or so, what are your memories of that time? What happened that was significant to you?

A: I think it started with Jewish families being physically thrown out of big apartments in downtown Vilnius.

Q: Who would do that? Who was doing those throwing outs?

A: Both.

Q: Both who?

A: And the German officers who needed apartments.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And the help, Lithuanian help. There were no yellow stars yet. There was no -- no walking on sidewalk yet. The first what I remember, all the Jews have to bring to the police station, all radio -- radios. Think next one was all Jew --

Q: Did your family do that?

A: No.

Q: Cause you weren't Jewish, or cause you didn't have a radio?

A: No, because we were [indecipherable] for Jewish. Next one was all the Jews are supposed to bring to police station, all jewels. And people did. Then, around that time I think there was a provocation. The Germans accused that a German soldier was killed. That was the first time that was something very ugly.

Q: What happened?

A: I think they called the Jewish elders, a committee of the elders, Judenrat --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And they put a fine in so many Jewish people, they had to report. But it still didn't -- didn't give people any idea.

Q: You mean, some soldiers were killed, and then others --

A: A -- a soldier, a soldier was killed. The Germans claimed it and they -- then they called the members of Judenrat and told them that they have to -- to send so many -- I don't remember now the number, so many people to report to Lukiškės, to the jail.

Q: And Lukiškės is a jail.

A: Jail.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: After that, next one was Jewish people wearing the, about three inches wide, white with blue, the Jewish Magen David on the sleeve.

Q: Jewish star.

A: Yeah.

Q: Right.

A: After that was no walking on sidewalks.

Q: Did that affect you?

A: In -- in what sense did that affect me? I mean, I -- I mentioned before that Father was still working at health department, Mama would go every morning with him too, and every afternoon to pick him up. She would hold him under the arm so that her hands was on his thing.

Q: But you're half-Jewish.

A: Yes, I know, but in Vilnius nobody knew me. In Kaunas I wouldn't be able to -- to hide it.

Q: So, in other words, you were not in Kaunas when the -- when the -- the first pogroms happened?

A: No.

Q: You weren't -- you weren't there --

A: I -- I was at Vilnius.

Q: You were in Vilnius.

A: Yeah, that's why --

Q: Did you ha --

A: -- I don't know anything about Kaunas.

Q: I see. And was there telephone connection, or did you find -- when you were in Vilnius, was there a way that you could find out what was going on and that -- did find out what was going on in Kaunas, or not?

A: No, because we were all in Vilnius.

Q: I see. I see. So -- so you really had no knowledge --

A: No knowledge, no.

Q: -- of what was going on there?

A: There -- what I knew -- what I knew about Kaunas was that Kaunas was given one month's time for Jewish population. They were given the borders bordering streets where they should move for future ghetto. And in Kaunas the whole thing went in an orderly manner. The Jewish people took their furniture, took the -- took their belongings into that area. They had one month's time to do it. In Vilnius there was no warning at all. The apartment which my Uncle S-Solomon had was in a building that was the last building before ghetto wall. And when --

Q: On what street, excuse me, cause I know s --

A: Rudninku gatvė.

Q: Oh, so it was really right there across the street.

A: Right there, right there.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And when the Lithuanian army soldiers came to put the boards to enclose, my uncle went downstairs, and he spoke perfect Lithuanian and he told the soldier, look, my wife is expecting a baby any day, and my old mother, please let us climb, as long as you are not too high yet. They just started, and the soldiers said, go ahead, right away. So he took his mother, his wife -- pregnant wife and himself, they climbed that started wall and they went inside. Now, the others were taken out to Lukiškės.

Q: Excuse me now. The apartment that your family was living in, it was outside the border of the ghetto?

A: Outside the border, outside.

Q: Okay, so they are still able to live in that apartment, or not?

A: Oh no, no, no, no, no, no.

Q: Okay.

A: That was the last building before the ghetto border.

Q: So where did they go, if they couldn't --

A: They climbed the wall, went into the area.

Q: Went into the ghetto area.

A: Right.

Q: Without a place to live.

A: Without a place to live. But they were fortunate because they weren't pushed to the jail, to Lukiškės jail. They escaped sure death, because all the others who didn't think so quick, they were already taken to Lukiškės and they never showed up any more.

Q: All right, maybe I've gotten ahead of myself a little bit.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: We were going through the sequence of what was happening in Vilnius and -- and in comparison it was chaotic to what was happening in Kaunas as far as the ghetto being established.

A: Right.

Q: But we left it at such that people were had -- had to take their radios to --

A: Police.

Q: -- the authorities.

A: Yes.

Q: They had to bring their jewels --

A: Jewels, yes.

Q: -- there. They had to rep -- some, when a German soldier was supposedly killed, the Jewish elders were told to get a certain number of people to report to the jail.

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: And then what? And then what?

A: And then -- then this started the -- the most awful period of the Jews being dragged from apartments by hapunes, by -- by the helpers.

Q: By the Lithuanian helpers?

A: Lithuanian helpers, right. That's when I told you the incident with -- did you -- you asked me --

Q: That's right.

A: -- whether there are other Lithuanian officers. That was what happened to Mr. Gornionski. Now what happened in our case, normally when th-these -- see, in Vilnius, every house had a -- what would you call it i-in English? Not a janitor, but it was a --

Q: Housekeeper of a sort?

A: Not housekeeper. It was a person who took --

Q: A supervi -- a super.

A: A super, right.

Q: Superintendent.

A: And all those supers knew everybody. So when they -- the Lithuanians came to take people, the super would take them to every door. She knew who lives where. So normally when they -- they -- they would come, Mama would come out, and said no, there are no more Jews in here. Just like that. But that particular time it didn't work out. The super stood behind and Mama came out, I came out, the grandmother came to the hallway, because her Lithuanian was perfect. And the question was, any more Jews inside? And we couldn't -- couldn't hide any more, the super was standing right behind. So, that's probably the most difficult scene I've seen in my life. He

came into -- the hallway was little, the hallway. He came into the first room. My father was standing, my uncle was standing, grandmother was there, Mama and I. We returned back. My father wore the army officer's boots, and the -- the army pants. And he said, well, take a piece of soap, take one towel and let's go. Now, we already knew what let's go more or less means. It's Lukiškės.

Q: That's the soldier. That's the --

A: That's a Lithuanian.

Q: Yeah.

A: Mama started to talk to him. She said look, you're a young man, you're attending college. My husband fought for independence. He put his books away, he finished high school after he returned from the front. He is one of the Lithuanian volunteer fighters. Please leave him here. Under no circumstances. Under no circumstances. My mother went on her knees. She grabbed his hands, she started kissing his hands, begging him, please understand that he is not just a person, he is person who fought for you. And somehow finally, he agreed, with Mama on her knees, he agreed to leave my father.

Q: Do you remember what he looked like?

A: Oh, not today, not today. I wouldn't recognize him.

Q: But do you remember his manner, his -- his attitude?

A: His attitude? I couldn't care less, probably I would describe it. He was told to get as many Jews as he can, and my uncle was standing behind my father. So my mother said to him again, listen, that's their mother. You left one son and you're taking the other son. I'm begging you, please leave both sons to their mother. And she managed to get my uncle left. When -- when --

Q: What about grandma?

A: No, the men, men.

Q: Oh, I see, they weren't taking women.

A: Take a piece of soap, take one towel, you're going to build the east west, or whatever it was, highway. After he left our room, Mama told me, go to the kitchen, see what's going on. That was Soviet time. Every room had a family, and the owner of that huge house had his room. So I went out and I've seen that from the other room, they're taking a husband. His wife was pregnant with a child too. And I went closer to the owner's room, and I looked through the keyhole. So what I could see was a man told him to give all the jewels first of all. You know, he took his watch, he took his rings. And then they took -- the man was in his probably, 80's, very old person, to build a highway. So anyway, after that, Mama ran to Mr. Gornionski's place, because they were kicked out from their luxurious apartment by German officers. But in a -- in a polite way. But they had to leave everything behind. She ran to the place where they lived with that -- sharing apartment with that Lithuanian officer, and that when Mama found out what happened to Mr. Gornionski. And then the major from our military place, Major Songinas ran to Lukiškės to find him and couldn't find him, that that was the end of it, yeah.

Q: So these are the first days --

A: These are the first days, yeah, yeah.

Q: -- of the German occupation --

A: Yeah, yeah --

Q: -- of -- of Vilnius and --

A: -- yeah, yeah, yeah --

Q: -- what's happening to the city's Jews.

A: -- yeah, yeah. And the -- the most unfortunate thing was that the ghetto area was small, and the population in Vilnius was big. And there was no warning and there was nothing to make people go into the area. So they couldn't fit so many, so they just took the upflow, what there was, overflow to the jail, and from jail to Paneriai for liquidation.

Q: But did people know that?

A: No, no, people didn't know what. Now, about knowing that, I'll come back to you. While Father was the head of Jewish hospital, one night --

Q: Can we leave this for a second?

A: Sure.

Q: Because we're going to ba -- finish our tape and come to the next -- to the next cass --

End of Tape Four

Beginning Tape Five

Q: This is something that is un -- I -- I don't fully quite understand it and maybe it needs a little bit more explanation. It sounds that all of a sudden, one day, without any warning, people show up, these hapunes show up in the various apartments across the stity -- city where there are -- where there are Jews who are living, and who are pushing them out of their houses, who knows where. Or is it they're th -- just taking the men? What -- what was happening?

A: Everybody. When -- when the exodus to ghetto started, it was everybody. Just leave the house. Old, young, baby, whatever. Everybody had to leave.

Q: And they go to where? Where they're brought? Where were they brought to?

A: As long as ghetto had enough place for those people, they went into the ghetto area.

Q: Okay.

A: When -- there is no explanation why certain groups was taken straight to Lukiškės.

Q: Straight to the prison, which is on another side of town.

A: Straight to the prison, another -- another side of town. The view that you saw was awful.

People didn't know what's going on. People thought that they are being grouped into ghetto.

They were dragging pillows, blankets, pots and pans, whatever they, in the panic they managed to take. The Polish population stood outside this on the sidewalks making fun. The atmosphere was awful, just awful. Now, that day a -- Father told me to go to Colonel Usas home and stay with them, cause we didn't know how much the Nuremberg laws will affect me, because the -- the nu --

Q: Did you know about the nur -- Nuremberg laws?

A: Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes.

Q: By that point you knew?

A: Oh yes. It -- but it's a -- Nuremberg laws affect three generations. Not the fi -- I was the first generation, and then my parents and then my grandparents. So I stayed with [indecipherable] Usas, and Mama took my father's war medals and went to see our Prime Minister, Kubilunas.

Q: I see.

A: And she -- she managed to get into his office, and she told him, General, have a look at these documents. It's your signature on my husband's war medals. Aren't you able to do something to help me? And Kubilunas was very polite, but he told my mother, Ponia -- Madam, there is nothing I can do in Jewish question. It's in the hands of the Germans and my hands are tied. I cannot do a thing. So Mother's only hope, that Kubilunas maybe will help, disappeared. He couldn't do a thing. And you couldn't do a thing. It was all in the hands of Gestapo, and that was it. And the SS.

Q: And he was in Vilnius at that time?

A: He was in Vilnius, he was in ghetto, he was the head of Jewish hospital.

Q: No, no, no, I meant Kubilunas.

A: No. The Lithuanian -- I think at that time that -- no, Mama went to Kaunas. He was in -- in Kaunas. Our first government, Kubilunas was the head of the government, was in Kaunas.

Q: I see.

A: So when Mama came back from Kaunas, she told my father that she couldn't do anything. Now, I started to tell you --

Q: And where were the --

A: -- I'm sorry. You asked me, did the people know what's going on. Quite awhile before ghetto, one night, I believe about five people escaped the shooting place Paneriai. There were three not connected, I think, women and two children, not connected in between. They managed to survive

the shooting in the pit, and that night got out of the pit, found the two children alive, and they walked to Vilnius in the dark, towards Jewish hospital. When they came into the hospital, my father took them to a separate area and started to question.

Q: So by that point he's director of the hospital.

A: He's director of the hospital and they were all bleeding, so he sent his personnel with hot water to wash the blood from the sidewalks so that if the Germans catch it, there wouldn't be no --

Q: Trail.

A: -- trail which way did they go. The Germans didn't catch it anyway. But my father isolated these people in the separate part of hospital because he was afraid of general panic. And he put the lady, by the name Mrs. Salinski, she was from Kaunas. She was a nurse -- she di -- no-not practically, she was -- she was a real, registered nurse but she wasn't practicing, and she was in charge of these people. The only person that went in and out, until he figured out what to do, because he didn't know whether the Germans will find or not. So by that time my father already had an idea what's going on in Paneriai. That's it's not going to build the highway east w-west or whatever, that is going straight to the pits to be shot.

Q: In other words, he -- if he had any doubts before, he learned at that point, that when your mother fell on her knees, she saved his life.

A: Oh, that's absolutely.

Q: Yeah, and also --

A: Absolutely, because that -- that went to -- straight to Lukiškės, yeah.

Q: I'd like to get a better sense of the sequence. You talk of -- you talk of mass chaos, basically, people being forced into the territory of the ghetto and those who don't have a room or a place

are left in the streets, and if they're in the streets, then they're taken to Lukiškės prison and then from there they're taken to Paneriai, but people don't know that yet. Is that correct?

A: That's right.

Q: And then when these two children, the three people, but two of them children, come to, you know, to the Jewish hospital in Vilnius, your father sees them, is that already when the ghetto has been established, even in its early days, or is that before the establishment of the ghetto?

A: Before.

Q: Before. So there's no ghetto yet.

A: Before. No ghetto yet.

Q: Is it after the time he was supposed to have been taken?

A: After.

Q: After.

A: After. Because at the time that he was supposed to be taken, he was still working for health department.

Q: Okay.

A: See?

Q: Okay, so then -- so the -- this is where I'd like to get more -- a little bit more clarity. So after that time your grandmother stays. Your uncles --

A: Uncle.

Q: -- and father are saved by your mother. And it's by a hair's breadth, but there they are. Then did they come again for them? Was there a second time when they were going to be put into the ghetto? Do you understand, is --

A: No, I do -- I do --

Q: Yeah.

A: I'm trying to figure out how [indecipherable]. I'll tell you what, the house was to -- supposed to be Jew free. There was not supposed to be any more Jews in the building, see.

Q: So what happened when that hapunes left without his quarry?

A: Yeah, they -- he took all the others from the apartment.

Q: Okay, but then the rest of you stayed in it?

A: Mama and I and uncle and grandmother, we stayed in it.

Q: So it wasn't Jew free, in reality?

A: In reality, yeah.

Q: Okay. And that's where you stayed?

A: That's where we stayed until ... Mama decided it was too dangerous to stay, for me. We got a room Kalinauskas Gatvė, in Kalinauskas Street, in an apartment where the owner of the apartment was a refugee from Poland, from Warsaw. Another room was take --

Q: A Polish Gentile refugee.

A: Polish Gentile refugees. Another room was by a -- also Polish refugee from Warsaw, of German extraction. And third room was ours. We moved out because you -- y -- it was too da -- dangerous to be there. It wasn't easy to get rooms. It was through the help of a Lithuanian person who knew who we are and who helped us to get a room. In those you had the -- you -- that was a leftover of Soviet regulations, you had a certain area and you had a person in charge of that area. So he was a person who worked in the administrative office, and he helped us to get a room because he knew our situation. So that's where we moved out.

Q: By that point -- excuse me, let me back up a little bit, I want to focus a little bit on your gram -- on your father's family. You had said earlier that your grandfather had been an invalid. By the time 1941 rolled around, was --

A: He wasn't there.

Q: He was -- he had already passed away?

A: Yeah. He passed away, oh, he -- he passed away somewhere -- I just remember my father wearing the black on his sleeve; that was, you know, custom in Europe. I must have been around, no more than nine - 10.

Q: Okay, so mid-30's.

A: Yeah.

Q: Mid-30's.

A: He passed away.

Q: And --

A: But in ghetto, in the first time when I came in, in one room we had grandmother, father, uncle, his wife, newborn baby, a cousin, her husband, her mother. So we had eight people in a room let's say like from here to here.

Q: A small room.

A: Eight people in that room, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Mm.

Q: That's when we get to the ghetto, but --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- your father had four brothers, one of whom was with you in Vilnius, Solomon --

A: Right.

Q: -- with his wife, pregnant.

A: Right.

Q: And wer -- whe-where were the other two brothers?

A: The sh -- Siauliai brother --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- was in Siauliai with his wife and newborn baby, too.

Q: And his name is?

A: Ephrain.

Q: Ephrain was in Siauliai, okay.

A: Yeah, Siauliai. Now, the youngest brother --

Q: Reuben.

A: Reuben had a very strange story. He was betrothed to get married, and in the first day of deportation --

Q: To Siberia.

A: Yeah, in the first day of deportation, they took hi -- the family of -- his fiancée and her family.

He was getting out of his mind. So he said, I'm going to beg an -- KGB to let me follow the transport. Mama said look, don't even try. It won't work. The KGB is not going to let you follow the transport. So he said to me, go with me, I know where their offices are, private, not official.

You stay on the other side of the street. If I don't come out, so you know that I didn't come out.

Anyway, I was waiting across the street, he came --

Q: This is still in Kaunas?

A: Still in Kaunas.

Q: Right.

A: That was before, the first night.

Q: Okay.

A: So he said they wouldn't even t-talk. No, that's no and no. So, when the war started, he took my bicycle and he told my mother's sister that, listen, I'll try, maybe I'll catch up with the train. The trains are not going very fast, they're overloaded. Maybe I'll catch up with my fiancée on the train. And from that day on, we never heard anything about him. Later on, somebody told us that he did manage to get to Soviet Union, but whether he found her or not, I don't know. But he never returned. So, that means --

Q: He disappeared.

A: He disappeared, yeah.

Q: And you never found out what happened to him.

A: No, no, no. I -- I looked at the 16th division. The 16th division had all their Lithuanian citizens in 16th division. Nobody knew that he was in divis --

Q: The 16th division was a Soviet army --

A: Soviet army, 16th division --

Q: -- partisan [indecipherable]

A: Yes, but he wasn't there.

Q: Mm-hm. He wasn't there.

A: So we figured that -- my aunt told him that, don't take anything, just take the bicycle and go. But he wanted to take some clothing and this and that on -- on my bicycle. So he said look, they'll kill you for the bicycle, don't take anything, just as -- if you can, peddle as much as you can. But we don't know, you know, what happened to him.

Q: And -- and yet, you say somebody told you that he did make it to --

A: Somebody told as if --

Q: Okay.

A: -- you know, like as if my father is buried here, or as if my father is buried there. It's nothing that -- to tie together.

Q: Yeah, not really reliable.

A: Mm-hm, no, no, no, not reliable at all.

Q: What a sad thing.

A: Yeah, sad thing.

Q: Very sad thing.

A: He was crazy when they deported her, just crazy. Well, you know, so, that's life.

Q: So there are three brothers --

A: Three brothers.

Q: -- and your grandmother.

A: And her, yeah.

Q: And they were all -- except -- except for your uncle in Siauliai --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- everybody was in Vilnius.

A: Everybody was in Vilnius.

Q: All right.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: At this point it might sound a little odd that I ask this question, but it's been on my mind as we've been talking. How do you identify yourself? What was your identity?

A: You know, I grew up Lithuanian.

Q: Was there any part of you where you felt Jewish?

A: Not that I felt Jewish, but I mean, I had a lot of solidarity, I had a lot of -- you know, it's -- it's very difficult to define. You stand in the middle of two sides. You don't take any sides. If it's necessary you're here, if it's necessary you're here, and that's how you grow up. I was never influenced by one side to be against another side. So I -- I really cannot tell you, but I grew up Lithuanian, but at the same time I have a lot in common with the Jewish nation. I know much more -- when my cousin of the -- the Uncle Ephrain's daughter, when they finally eve -- returned from Vorkuta and when he found his family and when she came to visit me, she knew nothing about Jewish customs or anything. I took her to synagogue and she just looked around. I showed her, though the custom [indecipherable] everything which we all -- we all know here, she had no idea, she grew up in Soviet Union. But at the same time I tried -- we have a very large population in West Hartford of refugees from Soviet Union. We don't call them Jewish, we call them Russians. I do a lot for them. And th-that's -- you know, when my mother went to see f -- Prime Minister Kubilunas, and when she came back and she was asking my father, please do not accept any official position. Be a private person. Because his military friends wanted him to get out and stay in Lithuania, in the states, and forget the thing. And then one day he told my mother, you know what, wh-whichever things were, whichever things are, I see how my nation is suffering, I cannot do it. I cannot go into hiding and leave things the way they are in ghetto, because there was a chaos. Can you imagine the Judenrat? Judenrat was a representative of each Jewish organization. There were so many [indecipherable] and Bundists and whatever you want, all Jewish gentlemen with big beards. Can you imagine a German officer coming to talk to them? It -- it wasn't possible.

Q: Is this what your father was saying?

A: It wasn't possible. They spoke Polish, they spoke Yiddish, they didn't speak German. And they knew that in the hospital there's something organized. Working, and working very, very well. He surrounded himself, since we didn't know the Polish Jews, he surrounded himself with Jews from Kaunas. And they really had a atmosphere of work. The first German request from the hospital for so many people, he had a separate section for syphilitics. So, you don't play God, but you try to do something. So the first German request got the syphilitics.

Q: Do you remember how many people that was?

A: No, no.

Q: Did he talk about it at home?

A: Well, he explained to my mother, that in order to save healthy people, cause the syphilitics didn't have very long to live one way or the other, and he was afraid to spread syphilis. The Germans didn't know that they were syphilitics, but they -- that's what Germans received, syphilitics. And that was his idea all the time, to save whatever he can. He believed, which was really very strange, he told to teach the children Hebrew. And the population was aghast, what for? What do they need the Hebrew for, they're going to die. So he said, they may die, and they may survive. If they survive, where do you think they'll want to stay, in Vilnius? It's -- it's -- that's you -- you know, place of their families? They'll want to go to Israel. They should stop talking in Jewish, they should learn Hebrew, so if a day comes and God willing they are s -- living, they can integrate themselves into the Israeli society. See, he had different ideas from the others. He discussed with the rabbinical committee in -- in ghetto, about how he is doing it. Because naturally they say you cannot play God. But he told them, look, I am giving, for example, 20 li -- li -- documents for life for the hospital doctors. And I don't know these doctors

in person, they were all Polish doctors. I lined them up in line and I tell the youngest ones, which in my opinion, by face and by the physique, look the youngest ones, I tell the 20 come forward. So he says to my mother, how would you think, Elenka? Should I save a young doctor who may survive and have children, or should I pick out a famous professor who is 80 years old? Now what would you do in my place? And you know, I was right there during the conversation. Mama said, you know, I -- I cannot tell you how to behave. But it's very difficult for my father to pick out who lives, who doesn't live. But in a way, he had his opinion about it, that the strongest will survive, whether survive in ghetto or whether later on in the forest, but you have to give them a chance. Now, what chance can you give an 80 year old professor? See, that was how he was -- how he would [inaudible]

Q: You were part of these conversations at home --

A: Oh yes.

Q: -- at age 14 - 15.

A: Four -- age 14 - 15, yeah, absolutely, absolutely. We had a lot of these conversations with [indecipherable] Panana Šimaitė. You know about her.

Q: Can you tell us about her? Who was she?

A: I found out who was she from the Lithuanian press now in Lithuania. There was an article by her brother who for the first time said that she was a communist. I do -- I believe I still have the newspaper. Panana Šimaitė was a librarian in Vilnius University. And Panana Šimaitė like us, had a permission to enter ghetto from Major Bourakas, another officer. And he gave her permission to enter ghetto as if she's studying the Jewish old literature. And we met her in ghetto. She was hiding a group of Jewish people in the attic of Vilnius University library. In summer it wasn't so bad, but in winter it was awfully cold. Getting food in was one thing, getting

waste out was another thing. So Panana Šimaitė regularly, on the clock, was in our place at four o'clock in the afternoon.

Q: In the ghetto.

A: No --

Q: Okay.

A: -- that was out. And my father would come for dinner around four o'clock. So she -- Šimaitė and my father, they would always get into all kinds of political conversation and this and that. And sure -- I remember one day my father said, you know, I am pretty sure that she is a member of communist party. By her attitude, by you know, her answers and so on. But that didn't -- that didn't scare us away. The thing was that Panana Šimaitė used to come and get food every day, and we -- she had such a metal -- metal little, like a bucket. And she would get a bucket full of food and carry to the attic, to the Vilnius, that --

Q: And that's when he was still director of the hospital?

A: No.

Q: That's when he's already --

A: He was already the head of the ghetto, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And that was day after day after day. Why did we start talking about Šimaitė now?

Q: Something -- something jiggled your memory. But we'll come back to her. I want to go back to the other question that I had when I asked you how did you identify yourself, because I had a follow-up question, and that is --

A: Now, I would say I -- I identified myself Lithuanian.

Q: When you saw -- when you saw the chaos in Vilnius and you saw Jews being expelled from their apartments and Poles standing on the street and making fun, and the Lithuanian collaborators who were there, who were part of this expulsion, not doing it -- I mean actually doing it, not seeming to care very much, did any feelings go through you? Did you ever think to yourself, how could they do such a thing? Do they not see what's going on?

A: I -- I don't think this was -- this was less because of religion or nationality. I think that would be for a person unbelievable to watch from a point of human attitude. You didn't have to be a Jew or a Czech or a French, just to be treated like that. I mean, it was a double -- you know, it was a double, the way I was brought up, in a humane way, to watch that was beyond your understanding. It's not just that because the people were Jewish, because they were people. They were not cattle, they were not animals, they were people. To watch people doing that to people, that was very difficult to watch.

Q: I know. But earlier you said, when we were talking about what befell people when the Soviets came in and what befell people when the Germans came in, you were explaining that there was this hatred Jews because there had been some on the streets waving red flags. And as a -- as an explanation as to why there was anti-Semitism, as an explanation as to why there was hatred, and for many people who were not there, who did not live through these times, that kind of explanation seems to hold very little water, exactly for the reason you just said right now.

A: Well, that was po-political, I would say. You see, we didn't see the night deportations. Whatever we heard after mostly was that Russian soldiers were correct. The ones that came and told people pack up your stuff and go into the truck. What we knew, what was going on in the building of KGB, that people were tortured, and they found later the traces of it --

Q: But wa -- again, I go back to, why would that be, if the soldiers were correct, then why would this kind of hatred, why would this kind of -- of anger be directed at a Jewish population? And I mean in the sense of explanations later, when people are explaining things to themselves -- you're sitting in Vilnius and you're seeing the chaos of what's happening, and you weren't saying to yourself, oh it's because they waved red flags when the Soviets were coming in, you were seeing people being dehumanized.

A: This is one thing, but the cooperation didn't have to be so voluntarily. The cooperation was a -- I would say a result of the red flags, of the heads of political personnel --

Q: Whose cooperation?

A: Lithuanian.

Q: Lithuanian cooperation --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- was not so voluntary, are you saying?

A: No, I say -- I say this -- this is what it is. It didn't have to be so voluntarily.

Q: So you mean --

A: It didn't have --

Q: -- they wouldn't have collaborated had they not seen --

A: -- I -- I believe st -- very strongly that the two weeks before that, if the deportations wouldn't be there, if we wouldn't have had a whole year of political personnel treatment, of not having a right to live where you are, of having everything confiscated of what you ha --

End of Tape Five

Beginning Tape Six

Q: Maybe I'll repeat a little of this.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Of a -- you were a person who was integrated into Lithuanian society, who was part of it, and were more familiar with different communities than most people were. And here, all of a sudden in 1941, you see a huge inhumanity take place. You see -- you see Lithuanians who you've grown up with and you are part of, come and want to take your father away. And others -- even if not those particular soldiers, others who took other people away. And some of them robbed them as they were doing it, and pocketed the jewelry and so on. How does one explain that to oneself about the culture one has come from?

A: I don't believe you can explain. I s -- think maybe you could say what motivated them to do it. Motivation can be all kinds, could be greed, could be jealousy. There was no hatred such in Lithuania per se, there was no hatred. We received our independence from the Polish -- from the Russian Tsars regime. Russia is famous. The first pogroms were in Russia. We didn't have a word pogrom in our language per se, we didn't use that word. We never had pogroms in our country. The Russians were not able to switch that ugly behavior of theirs in our territory. But the seeds probably remained. On one side they lived as neighbors, very well together. Again, please -- I remember that during the Russian Tsars time, the Jewish people were not allowed to own land. And the reason they all went into business was not because they wanted to be business people, they were not allowed to work the land. So one came with the other. So naturally, if he was, say, a tailor or shoemaker or he was bringing in his drosken kucher, some kind of merchandise to the farmers, that was the only way to survive. So after so many years of Russian occupation, the first one, the Tsaristic occupation, that remains. Now naturally, if you are a poor

farmer and you work from four o'clock in the morning til late at night, and ri -- next door your Jewish tailor is doing a good business sewing and this and that and he doesn't have to get up and milk his cows and maybe that brought some kind of a jealousy? But we never had incidents in our villages, in our towns. We never had a Jewish Lithuanian incidents.

Q: So tell me, when you have the hapunes come by --

A: Yes.

Q: -- these collaborators --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- come by, what do you think motivated them?

A: Deportations and red flags. I'll sti --

Q: Deportations and --

A: Red flags.

Q: -- and red flags.

A: Yeah. I'll stick to that. Cause I was one of those. It's -- except that I -- I couldn't [indecipherable] as low as that, but the feeling inside was awful. The feeling inside was awful.

Q: That there were people who would to -- betray your country --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- betray your other -- but why would it ha -- okay, all right, but when you look at documents later, you -- people say that they were all nationalities who are part of this great Soviet experiment, not just the Jewish nationality.

A: No, and I told you before, according to percentage, according to figures, the bigger percentage of Jewish population was deported in Lithuania. You see, out of the total.

Q: Yeah.

A: There was not 30 percent of Lithuanians deported, but there were 30 percent of Jewish population deported. So it's not logical, because actually there were very many friendships in Siberia that we Jews helping Lithuanians, Lithuanians helping the Jews, the old way, the way it was before in the country. Because they were all thrown into the same kettle.

Q: Yeah. Okay.

A: So there -- there is no explanation. We can go back to Tsaristic times, to that Tsaristic hatred, to Tsarist -- Tsaristic pogroms. But again explain why didn't we have a pogrom in our country? Not a single one. We -- we knew the word, we knew the concept, but we never used the word in our language. See, that's what very strange, wa -- how suddenly -- I have only my personal explanation is deportations and red flags. That really made, you know, the [indecipherable] in a very ugly way.

Q: Thank you. We'll break right now for lunch and then we'll come back to the story itself.

A: Mm.

Q: Okay. You know, I [tape break]. Okay, I'd like to get a better sense, even though we've talked and -- and touched on this before, of the transition from your father being head of -- the director of the Jewish hospital to being appointed head of the Jewish police. Can you tell me about the sequence of those events?

A: I mentioned that Mama went to talk to the Prime Minister ku -- Kubilunas and before she left she begged my father not to take any official duties. Not to be tied, so that his name wouldn't figure anywhere and in case of necessity she could take him out and that's it. When Mama came back, he told her exact words, "I'm sorry, these are my people. I couldn't refuse." I mentioned before that there was a Jewish committee of o -- el-elders and they were not able to grab [indecipherable] chaos. People everywhere, people on the street, no food, nothing. They just

were completely lost. And they heard that somebody is in the hospital and keeps the hospital very firmly, there's an order. So they came to talk to my father and they begged him, they begged him please, we are out of means, we don't know what to do. So he took it.

Q: Were you in the room when he said this to your mother?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you remember how you reacted to this?

A: I didn't react, but Mama -- Mama went pale. Mama went pale. So she told him, well, you know, you did what you decided to do, but you realize that that's it. There's no way, now that you'll be known to the Germans, that we can take you out and leave the ghetto. There's no question about it.

Q: You were living in the ghetto at the time already?

A: No, we were coming in and out.

Q: Okay.

A: He started right away to organize. People had to be placed somewhere. I mentioned that in a tiny room there were eight of his family, and that was very good. People were living 20 next to each other. There was no way what to do. He had to find a way how to straighten everything, how to organize food, how to organize cleanliness. Rubbish collection. Can you imagine to throw so many people into one place without anything, no administration? And so he started.

Q: Were the borders already defined of what the ghetto was?

A: Oh, it was boarded up. It was boarded up, there were no borders like in Kaunas, it was -- they started to board up early in the morning, by the evening everything was boarded up. The windows that faced Vilnius's streets were boarded too. Every gate, every entrance was wor -- boarded up. So anyway, he surrounded himself mostly with Jews from Lithuania that he knew.

But he asked the elders, please give me a [indecipherable] from Vilnius, from polis -- Polish side that I could work with, because Papa didn't speak any Polish. Wh-Who in Lithuania spoke Polish? Nobody. So they introduced Mr. Dessler. And Dessler's old family was very known in Vilnius, very decent family. I cannot -- I cannot tell negative or positive about Mr. Dessler. I can only repeat what people were talking and what my aunt saw.

Q: Your aunt being your mother's sister?

A: Yeah. I was told by Father, together with Mama, that please do not discuss anything we're talking about at home where -- when Mr. Dessler is present. And that was enough for us. And later, I don't know how much there is truth in it or not, people are blaming Mr. Dessler for my father's untimely death. Nobody knows why they shot him, whether to start the liquidation, they figured with him present would be very difficult to start liquidation. Whether they found out that he's sending people to the forests. Whether they found out that he knows how to procure guns, we don't know. We don't know -- we know from people that he was shot by the chief of the Gestapo, Neugebauer. We don't know where are his remains. We were told by people that he was buried in Rasų kapi, the --

Q: That's right, a cemetery that --

A: Cemetery of [indecipherable]. And they put some plates, glass plates into the place of burial. I went to Rasų kapi, talked to the caretakers, they said they'd never heard of anybody being brought by Gestapo into -- so anyway, there is no place. We don't know anything.

Q: You don't know where he was shot?

A: No, no. We know that he was shot at the Gestapo building in Vilnius.

Q: And the Gestapo building in Vilnius was where?

A: [indecipherable]. What was the street name? I don't remember. If you know where the students -- students live on the -- on the hill.

Q: Orlando gartay?

A: No, no, no, right in the center of Vilnius. [speaks Lithuanian]

Q: This I wouldn't know. I mean where is --

A: It's -- it's one of the side streets from the main street.

Q: Okay. I thought it was where the KGB building was, too, the same building.

A: Wa -- the same thing, same building.

Q: It's the same building, then?

A: Same building, right, yeah.

Q: I see, so it's at Lukiškės Square.

A: Befo --

Q: It's a building -- building near Lukiškės Square?

A: But i -- co-coming from Cathedral --

Q: That's [indecipherable]

A: -- going straight, it would be to the left.

Q: Correct, that building.

A: Little street, that's -- that's it, that was the --

Q: So that's the building that your father was shot at.

A: -- that's the building was shot, right. Now, so he warned us to be careful what you talk, what we are talking at home in his presence. How -- what's the role of Dessler, I cannot blame because I don't know. People didn't talk very nicely of him. Now, when he -- they introduced Mr. Dessler to Papa [indecipherable], Father tried to find out more military personnel. He found

Polish Major Vucht. He found Polish Captain Bagle. He found [indecipherable] Lieutenant Nikadrasin. Anyway, whoever was from military, he took right away to work. And --

Q: In what capacity?

A: Police. Order. Now, by the way, Captain Bagle, I knew from Papa hundred percent. Father had a walking stick. He had two pieces. One he handed to Captain Bagle, one he kept himself. The historic pictures from ghetto were in these two walking sticks. When I met Vilik, Captain Bagle's son, who was my very close friend in ghetto, I met -- met him in New York, my first question was Vilik, what happened to your father's walking stick? He said I -- I don't know. No idea.

Q: So the photographs in those sticks --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- from the ghetto?

A: From the ghetto. Papa had a very good photographer who was instructed to historically, in pictures, to show the life in ghetto. So Vilik didn't know anything, and Papa's thing disappeared. I'll tell you later what I was able to find. So that's how he started the administration, and you see, Kaunas and Vilnius had the completely different histories. Kaunas had barbed wire and Germans inside and at the gates. Vilnius had no barbed wire, because everything was boarded up. Vilnius had one Lithuanian policemen. If you've seen pictures of the ghetto gate, there is one police -- little booth where the policemen stood and saluted my father. So he tried to avoid the fate of Kaunas ghetto by having Germans stand at the gate, because Kaunas didn't have forests. Vilnius had big forests in the vicinity and very many Jewish survivors were hiding in those forests. And when finally it was little bit quieter in ghetto, and people weren't taken constantly to be shot, these people started to come back to ghetto to survive, because it seemed that it's nice and

peaceful. And people didn't realize that we used to get ration cards only for official number of inhabitants. And the unofficial people had to be fed. And how would you feed unofficial people when it's not enough for official people? So Vilnius had a completely different situation. Now, through my father's connection with Lietukis --

Q: With [indecipherable]

A: -- for so many years --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: He, for example would get a shipment of frozen potatoes. The Germans would be told that potatoes are frozen.

Q: They're no good.

A: No good for public consumption. The Germans -- and they say, can we throw it to ghetto? And Germans would say yes, you can throw it to ghetto. That's how -- but that wasn't all, you had to feed thousands, it wasn't in hundreds, it was thousands. So the only thing was to get illegally food to ghetto. You must have heard -- and in the -- in -- in writing too, the very, very, I would say rough treatment of people coming back from work at ghetto gates. And you would -- I heard myself, standing across the street on the sidewalk, Polish people talking, why do you need Germans in here? Look how the Jews are treating the Jews. That was my father's idea, to make it look so bad that the Germans wouldn't need to bring either Ukrainians or Lithuanians or Latvians to the ghetto gates, because if you would have either one of those people at the gates, these people would die from hunger.

Q: So in other words, what would -- I'll back up just a little bit. As far as anybody else guarding those gates, it was one Lithuanian soldier --

A: He had nothing to do with the gates.

Q: -- in a booth, and that was it. Okay.

A: He was just standing on the side, he had a little booth, and he was stuck in that booth, that's all.

Q: And there were no German soldiers around?

A: No German soldiers. But, by having Jewish police behave the way they behaved, Father escaped having Germans at the gate. Now, nop -- I never --

Q: Did you see how they behaved? Did you --

A: Oh, sure I did.

Q: What did they do?

A: I'll -- I'll tell you. Father had meetings of the leaders of the brigade. And the leaders were handed in a plan. If two go through, the third one will be hit. Three go through, the fourth one will be hit. So that, watching from outside you had a picture that the Jewish police is hitting returning workers because they find something. And you would. The two that go through, no food. The third one, food. The three, no food, the fourth one, food. And every week there was a meeting of brigadiers with instructions how to bring food. The only unfortunate case was when Mueller caught our singer, Luba Levitska. She had a pound of green peas. Green peas, now scientifically, has the same vitamins as meat. Mueller happened to come to the gates and he caught her with a pound of peas. And as much as my father tried to get her from Lukiškės, if it would have been a Gestapo case, he would be able to smuggle her out. With a Gebiets commissar, the civilian case, he was not able and she wa -- was finally shot. But anyway, there was a system how to get food. Another thing was --

Q: Can I -- I'm sorry --

A: Yeah, go ahead.

Q: -- that I'm stepping back, but I wanted to understand this. The work brigade is told that every third and then every fourth, and every x person --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- is gonna be hit.

A: Yeah.

Q: And that two should have no food and the third should have food?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: So they find food on that person?

A: No, no, they --

Q: Or it's the first two have the food --

A: The -- the first two -- the first two are making up, they are getting [indecipherable]

Q: They're getting food in.

A: -- to the left and to the right, and the third one goes through.

Q: I see.

A: Yeah.

Q: I see.

A: But the picture from outside, the people that know to count one, two or three, looking from outside it looks awful. A Jewish policeman hitting a Jewish worker. And you don't figure two or three goes through, but main thing is, two get hit, third one brings food inside. Because bringing the food and getting caught was punished. Punished by death.

Q: Okay, so he would catch people who just never happened --

A: Never.

Q: -- to have any food on them.

A: That's right. And the third one or the fourth one, but there was a plan, they -- they -- the head of the brigade knew the plan. Now, for example, the older brigades came on the wide [indecipherable]

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- it was in Polish. If there happened that either Gestapo or Murer was at the gate, Mama would go to one direction, I would go to another direction. We had only three words to tell, Murer colo brani. Murer at the gates. Everybody would lower their food on the street, because that meant death, you see. So that's --

Q: So you were in some ways involved in the bringing of food into the ghetto, in the ver --

A: I-In -- well, not in directly, but --

Q: That's right.

A: -- warning, warning not to bring food to the gates until it's clear, you see.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about how -- how you saw what you did, because that's a little murky at this point in the story, because what we've seen -- what we've heard so far is that you're living outside the ghetto, your father is appointed head of the police, and we've dropped that part of the story. Bring us up to date on what ha -- where did your mother end up living, where did you end up living? You -- we mentioned before your grandmother -- your father's mother and your uncle, where were you all placed in -- in this geographical scheme of things?

A: Okay. Father had one tiny room.

Q: In the ghetto?

A: In the ghetto. As the chief of police. Next to that tiny room was a door, regular door, to a large room, where about 30 people lived. Upstairs was one little room. My uncle, his wife, the

baby and Grandmother, in one little room. Now, we had an apartment across the street from ghetto, I would say maybe 200 yards away, Gëliq Gatvë

Q: Flower Street.

A: That was Flower Street. Now we're coming to a person I would like to talk about. The whole area was in the hand of a Lithuanian Major Narusias. That whole -- whole section, including the area where ghetto was. A -- Murer used to come very often to ghetto to check on non-working population, because there was supposed to be no non-working population.

Q: Tell us who is Murer?

A: Oh Gebiets commissar [indecipherable]

Q: Oh, he was the assistant --

A: Assistant to Hingst.

Q: I see. The -- the --

A: Assistant to Hingst, yeah Gebiets commissar.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: And there was an instruction during the day, whoever didn't work and had no working scheins, not to walk the streets. So not make an impression that there are plenty people who are not workers. But it was impossible in a room like that, there were bunkbeds. In a room like that would be at least 30 people. You had to put them somewhere. Now, Narusias was Papa's friend. So he went to him and said, look, Stefan, there are buildings outside the ghetto where nobody lives. Nobody wants to live to -- th -- next to Jewish ghetto. Why don't you talk to the Germans, explain to them that these buildings are getting ruined. No heat, water seeps in. Tell the Germans that you would like to attach those buildings to the ghetto area. That proposition costed my father a lot in gold, in diamonds. But Narusias went to the Germans and he attached a big area to the

ghetto, so that first of all you wouldn't have 30 people in a room. You had already place to breathe, and you wouldn't see so many people on the street.

Q: Wa -- can you tell me, do you know the particular buildings and the particular streets that were attached? What streets they were --

A: I-If you come -- if you come through the gates, the left side. From the gates to the left, that was the area.

Q: Okay. So it would be -- it would be streets that would go towards the church of Saint Michael and Sionta Mykoloyos, or it would be --

A: Oh, Mykoloyos Natan, no.

Q: It would be going --

A: Well, it -- it was bordering Pino Gatvè.

Q: I know that.

A: But f-further outside the ghetto wall.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah, I -- I can't know the -- remember all those names. But anyway, that helped tremendously, and that was possible to do only through connections and through old friendships.

Q: And bribery.

A: Oh, sure, what you say. Nobody would do it unless it -- but at least it gave results.

Q: Yes, yes.

A: It gave tremendous results. Now, he still had a problem with food, how to feed the people. So he discussed with Germans the possibility to found more and more workshops. And they agreed that they could have in ghetto a workshop for furniture. They had their own telephone, they were not allowed to use city telephone, and they had all kinds of workshops, and they --

Q: The police had their own telephone?

A: Well they probably --

Q: The ghetto police.

A: -- probably, yeah. Probably had. And the Germans agreed to Father's idea to take the boards from one of the door from previous stores, open the store with samples what the Jews can do in ghetto and what people can come and order to be done. That was another outlet to get foods legally.

Q: Okay.

A: Legally, right, I mean --

Q: That's right.

A: -- they the -- you know, to get food.

Q: That's right. So they would make things to order.

A: To order, yes, but those people who came, at the same time it had people who had nothing to do with coming for order, they just smuggled food to ghetto. But th -- until one day they caught a big shipment coming at night through the gates. And they requested Father to give the guilty parties for arrest. And there were two people in charge of that, Mr. Trapeida and Mr.

Biniakonski. When Papa called them in, they said commandant, you're not going to be in charge of that. We're taking the responsibility and we're going to Lukiškės. You don't know anything about the transport, you have nothing to do with it, so that in front of Germans your hands are clean. So they took Mr. Trapeida and Mr. Biniakonski to Lukiškės jail.

Q: So these weren't part pa -- these weren't people from the ghetto, these were suppliers --

A: Ghetto -- ghetto -- ghetto people.

Q: These were ghetto people?

A: The Germans requested to give the culprits. Who is in charge -- who is in charge of getting that food into ghetto through the gates. So --

Q: Okay, we're going to have to --

End of Tape Six

Beginning Tape Seven

Q: Okay, so these two people who were as themselves ghetto inmates --

A: Yes.

Q: -- went to your father --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and said, we'll offer ourselves up, basically.

A: And they told my father that -- they -- they called my father commandant. [indecipherable] Commandant, you're not going to take responsibility, we're taking the responsibility. They were in charge of the food supplies. They said, whatever happens, we go, you stay. They -- Father had to bring them, and they were brought to Lukiškės. Thank God Father was able to buy them out. They -- all were -- they suffered was frozen toes. Lukiškės had no heat and the winters in Vilnius are very, very --

Q: Cold.

A: -- cold. So they finally got them out. And usually -- it was always -- not always, but in many cases, possible to buy out from Gestapo arrest, but not from the Gebiets commissariat. Whenever the civil SS -- SA, brown uniforms were involved, like Murer, you couldn't do anything.

Q: So the Gestapo was more corruptible?

A: Gestapo you are -- corruptible.

Q: I see.

A: Corruptible, yeah. Now, in the Gebiets commissariat building, you know, there is a proverb that says that world is not without good people. One day Father met a man, he looked familiar. And then he said, Colonel Keenas. He said yes, but now I am Colonel Kune. Father's friend from army.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: When the Soviet came, there was repatriation to Germany, whoever could save himself finding an old aunt, and old grandmother from German descent, he went to Germany. And that Colonel Kune is actually to be thanked for my life and for my mother's life. Every first of the month he was issuing my father two permissions, for Mama and for me separately, to use Lithuanian railway system. You couldn't go and buy a ticket to buy -- go on the train. Every month on the [indecipherable] my father would bring us this permission to use the railways. See, that's all network of Lithuanian officers.

Q: But here I want to come to a point where it's highly unusual that, in my mind, thinking that somebody who so the head o -- head of the ghetto police would be able to keep his wife and daughter outside the ghetto.

A: Nobody knew. Nobody knew.

Q: Why didn't they know? How could they not know?

A: They didn't know.

Q: So the Germans did not know?

A: Didn't know.

Q: Didn't know he had a wife and daughter?

A: No, no, they didn't know. One day we were walking on the Pilmo Street together and Weiss, one of the murderers, was going in a [indecipherable] a horse -- horse.

Q: Drawn carriage, mm-hm.

A: Yeah. And then he said to my father, oh I saw you on the street. Who are these people? And my father said oh, two very old acquaintances. Nobody knew. Until Father was shot, nobody opened their mouth.

Q: So even i -- di -- did people in the ghetto know that he was married and had a child?

A: Yes. How otherwise I would know everybody? People in the ghetto did, but they would not squeal. That's why they say that their -- they suspect Dessler, that Dessler squealed after my father was shot. I don't know. I cannot blame because I don't know. Now I -- I had a friend in Gestapo, a Lithuanian in Gestapo uniform, who was a real friend from my childhood, from high school, in sporting events. He never squealed. So what -- the way the Gestapo came after us, it had to be very, very clear information, where we are, where we live, but that stopped in there. I mentioned to you that we were about 200 yards from ghetto, across the street. And they came into the apartment, they ripped everything apart. They ripped the floorboards. Whats they were looking for, I don't know. They were looking for guns, for -- for some kind of written material, whatever.

Q: This is after your father is shot --

A: After.

Q: -- and they're coming to get you?

A: Yes.

Q: And you were there, you saw this?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: We were given 10 minutes to disappear. Father's helper came one day and said, Mrs. Gens, please take Ada and disappear immediately. Nothing taken, just walk out of the apartment the way you stand, not to throw any suspicion or anything. Mama --

Q: What time of year was this?

A: That was the day he was shot.

Q: What time of year was that?

A: Oh, that was in September.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. And he said, just disappear. But he didn't tell that Father was executed. Ghetto knew it, we didn't know it. We didn't know it for a long time. And my mother's sister know -- knew it, but she wouldn't tell.

Q: Okay, so that day you were leaving the apartment, you're told to --

A: Just walking out into the street. Next day the Gestapo came into the apartment. And how do I know how it looked? Right across the landing was another apartment with a Polish refugee from Warsaw who was hiding her son inside the apartment. And our back door, from the back entrance, were again, one across the other. So she was watching what the Gestapo was doing and when my aunt came in, my aunt came in through her apartment, opened the back door, and came in with her. They Gestapo kept the person hidden behind the front door for three days thinking that maybe we'll come in or whatever. But naturally, by that time we were out be -- because of these permissions to use the train, we were able to escape.

Q: Then your aunt came into an apartment which had somebody waiting behind the front door.

A: No, after that --

Q: After that.

A: -- after that, yeah.

Q: After that.

A: You couldn't do that, that was [indecipherable]

Q: Okay, so in other words, they knew, her neighbor knew, people knew that there's still somebody standing there for three days.

A: Outside, yeah.

Q: O-Okay.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: If that's the case that nobody knew from the Germans that you had any connection whatsoever to the head of the ghetto police, how was it that you had permission to go in and out of the ghetto? Wasn't that restricted?

A: I ha -- I mentioned before, was Major Bouragas, again another military friend, issued permission to cross the gates. Panana Šimaitė had one, my mother had one and I had one.

Q: And how often did you go in and out of the ghetto?

A: Me?

Q: Yeah.

A: I would say I spent more than 50 percent time in ghetto than in outside, because it was safer for me in ghetto than being round up in -- in the town for labor work in Germany.

Q: I see. So as there was ghetto life, there was -- still were roundups within -- outside the ghetto walls.

A: With -- outside the ghetto walls for the ge -- Gentiles.

Q: I see, I see. And the ghetto -- can you just give us this frame, the ghetto existed from what date until your father's execution and then beyond. Ca -- do you remember the dates?

A: According -- according -- I wasn't there --

Q: Okay.

A: -- according to the books that I read, the liquidation started on the 23rd of September.

Q: 19?

A: '43.

Q: Of the ghetto.

A: Of the ghetto.

Q: Okay. And it existed -- it was founded --

A: From -- founded, I would say two years. '41 - '42 - '43.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: So late summer, early fall, '41?

A: Right.

Q: And -- and in those --

A: Until exactly 23rd of September, '43.

Q: And 23rd of September is the date you left your apartment --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and the date your father was shot?

A: We don't know. We weren't told.

Q: Okay.

A: You see, we weren't told for several months. We -- we didn't know -- had told that Father is dead.

Q: Do you remember the last time you saw him?

A: Probably day before.

Q: Anything memorable from that -- from that --

A: No.

Q: No?

A: Regular. Mm, you see, so many -- so many things happened in between. There were roundups of people in small ghettos outside of Vilnius. While Papa was alive, children were not touched. After Papa was dead, they took the children. My mother's sister tried to get my cousin. When it was time to go, the mother wouldn't give. She said, oh, as long as my -- my father is there, nothing will happen to my daughter. Let's wait. And then when one day they put Ukrainians around, you couldn't get anything out. So then my aunt went to Siauliai, where it was exactly the same story. The mother wouldn't give her child before, and when my aunt arrived from Vilnius to Siauliai the ghetto was surrounded. So she couldn't save the other child either. She managed to do somebody's --

Q: You mean your -- your --

A: Mother's sister.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: No, no, you mean your mother's sister who went, but it was your uncle's children.

A: U-Uncles' children, both uncles here and uncles there.

Q: When you had permission -- I'm sorry to go back to that --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- but when you had permission to go into the ghetto, what was the reason for it? What was the ostensible reason for why a Gentile girl who has no connection to the ghetto, would be going there?

A: Who would know that? Just the Jewish people. The Jewish people knew that I'm his daughter.

I -- how would I know everybody, if I wouldn't have been there?

Q: No, I'm -- okay.

A: So I mean, the Jewish people, everybody knew. That's what I said, until Father was alive, nobody squealed. We don't know who squealed after he was killed. We don't know. And I can't put a finger on anyone, because you don't know.

Q: What would you do when you would be in the ghetto? What would be your job or your function --

A: No job, no job.

Q: -- or your activities?

A: We had a group of people that we knew each other very well from Lithuanian, Kaunas area, and there were a group of younger -- you know, we were young people. Can you imagine at that age, we just finished high school, all of us, and it -- it's awful. You're -- you're -- it's depressing. There is no way to express -- I -- I don't know what -- what to say what would I do. I would visit everybody. We would stay in groups. There was a lot of things to do in ghetto, there was a c -- there were activities that I attended. Papa took me through the pur -- orphanages, through the kitchens, you -- you know, with him, to show me how things are going. And then I just would say -- stay with grandmother, with Papa's family. That's -- you wouldn't do very much. I had one very, very bad experience when Murer came into the ghetto and Papa managed to sh-shove me out from the door into the next apartment, and Murer was checking apartments. I had nothing on me, no schein, no yellow --

Q: Star.

A: -- stars, nothing. But luckily, he didn't get into that room. There were oh, at least 30 women in that room and pa -- can you imagine if Murer would come in and yi -- Papa would have to explain to them why are these 30 ladies in the room, not working. That was a very, very narrow escape. But it -- it worked out. And then, you know, I participated a lot. I used to -- you must

know that ghetto had a very strong cultural life. I used to bring information about the place they were playing. For example, at the same time ghetto had in Vilnius theater, there was a play called *Žmogus Potilto*.

Q: Oh, person under the bridge.

A: A person under the bridge. So I used to bring them sketches and tell how they do that, so that the -- the Jewish production was not worse than the production in Vilnius. And I took musical lessons. I continued, I couldn't go to conservatory because I was warned at the philharmon -- philharmonia -- not to show myself. So I took music lessons, I stayed and played, not normal as if it's a normal life. It was the normal, but as much as possible.

Q: But somebody in Vilnius outside the ghetto knew who you were, because through the philharmonic they found out.

A: Yes, somebody did, yeah, somebody did.

Q: Did you -- did you participate aside from warning workers as they're coming back that Murer is at the gate? Was there any other way that you participated in some of these activities to help -- help the ghetto, and help the ghetto in -- inhabitants. Was it through the kitchen, was it through other kinds of activities of taking care of some of the old people or -- or -- or such?

A: No. No. I -- I went, I saw, I was -- Papa took me to show, but I didn't participate in any administrative work.

Q: Did your mother?

A: Don't forget I was 15 years old.

Q: Yes, it -- anyways --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: A --

Q: He might have not wanted you to, either.

A: I don't know, but at 15, what -- I mean, he had the -- the very well trained personnel to do all that. For example, there was no hunger. The children, the orphans were very well kept. They had quarters where they lived. Jusef Mushkat was one of Father's helpers, police member. He was in charge of orphans so that there were no people on the street, sitting or begging or anything like that. And whoever survived the ghetto is a testimony that Vilnius was very well run as far as the feeding, the hospital. They had babies. Under German law you couldn't have babies. Papa had a section where babies were born, so that ev-everything was done, whatever it was possible to do.

Q: Let's go back to the time when he was -- still in the very beginning, he was director of the hospital and the two children crawled out from the pits of Paneriai --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- and make their way back, and he hides them in this room. What happened to those children, do you know?

A: What happened later?

Q: Yeah.

A: Later I don't know, there were thr --I think -- believe there were three ladies --

Q: Three --

A: -- and two children.

Q: Do you know what happened to them?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: Right now I -- no, I don't.

Q: And did he have such -- you know, and at that point you talked about he had to turn over to the Germans a certain number of people --

A: Yeah, right --

Q: -- from the hospital.

A: -- right.

Q: I take it that must have continued in the ghetto as well?

A: Absolutely, absolutely, absolutely.

Q: And were you -- did he talk to you about these things?

A: Oh, surely. I -- i -- you need an outlet. You can't work under such pressure where human life is involved. You -- you have to try to -- to get the best of the wor -- du-during the worst, you have to try to do the best you can, but it's very difficult. I portrayed to you the selection of doctors. Those selections were going all the time. And they are painful selections, because why - - why Joe and not Peter? Why Peter and not Joe? It's impossible. But one thing which Vilnius I think is famous for, no corruption. You couldn't buy a life certificate for money. You hear that in other towns. You hear that in Warsaw. I've heard that in Łódź, reading the books, you cannot find one single case of life certificates sold for money.

Q: There are though -- there is that incident, I think, outside of town, was it Oshmini?

A: O-Oshmena

Q: Oshmen -- Oshmena.

A: Mm-hm, Oshmena.

Q: Where in some of the things that I've writ -- I've read, it's written that some of the police came back rather well-to-do. Now, can we ta -- can you tell us about what the whole incident was at Oshmena? What -- how distance i -- you know, its geographical distance from Vilnius --

A: In -- in the -- in --

Q: -- and what happened there.

A: I don't know geographically how many miles, but there were couple of small places -- like small ghettos, and the Germans, the plan was that they will be brought to Vilnius, to close the small ones and bring them to Vilnius. And that's what it was assumed will happen. When Papa didn't go there, when the police went over there, the Germans told them that these people are not going to Vilnius and that they will be finished. In those writings -- I read them -- what I believed what happened, this was the mostly gold pieces, money. The Jewish nation went through so many upheavals and pogroms in Tsaristic Russia, they didn't keep paper money, they ca -- kept mostly golden pieces, golden rubles. And I think those who came back pretty rich, they were told by the Germans to collect the bodies, and I think that's when they got into that. That wasn't a story with life certificates, that was a story when people were -- made-believe that they're going to Vilnius ghetto and at the last moment they were told that's what's going to be then, you not --

Q: So they -- they weren't shot at Paneriai, they were shot at Oshmena?

A: No, they were -- Oshmena [indecipherable] they did, yeah.

Q: And your father wasn't involved in any of that, then.

A: Oh, he didn't know. He didn't know. See, they do -- they did exactly the same thing with Kaunas. Father checked very carefully through Lietukis [indecipherable]. They were going to bring a transport to Kaunas. Father checked on the offices of suppliers of food whether it's really going to happen, and he was assured by the Lithuanian officials, yes, we had an order for bread, we had an order for potatoes, we had an order for this, for that. This is for that additional transport to Kaunas. And when they were in the Vilnius railway station, Father overheard an old Polish railway worker that we're changing the --

Q: Railway lines?

A: -- rail -- railway lines. So he said, what do you mean you're changing the railway lines? He said well, we're not going to Kaunas, we're going to [indecipherable] to Paneriai. So at that moment, Father said he understood what's going on.

Q: And -- and that was?

A: And that was -- I don't -- you know, it -- it's been so long, now I don't remember whether this was -- whether this was the people around the top in Oshmena, or that was another German trick. Could be that could have been the Oshmena people who were supposed to go to Kaunas.

Q: How -- how did people in the ghetto, as far as you are able to tell, how did they look at your father? How did they evaluate your father?

A: You know, in ghetto they used to say, look at commandant's face when he is on the street. If the commandant is smiling, you know that no aktions are coming forth. If the commandant has a --

Q: Scowl.

A: -- it's -- yeah, scowl, you know that it's not good. And I -- I would say that they took everything at a stride. They knew that he is trying his best. You -- it's -- as much as a human person can do, he tried. It -- you know, there was a -- we had a performer. He had a, like a little song, a [indecipherable]. They -- li -- life certificates were white, then they turn yellow, then they turn pink, make sure they don't turn red.

Q: Can you sing the song?

A: No.

Q: Do you remember it? Do you just remember the words?

A: That -- it's a -- it's a jet -- oh yes --

Q: That's okay.

A: -- but it was in the Russian language.

Q: It's okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: But the -- go --

Q: How does it go?

A: [speaks Russian]. The thing is that Father tried to get from Germans permission to employ people inside. And he told the Germans that he needs some kind of paper to give those people. Not the yellow scheins to work outside, but something so that people would have something in their hands to give them more hope. And the Germans agreed, so they printed the pink scheins. And they were --

Q: Certificates.

A: Certificates, right. So he tried whatever was possible to keep their spirit alive. At -- it's not so easy. Now, the question of theater, for example. From the beginning it was very, very negative. How can you have theater and concerts in a place which is actually a cemetery?

Q: And --

A: Where so many of our people have died, or are being taken to die? But after awhile, I think the human nature wants to look more -- towards more positive and more opportunistically. You couldn't get a seat in the hall.

Q: Did you used to go to the performances?

A: Absolutely, everyone, absolutely everyone. So --

Q: And was this your father's idea, to start the theater?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah. The very first -- the very first one was in a room about the size I would say like this, towards that broom, that size. It one -- one of the rooms were the administrative building. My mother was so against it, you have no idea, but she couldn't talk him out of. They said, look Elenka, we need something to give the people. Let's try it. And in that room they had like little pieces. One would sing, [indecipherable] Rosenthal, she sang, and the Fima Shapiro, Marek Shapiro. Adriana -- little sketch, little pieces. And it was tremendous success. But the opinion in ghetto was awful, look at that. There were not many, I would say no more than 30 people attending, and it was just for the administrative apparatus. And after that he discussed it with other people who were in that line of work before the war and they decided to start. And it started, and the success was tremendous, just tremendous.

Q: What were your mother's objections?

A: My mother's objections? Her objections was exactly the same way. You don't open a theater in a cemetery. She's -- she's -- she's -- figured that it would be too painful for people who lost family members, which -- which I completely agree. But in retrospect when I look back, I see that that gave people a lot of positive thinking towards the future. You go to a symphony orchestra, you know, you relax, whichever country you are. Especially in ghetto conditions. Was a very good symphony orchestra until Luba Levitska was int -- killed. She was a very good singer, and the drama actors were very good. So that it -- it worked out, it worked out to the benefit of people.

Q: In general, I'd like to, in the next tape, talk a little bit more about your mother's activities during these two years of the ghetto, from 1942 til 1943, but we can keep that for the next tape, right?

End of Tape Seven

Beginning Tape Eight

Q: It sounds from your telling that your mother was still very integral in your father's life, even when he moved into the ghetto and she was not known ami -- at least amongst the Gentile, and certainly the ge -- German administration that she is his wife. Was that so?

A: That's so.

Q: Did he used to come back to the apartment that you had an awful lot? Was he able to?

A: At four o'clock in the afternoon.

Q: Every single day?

A: When the things were quiet, every single day. That's where Panana Šimaitė would come in at the same time to get her ration of food --

Q: I see.

A: -- for the people upstairs, and well, influence. First of all, influence -- first of all, he didn't listen to her when she begged him not to get involved. That's the influence ended. Oh well, what can you do it? Otherwise, they always conferred, they always discussed. Whatever was going on, they always discussed. Mama was a very intelligent and clever person, and she -- she felt his pain, and she felt his inability to do more than he can do. And for a wife to watch her husband being torn to all sides, it's very difficult. On one of those awful nights of Oshmena, Mama woke up in the morning, her hands were covered with a -- like a scale, from nervous tension. Both hands were covered. And she was a very sensitive person, nervous tension. And she could predict, in a way, things. And my father was aware of her knowing what is going to happen. In 1939, I believe, there was a reunion of Lithuanian officers in Vilnius. And my father knew that Mama wanted to see a Talmudist in Vilnius, because in Kaunas everybody was speaking, there is a famous Talmudist in Vilnius. And he told her look, I'm going to the conference, don't you dare

to go and see that Talmudist. Don't you dare. Cause Father was not one of those people that, you know, believes in this or that. When he returned from the conference, he had one look at my mother and he said, you didn't listen to me. You went to see the Talmudist. Now, I don't know how to explain it, but the Talmudist told my mother everything that happened. They didn't say the word Germans, but he described the awful things that are going to happen and he told her that in a couple of years after that, she'll lose her husband. Talmudist had no idea who she is, who my father is, that her husband is Jewish. Absolutely no idea. He read Talmud. So when Father returned home from the conference, looked at my mother, he knew right away. And Mother lived with that heavy burden on her chest all these years, from '39 to '43.

Q: And she never told him what he told her -- what the Talmudist to --

A: She did, my father laughed. But he told her, I warned you, please don't go. Cause he knew my mother was a very sensitive person. I told you about the scales overnight. He told her not to go because to him that was a laughable object. To her, that didn't disappear. And she lived all these years waiting and expecting something terrible to happen. And Talmudist didn't know how to put it.

Q: It was 1939.

A: '39, yes. But he said, things are going to be awful beyond description, and you lose your husband couple years after that. So you know when you live it was a feeling like this. My mother hated the Germans to the point that when we were forced to live in Munich in one apartment, she never talked to the Germans.

Q: This is after the war.

A: After the war. Well, I wanted to go through German consulates to look, maybe I could find out something about Weiss, about Murer, about Neugebauer, people that they thought -- she

didn't even want to hear anything about them. Her hatred is not a human hatred. I-It's difficult to describe. And when my mother finally -- found out about my father's death, was already probably 40 -- end of '44. She went to Kaunas from where we were staying, and the landlady of my aunt's house didn't know that Mother doesn't know. We lived in the hope that maybe he ran away, or maybe -- whatever, but not dead. And she started to, oh, poor Mrs. Gens, oh my sympathy, oh, I am so sorry. Mama couldn't understand what she is talking about. And when Mama finally grasped, she nearly went mad. It was awful. The lady was telling me later, said she hasn't seen a sight like that in her life. Because it was shock plus she finally realized what happened. She didn't take too much activity in ghetto. First of all, Mama -- I wasn't afraid, Mama was afraid of the Germans, that can get caught in there. And she would spend time with Grandmother, with Uncle, and we had very many friends in ghetto, so she would visit. But she didn't take part in any administrative or anything because, as I say, nobody from German part knew that we exist. But she would attend, like I show you the picture, I showed the picture. But even in the picture, she bent down so you wouldn't see her face. She didn't want any documentation that there is a wife to the commandant.

Q: What happened with your grandmother?

A: They were -- that was the last. That was already after Papa's death, they were taken all to Paneriai.

Q: So your grandmother is in Paneriai?

A: In Paneriai. Now the aunt with a little girl, she tried -- Sala -- Salomon's wife, she tried to save herself. The girl was adorable. Big green eyes, blonde. She was dressed in a white fur coat. Tiny girl, two years old. And she put the girl on the ground and she tried to go to the other side. So I talked to survivors and they said that the German officer picked the child, was going around

to say where is the mother of the child, where is the mother of the child? And th-that Sonia couldn't stand it, she -- she just broke down. She came to the German officer, took her child and went to the --

Q: To Paneriai?

A: To Paneriai, yeah.

Q: What was the girl's name?

A: This one? This one was Ivana and the one in Siauliai was Aviva. About the same age, both.

Q: We'll get to Siauliai in a --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- in another --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- time. So -- and your Uncle Salomon wa --

A: Kloge. Kloge.

Q: So your uncle was deported to Kloge --

A: To Kloge, after Father's death. And what was interesting, when he was deported to Kloge, the train went via Siauliai and he was able to write a little note, throw it through the window.

Somebody picked it up and ran to the ghetto in Siauliai. And the brother in Siauliai came to the train, he was the head of ghetto in Siauliai. He brought Solomon some clothes, some food, and that was the last the two brothers met. And that's was -- when Salomon told the Siauliai brother that my papa is dead.

Q: So your -- Salomon knew --

A: So --

Q: You didn't know, but Sal --

A: I didn't know sa --

Q: -- but Salomon knew.

A: -- Salomon knew. They didn't tell us. They didn't tell. That's why I don't even know the exact date. We always took the date as 23rd of September. That's what we thought, but we don't know.

Q: When was it -- when was it that you found out? Your mother found out through this lady in Kaunas.

A: That's when th -- when we found out.

Q: Tha -- so that you found out the same time.

A: Yeah, mm-hm.

Q: So your mother told you, or this lady -- you were there when the lady was te --

A: No, no, I was in hiding. We were both in hiding. But that's also already 1944, I believe. So that that was already so far away. Mama went to Kaunas.

Q: That's right.

A: And that's when she found out, and then she returned back.

Q: And she's the one who told you.

A: And she's the one who told me, yeah. But when she returned back, you know what she did? She sat in one corner, looked into the other corner opposite and wouldn't move. She wouldn't move. Nothing mattered to her, nothing.

Q: How did -- what were you thinking? What were you -- how did you react to something like that?

A: I think at my age you don't react like my Mama reacted. I-I believe that I kind of suspected it. You see, what happened, only the day when they told us to leave the apartment and we went to

Panana Šimaitė's place, Šimaitė came back and she said, listen, the rumor in Vilnius has it that somebody ran away from Gestapo building and there are guards around the area. So that kept me --

Q: Hoping.

A: -- hoping that if whoever escaped the Gestapo building, it would be my father. That's -- but that took too long, when by '44 we haven't heard, because if he would have been alive there would be a way to -- to let us know or something, so I started to lose my hope. But Mama clung to it, that Papa managed to get s -- ge -- escape Gestapo and he is in hiding somewhere. He just cannot get in touch with us. See, that is -- that was her attitude.

Q: Where did -- where did Mrs. Šimaitė bring you -- or Miss Šimaitė bring you, to get into hiding? We haven't explored --

A: She didn't bring, she didn't bring. We went to Šimaitė. Panana Šimaitė lived in the apartment which was used to -- as a lodging for people who worked for the university.

Q: She lived in a dormitory.

A: Dor -- like a dormitory, yes. And in same apartment was a lady whose husband was a very high Soviet official in -- during the Soviet year. And the Germans had a place for all wives and children of Soviet officers who didn't manage to take their wives away. They didn't do anything bad to them, but they were segregated from others. It was a house close to Hakapay.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And she was taken by director of Vilnius University and placed in an apartment with Šimaitė, illegally. So when we saw her there, Mama said, you know what Panana Šimaitė? I don't feel very safe in here because of her. Because if Germans come after her --

Q: They'll find us.

A: -- they'll discovered us. So Šimaitė walked with us to a wife, Polish wife of another police officer, Mr. Alprin. And we stayed a couple of days with Mrs. Alprin.

Q: So her husband was a ghetto police person?

A: Ghetto police person [inaudible]

Q: But she was a Polish Gentile?

A: She was pol -- Polish Gentile. And after a couple of days, we figured, well th-this is the place t-to hide, because we didn't know to what extent the Germans are going to look for us. So we had the permissions for the train. We boarded the train and we had very close friends of my parents, that's the people whose children were on the echelon to Siberia, and we thought we'll go over there. That's far away from Vilnius, far away from Kaunas. On the train, when the gendarmerie came to check the documents, my mother's face went white. She didn't know is it because they have to check everybody, or just us. And her face gave her away. The Germans probably didn't notice, but the people --

Q: Next to her.

A: -- sitting next to us noticed. So the man who was sitting next to me turned around to my mother and he said very quietly that, Madam, I see that you have some very big problem and may I offer our house in Siauliai until you decide what you are doing? They --

Q: Strangers?

A: Strangers. They didn't know who am I, who Mama is, or anybody. There was a curfew. The train pulled out late, ta -- five or six o'clock in the morning, you couldn't walk. So we spent the couple of hours until the dawn, and the cra -- curfew was away, and he mentioned his name and he said that we have a huge estate, past Siauliai. I'll take you to the estate and then you'll decide what you want to do next. No questions.

Q: So this was a train going from Vilnius to Siauliai?

A: Yes.

Q: You weren't going back to Kaunas, you were going to Siauliai.

A: No, to Siauliai, Kaunas was too close. Everybody knew us in Kaunas.

Q: Okay.

A: When we came to the estate we discovered -- well, we knew his name, he introduced himself. We discovered that family who knew who we are, and they gave us, or actually him, a -- a horse and buggy and he took us to the estate where we stayed for two years in hiding. The first face, when I looked down from the buggy was my sport friend, in sports, a member of Lithuanian basketball national team, Shlupas. Uh-huh. I just looked at him, said [indecipherable] what are you doing here? And he says to me, and what are you doing here? He doesn't know that I am half Jewish. And this is my mother, he says, Mrs., what are you doing here? So I said -- he was not afraid of me. So I said, I'm in hiding. How would we translate in [indecipherable] the --

Q: Wi -- uh-huh, he was sort of like the village elder.

A: Village elder. The village elder was his cousin, and he needed a place to hide not to be inducted into German working force. So he came to his cousin. His cousin sent me to the place where we were in hiding, and that was the first face I saw. And Mama wasn't very happy about it, but I said, Mama, you don't expect anything bad from the family Shlupas. It's too high in our society to do anything bad.

Q: But she would have preferred someone who didn't know you at all.

A: Sh-She would have preferred, but I don't think he knew anything about me besides my name, last name and so on. So that -- to suspect anything, because definitely my mother doesn't look

anything like a Jewish person. And he knew me for years, we were together in [indecipherable].

The -- the -- the -- we had in Kaunas the [indecipherable] sports --

Q: A sports --

A: -- sports --

Q: A sports facility.

A: -- facilities. So for years we were together in sports with him. I knew -- we knew each other very well. So, see that what happen. You never know whom you meet.

Q: Right.

A: So he stayed there for quite awhile with us over there, yeah.

Q: And so this was a se -- you went first to this person who was set on a train.

A: On a train, right.

Q: Saw that your mother was --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- was beside herself.

A: Beside herself, right.

Q: Offered his services.

A: Right.

Q: But he recognized, or he was able to identify who you were?

A: No, nothing.

Q: Nothing.

A: Nothing.

Q: And then who knew who -- you say when you're gone to a certain estate.

A: That was, if you know Lithuania, the Venslauskas family.

Q: I see.

A: Yeah.

Q: And they're the ones --

A: That's another known family, yeah.

Q: Okay. And they're the ones who hid you for --

A: We'd stayed with them for awhile.

Q: For awhile.

A: And then he brought us to the estate where we stayed, yeah.

Q: I see, and you stayed out in the country then?

A: In the country for two years, over two years [indecipherable]

Q: And you were then closer to Siauliai than you were to Vilnius?

A: Closer to Siauliai, right.

Q: Yeah.

A: Right.

Q: Before I leave the Vilnius ghetto and talk about Siauliai, I'd like to ask a few other questions.

Were you familiar with -- did you know about the Resistance movement that was forming within the ghetto? Did you know any of the people who were in it?

A: I knew only enough in case I am caught, not to give the information, because there was always a possibility that Gestapo may find out about us. Father was very, very careful. And I knew the fact, I didn't know the names. I knew, for example, in 1942, Father talked to the Germans and explained to them that ghetto has no way to heat the buildings and he asked for permission to send Jewish workers in faraway woods to cut the timber and bring it in ghetto, and finally je -- Germans agreed. That was a place where the movement started. A carriage would go

with double floor, with people under the double floor, to unload themselves, load the timber and that goes one back and forth. So I -- I spent couple of weeks in that place over there and I knew perfectly what's going on. But if you would put me at the wall and tell me I will shoot you if you don't tell me, I wouldn't be able to tell. Father was very careful. We --

Q: So you knew perfectly what was going on --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- but you had nothing you could say?

A: No.

Q: That sounds --

A: I didn't know the names.

Q: I see.

A: You wouldn't -- you wouldn't mention the names. I knew the fact because I was spend my time over there, I went with him over there. I knew -- I knew the extent what's going on.

Q: So in other words, he was also supporting the resistance by doing this.

A: He was -- well, you -- you've seen the literature. They have all kinds of -- all kinds of opinions. They -- on one side they say that you are supporting, that he was procuring the guns. On the other side they s -- would say that he didn't want them to leave ghetto, to leave the children and old people alone, because if you -- let's say you saved hundred people in wood, you left the others for their own what? They can't do anything. Children, old ladies, women. He was against young people completely leaving the old ones in ghetto without any defense. He thought that there should be -- there should be something left.

Q: But it goes against what you were saying earlier --

A: Well, that's --

Q: -- when he chose the -- the young to live --

A: Ye -- he chose the young to live, but you see, circumstances change, and when you see old mothers and mothers and grandmothers and little children and everybody tries to get into the forests and leave them behind, I-I don't think you can stick any more to -- to your ideas that you had before. He was telling them nicely that listen, I am warned by the Germans that if they find out who brings the guns, who goes away, the repercussions will be very bad, and they threatened the children. Th -- Papa did everything in his force not to sacrifice the children, and the children were not touched until Papa was alive. He asked them to be careful, and he tried to explain to them that by removing a dozen today, dozen today, dozen tomorrow, we cannot save the ghetto. He wanted to prolong -- you see, the front was moving slowly. It wasn't as rosy for the Germans as it used to be in '41. In '43 the situation in the front was already different. He was hoping against hope that maybe somehow, if he drags the people longer, like in Kłoge where my uncle died, the Russians were right there. They came in, the timber was still burning, you see? So he -- he just thought that maybe, maybe, if we don't provoke the Germans, if they leave us alone and let us live the way we are, work, work, work, work, nevermind work, but work, maybe we'll expect -- you know, maybe our expectations will take place. Maybe it'll happen. Maybe the Russian army will come closer.

Q: Did he ever have a conversation with you as his daughter of, I may not survive the war?

A: No, never. He knew it very well. He knew that the German could -- a German soldier came into the ghetto area and he wanted to rip a -- Father had a -- a Lithuanian officer's c -- student -- student -- like we have here, those [indecipherable]

Q: Insignias --

A: Insignia, yeah. And Father didn't want to give it to him. He pulled out the gun. So, there was no way, you know, he had to give it to him. And an officer could have shot him any time, any German could have shot him any time. We -- we -- we counted on it, we knew it. So, I mean, there was no sense to discuss at all. What sense did it make? We knew the way he -- he lived.

Q: You say that he was very careful to not talk to you about something that could eventually hurt you and hurt others, were you caught, where you would be forced to talk.

A: That's correct.

Q: And yet, at the same time, every day four o'clock, he'd come back to your apartment --

A: That's right.

Q: -- and he would share things with your mother. Do you think the same rule applied with her, or do you think he went into details with her, because he needed to talk to somebody who was trusted?

A: I would say the same rule. I would -- I -- I was always there, so whatever I heard, she heard. There was no secrets without me being present. You know, all -- all the effort that he put into that period of life was to prolong, somehow, the survival. Whatever he did was for that one and only purpose. We have no idea, as I told you before, we have no idea what the Germans discovered, or simply they decided that he is the head, he should be removed, it'll be easier to annihilate the others.

Q: So --

A: For example, he built malinas. You know what malina is?

Q: Secret places.

A: Secret places. In charge of malinas were two people, engineer Marcos and Mr. Dellwell. Mr. Dellwell was from Kaunas. He knew him very well because his daughter was with me in school,

and engineer Marcos was from Poland. It was in engineer Marcos' hands to build the malinas. It was in Mr. Dellwell's hands to supply water and food. This we knew. Mama knew and I knew that they are in charge. I didn't know where the malina was, but I knew that Father had a plan, had quite a big plan for malinas. And I believe what people told me, that my uncle's wife and grandmother and the child were in the malina. But the Germans forced people to open the malinas. So some were saved and some were pulled out. But his idea was to do as much as possible, to save as much as possible. So it's -- it's not like you sometimes read, cooperation, what kind of cooperation? He would go into [indecipherable] with the Germans. If they would say they want 5,000, he would offer a thousand and the Germans would come down to 3,000, he would s-say 1,500. But he was able, he managed to have that -- I think billing -- being such a military nation, the Germans had certain -- I wouldn't call it respect, but they had a certain attitude towards a military posture of my father. He looked a military man whichever way you looked at him, from the left, or to the right. He looked a military man. And when the mail used to come from Gebiets commissariat, mail, they would never write to Jewish, they would write Herr Jacob Gens. It was unusual to have such a polite form. I think that had a lot to do. And we were told that when Papa went into Gestapo and the army found out, well I don't know whether that's true or not, the army offered Gestapo two --

End of Tape Eight

Beginning Tape Nine

Q: So your father is arrested and you heard later that the -- that the German army might have -- I mean a rumor --

A: Might --

Q: -- that a --

A: There was a rumor that the German army offered Gestapo a tremendous amount of money to let my father go. Not because of sentimental reasons, but he was a organizer of entire product -- productive, you know, force for the German army, and army needed it. But unfortunately the -- Hitler's line was stronger and they --

Q: Well, so what you said earlier about the Gestapo being corruptible, wasn't always the case.

A: That was not the Gestapo, that came straight from Himmler.

Q: I see.

A: That came from the up, up, up.

Q: That it's time for Gens to go?

A: The Jewish solution, yeah. It's time to finish with the Jews --

Q: I see.

A: -- in Vilnius. Time to finish with the Jews. So they didn't care that army needed them. They didn't want any more Jews. The only place that they left for time being was the Hakapay at Kilus. Kilus was producing a fur uniforms for the German lady -- female personnel, and also for German officers, and later on for German army, what -- as much as they could. And Hakapay was involved in structural work, so --

Q: What is Hakapay, what was Hakapay?

A: I don't know the German word -- n-name of Hakapay, I can find it. It's what's called H -- Hakapay, HKP.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I -- I'll find out what i-it meant.

Q: But there was also effort --

A: The Jewish -- they were out of ghetto. They were living separately, out of ghetto, in the vicinity where the Russian wives and children of Russian officers were there -- where they were there. And they had the -- they didn't belong together, they always were separate, and I don't remember which one went first, because I wasn't there, whether Kilus went first or Hakapay went first, they were not able to -- to save them. So --

Q: So you didn't know of the details of resistance activity in Vilnius ghetto. Did you know of the incident as -- as it happened, of Vittenberg, or Wittenberg?

A: Yes, I knew, that I knew.

Q: Okay.

A: That I knew.

Q: What did you know of that, and what did you see or experience that surrounded the head of the resistance and his --

A: Father warned his people to be very careful with Polish people around. He never trusted the Polish people, I'm sorry to say that. One reason was, he didn't know them. Another reason was that he saw too many Jewish people disappear in Lukiškės, because the Polish people will give them out. So he said, be very careful. Don't ever trust a Polish person. I don't remember the details now, but somehow Germans, I believe, caught a Polish person and under torture he gave name. And the Germans requested to be handed in [indecipherable] yeah.

Q: So this person -- so he gave the name of [indecipherable] Wittenberg?

A: Yes, Wittenberg. It was an awful case because Papa tried to assure the Germans that there is no illegal activity in ghetto. Because they were threatening all the time, if we catch illegal activity, that will be the end of the ghetto. Now we all knew that Gestapo had means to torture and the -- the Polish man didn't -- was not able to stand it, Wittenberg wouldn't be able to stand it either. Now if they got Wittenberg and he would start talking, that was very bad for the ghetto. I can't remember who gave him ciancarli.

Q: What's ciancardi?

A: The very strong poison like Goering took? Goering's wife.

Q: Cyanide?

A: Cyanide, yeah. Can't remember now. Even when I read those books years, years ago, I -- I don't reread them all the time. I can't remember, but anyway, he was given ciancarli.

Q: Did you know Wittenberg? Had you seen him ever?

A: Probably. A -- you know Wittenberg, Wittenberg. He -- he -- nobody knew anything, so Mr. Wittenberg, that's it. So he wasn't given a life.

Q: So in other words they handed over a corpse.

A: Corpse.

Q: And how do you know that?

A: Oh that -- that was -- everybody knew that.

Q: So that was written, or that was -- that was at the time.

A: That was at the time, yeah.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But Papa couldn't afford to have Wittenberg tortured, because then the whole thing would slowly come out. The forests, they're going to the forests with a double bottom to, you know, carriage --

Q: Did he talk about that at home during his four p.m. meetings, you know, when he'd come back every --

A: About Wittenberg's torture --

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes. It was very, very difficult story for him. But what do you do? You can't risk -- that's what he was trying to tell those people, I cannot risk the entire ghetto because 20 or 30 of you would run to the woods and leave me with a whole -- thousands on my hands, so that you are going to be free. You see, the situation changed. Situation changed and he saw that there is no way -- if Warsaw ghetto, with such tremendous, organized uprising didn't survive, he knew that Vilnius can't -- Vilnius doesn't have so many ammunition or anything. You -- you can't -- you can't survive.

Q: So, but it was an argument then, that he must have had, a very strong argument and a longstanding one with those who wanted to resist, the young people who wanted to resist and belong to that resistance movement.

A: That's all right? They wanted to resist, and what about the others? What about this -- the aftereffect? Okay, they would resist, let's say they would fight for a week. There's no question that the Germans would send their army and that would be squashed out. But what about the remaining ones? What about the remaining ones? Straight to the ovens?

Q: It sou -- it sounds like he was caught in s --

A: He was caught, yeah. What would you do? How -- how would you -- how would you reason with people? He knew that the young ones wants to save -- they want to save themselves, but what do you do with mothers and grandmothers and so on? Father was counting that maybe one day the army, Russian army will come closer, and the Germans will run away.

Q: When did you a -- he sounds extraordinary.

A: I would say not because it's my father, but I would say that he was extraordinary. He was. Absolutely no fear. Absolutely no fear.

Q: But did he have fear for you and your mother?

A: Yeah. That's why c-certain things you wouldn't tell. You -- I would know the facts, but I wouldn't know the names. Because, you see, in Kaunas the Nuremberg law was applied right away. Somehow in Vilnius, between Polish, Lithuanian and Jews and this and that, it didn't come on the poles. So --

Q: You mean, you didn't see these Nuremberg laws pasted --

A: No, pasted i-in Vilnius. In Kaunas, yes. And Kaunas had quite a few suicides, when one side wouldn't give the other one away and both would commit suicide. Nothing like that in Vilnius. So -- you know, but you never knew when it will start. That's why he was always very much afraid.

Q: What legacy has he left you? Your father.

A: What legacy?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: You know, he tried to help people. I've been helping people since 1947. He never got anything for his help. I never ask anything for my help, and I -- I help a lot. I think this is something that goes through the genes. You are the way you are because of something. You're

not the way you are that suddenly [indecipherable] oh, it's good to make good, and this and that. You are the way you are. And I believe a lot of that behavior had tremendous influence on my growing up -- in my growing up years. He used to say -- he had a saying in Lithuanian that [speaks Lithuanian here]. In English it would be, the dear Lord is getting old, and doesn't see what's happening on the earth. But he never complained, he never blamed, he just took it in stride, whatever the life was throwing at him. And he had a very easy way not to do it. The Lithuanian officers had the place for him. It was a estate of Pulkanika Skorupskas. Just go and stay there. Nobody would know, that's why Mama was begging him, don't get any official place. We have a place for you, we'll wait until the end of the war, and that's it. But you see, certain -- certain forces in your conscience overpower you, and even if he wasn't Jewish up til that time, he felt for his nation, and he -- he wouldn't budge.

Q: Do you think people have been too hard on him?

A: You want to know my answer? I couldn't care less. That's my answer, I couldn't care less. I would like to have them just sit in his skin and do what he did. Telling you're going to die, telling you're going to live. That's easy on a person? They show in those plays, they show a scene, they describe a scene. Father standing at the gate, and the German is letting father, mother in to children. And he sees a family coming with three children and he sees a family coming with one child. And he grabs a kid from the three, throws them into the family with one, hits the father on the shoulder with his stick and yells at him, what do you do? You left your child behind. Well that story is all over the plays, the books and so on. His mind had to work in all directions. If he wouldn't have noticed that one has one child and the other has three children, the one would go through and they would take another third child from the next. He had to see everything. It's not so simple. And it's not so simple to -- to have conversations with the Germans when you have

human blood to count. As I told you, they want 5,000, you offer a thousand. They go down to four, you go up to one -- 1500. These are people, these aren't just marionettes, and you have to deal with it. So I would like those people who have harsh words to try to be in his skin and see how they would like to do it. That's why I say I couldn't care less at all, cause I've seen my father's reaction and I've seen his tremendous effort to do whatever is possible. And he -- in the certain way the effort worked out, quite a bit survived. Not necessarily -- not necessarily in Vilnius but they survived in Dachau, they survived in Auschwitz. Some survived. So, you know, it's difficult -- difficult to make a judgment. And now what can people -- they judge harsh -- harsh behavior at the gate. I explained to you the gate. Kaunas had completely different situation. Vilnius had completely different situation. Kaunas didn't have to feed the people, we had to feed the people. So, you do something to do it. He had Polish people around, which he didn't trust. Kaunas didn't have it, Kaunas had Lithuanian people. So he had here the Germans on one side and he had untrustworthy Poles on the other side. So h-he's -- find the gold medium. You were afraid of the Polish population, which was not friendly at all, not friendly at all. He had an agreement with Gestapo. The Jewish person had a Polish family, friends. The Jewish person would leave his gold for the Polish family to save for him. And then one day they would agree that the Jewish person somehow will come in the dark to get some of the gold. And the Polish person would call the Gestapo, and the Jewish person would come in, and pick up the Jew, here we go to Lukiškės. And that happened time and again, time and again. So Father made the plan. He offered Gestapo 50 - 50. I'll tell you where the gold is, you take 50, I take 50 percent. No Jew goes to Lukiškės, no Jew is shot in Paneriai. You have your share, I have my share for the ghetto. You had to buy food. Food was at exorbitant prices, you needed money. So you figured, what I'm losing? One way or the other, the Pole will call Gestapo to get the Jew, the gold will go

hundred percent to Gestapo. This way at least I'll have 50 percent for Jewish ghetto. And the treasury in ghetto will not be bare, will have something. Well these people -- these people don't know it, see? He had to -- it was a Machiavelli scheme, but it worked. Everybody was happy. Gestapo was happy, and Jewish treasury was happy.

Q: The Pole wasn't very happy.

A: The -- th-the -- that was not my father's concern, you see? If the -- if the Polish people kept the same attitude, greedy people, people who were friends before, just because it was financial benefit involved, he didn't care about it. So you see, things like this, they are not in the books. People who wrote all those articles were happy to have food. And they were happy when they saw Commandant werk -- walking around the street aw -- in a good -- in a mood. They were happy at that time. Well, he -- he wanted -- he wanted to live, but I'll you again -- you mentioned about his father in Siauliai, I think if he would have lived, his fate would be even worse than his brother's in Siauliai, from the Soviet Union side. Because in addition of being the head of the ghetto, he was anti-Soviet, with all I told you before. So I think if my uncle was sent to Vorkuta, he would have -- probably didn't even reach Vorkuta. He would be finished before Vorkuta.

Q: Let's get to Siauliai.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: How is it that your uncle, Ephrain Gens, got to be the [indecipherable]

A: Coincidence, we didn't know a thing.

Q: It wasn't -- it wasn't in any way --

A: No way. Absolutely not connected. Very energetic, very good looking, tall, blonde, blue-eyed. Didn't look like a Jew at all. I -- I saw your picture.

Q: You showed me the pictures.

A: He had -- I showed you the picture. He didn't look like a Jew at all. Product of Lithuanian schools, Lithuanian university. Energetic person. Pru --

Q: When did you learn he was a ghetto police chief? When you were in Vilnius?

A: When we were in Vilnius, yeah.

Q: So --

A: From my aunt.

Q: From your aunt in Siauliai?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: What -- did she have the right to come --

A: No --

Q: No.

A: -- no, no, no.

Q: Did the brothers ever meet during that time?

A: No, no. The only brother that met [indecipherable] was Salomon on the way to Kloge, to Estonia.

Q: So your father and Ephrain, in the times that they each were --

A: Had no idea.

Q: They had no idea --

A: No idea, mm-hm.

Q: -- that the other was the head of the police in the other ghetto?

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Q: Not only did they not meet, they had no idea?

A: No idea.

Q: When did you learn that he --

A: When I did learn? When he came from Dachau.

Q: So you were still in Lithuania when he came from Dachau.

A: Yeah.

Q: And can you give us just a brief kind of overview of what his fate was, what his role there was, and --

A: All right. First it --

Q: And what happened to Aviva?

A: He had to hand it in, children's section. That's what my father didn't live to see. One thing, he was protecting the children. And two, his moral satisfaction. He did not see the handing in of the children. They were taken out after his death. He was doing everything he could to protect the children. Every time the Germans wanted the children, he would offer something else. He si -- his brother couldn't protect her daughter. He was commandant's -- chief of police daughter, so everybody knew. He had to ge-get her. What happened? In -- when stut -- Stutthof was liberated, the Russians put German cows -- cows marching through Lithuania to Soviet Union. And they put the prisoners from Stutthof in charge of the cows. And if you talk today to people in Kaunas my age, they will tell you how Kaunas looked when hordes of cows were going through our streets further towards Belose. You have no idea. So, his wife was one of those prisoners from Auschwitz liberated --

Q: Stutthof.

A: -- Stutthof, liberated, who was put in charge of getting the cows to Soviet Union. Naturally when they came to Vilnius she ran away -- well, they weren't prisoners any more -- she ran away. She knew where my aunt, my mother's sister lived, and she came straight to my aunt, and she

told us -- she told us everything. She told us how they had to give the child away, and she said that if her husband is alive, they agreed -- cause nobody could even f-fathom what will happen, but they agreed that they'll meet in Lithuania. They'll look for each other in Lithuania. So she stayed with us all the time. She was shaven, her hair started to grow, little by little. And one day the university choir had a concert in Vilnius. We came to Vilnius and I went to visit my mother's brother.

Q: An uncle.

A: An uncle. And when I knocked at the door and my -- his wife, my aunt opened the door, she screamed in an awful way. I thought, oh my God, what happened, why is she screaming like that? And then I looked deeper and I saw my Uncle Ephrain sitting at the end of second room. She screamed -- and she told me later that she didn't know how to react. She was afraid of my reaction, at the same time she couldn't control herself. So anyway, he sat in there, i-in the other room in a German uniform, cause he was six something. They couldn't find him any clothes after Dachau so they dressed him in a German army wu -- uniform. Can you imagine, Soviet years, war is still going and I get to the street with a man in German uniform? So anyway -- oh, that's another thing, how we survived, we have to come back to something.

Q: We will.

A: Anyway, Mama's ministry of -- I think it was of -- [speaks foreign language here]

Q: Commerce.

A: -- of commerce, commerce ministry had trucks going Kaunas Vilnius. So they gave us a truck. We put my uncle at night in the truck and we transported him from Vilnius to Kaunas. Now in Kaunas when we returned -- we had nothing in Kaunas, but my aunt had an apartment. But because we -- we were cut off in the Samogitia place --

Q: Mm-hm, in [indecipherable] mm-hm.

A: -- in -- in Lithuania, there were 30,000 of us were cut off, we returned to kow -- to Kaunas very late. And already in all the poles you could read, if you don't come back by such and such date, the state will take over your apartments. That meant that wi -- if you are in Germany, you ran away, we'll take over your apartment. But they gave a chance for the 30,000 to come back. So my ha -- my aunts --

Q: The 30,000 refugees, the 30,000 who were hiding, the 30,000 Jews?

A: The 30,000 who were cut off in Samogitia.

Q: Okay.

A: Cut off. You had Russians coming from this side, you are Germans arriving from this side, and you had 30,000 Lithuanians trying to get somewhere.

Q: I see, okay.

A: So anyway, my -- my -- ma -- my aunt's landlady figured that probably my aunt will return, so she had no way to save her stuff, but she put her stuff into one room and gave her apartment to enkavadair lady worker. The KGB lady worker. So now we can't show my uncle. It's one apartment. You know, you share the rooms, share the kitchen. It's one apartment. So during the day he exactly sat behind a tall wardrobe, without moving.

Q: And the reason why is because he had only a German uniform on?

A: He had a ger -- he had a German uniform, he came from Dachau, explain to her, to a KBG lady. In uniform. She had the blue epaulets and everything. So anyway, after awhile of staying in this arrangement, we had no place to sleep. My aunt had only one little couch and one chair that you could open. And there was my uncle, his wife, Maba, Kata and myself, five of us. So they decided that the best thing for them to do would go to Klaipėda. But at that time Klaipėda was

not open for private population because it was mined by the Germans when they ran. They mined every building. So the Russian forces were going from one building to another --

Q: Clearing it.

A: -- removing the mines.

Q: And this was a harbor town, harbor city.

A: It was harbor city. So they said, when the mining period will be finished, they'll go to Klaipėda. Nobody knows in Klaipėda the Gens name. They realize they cannot stay in Kaunas, Vilnius or Siauliai.

Q: He had new clothes, I take it, by that point?

A: Hm?

Q: At some point along the way --

A: No. No, not yet.

Q: No?

A: Not yet, not yet, not yet. So that's what -- what was decided would be the best thing for him to do, to move to Klaipėda. And then slowly we started to gather things for him to take with and so on, and at one point naturally the clothes had to be changed and the -- but what happened, when Dachau was liberated, he was appointed a head of German post office in Frankfurt.

Q: How did that happen?

A: Well, he tel --

Q: A former prisoner of Dachau becoming --

A: Yeah, but that's a -- Germany is no more.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Intelligent person, knew how to work, and he was in Frankfurt am Main, am Oder, that was Frankfurt am Oder. He was head of the post office, but then h-he remembered that he made an agreement with his wife to meet in Lithuania if they stay alive. So he said nevermind my post in the post office, I'll go to Lithuania and I'll see maybe I'll find my wife alive. And that's, you know, what happened. So we transported him from Vilnius, from my other uncle's home to do this and later on -- you see that -- that will make me explain to you why we left Lithuania.

Q: Okay, you can do that.

A: We have enough time to do?

Q: We got enough --

End of Tape Nine

Beginning Tape 10

Q: Okay. So your uncle at Frankfurt am Oder remembers his promise to his wife, that if they are alive they meet back in Lithuania. He makes it back to Lithuania only in a German soldier's uniform.

A: Right.

Q: By a miracle doesn't get arrested, doesn't get picked up. Is -- is transported surreptitiously from your mother's brother's, that is your uncle's from the other side of the family apartment in Vilnius, to Kaunas --

A: To --

Q: -- and eventually goes to --

A: Klaipėda.

Q: -- Klaipėda.

A: N-Now, I'll explain to you what happened with us. When we returned back from hiding --

Q: And when did hiding end and how did it end for you?

A: Soviet army broke through from Leningrad, Riga, pushed the Germans out, and we were on the way.

Q: And do you remember what it was like seeing the first Soviet soldier?

A: What it was like?

Q: Yeah, well I mean, did you see them? Did somebody come and tell you?

A: Oh sure. No, no.

Q: Okay.

A: We were in the valley.

Q: Okay.

A: On the other side of the valley was a high -- not highway, but a road where the German army was running like crazy, because on the other side of the valley was a hill and you could see Russian soldiers, mounted soldiers with binoculars watching what's going on. So here is a picture. People in the middle, Germans running away, not letting you on the road, because they had to run. Russians watching the whole scene and shooting with cartouches over our heads at the rush -- at the Germans.

Q: [inaudible]

A: Yeah. Now, these were the Russian troops, the frontier troops. Mama, in her wisdom told us look, we're not waiting for the 30,000 people to be transported back to Lithuania, we're leaving tonight. As long as we are dealing with frontier troops, they are not going to be -- there won't be any inquisition about our political views. As soon as the Russian troops go out and the civil government sets in, we'll start the same thing as we lived in 1940. Who are you, where are you and so on and so on. And Mama was right, as always. So, we asked the Russian echelons of soldiers, trains of soldiers, to help us to go back to Kaunas. We explained that we're refugees from the war, from the shooting. So Mama, my unc -- my aunt, who came to join us later in the hiding place, they transported us as far as Radvilishkis. On the way there, more people joined the train and they started to tell that in Radvilishkis, which was already in Soviet hands for quite awhile, there is already a KGB checking every refugee, his papers, and asking questions. And those people told us that, you know what? You better get, before Radvilishkis, off the plane, walk --

Q: Off the train.

A: -- off the train, walk to Radvilishkis, go in a half circle and get another soldier's train, jump in to go to Kaunas.

Q: By train do you mean an actual train on tr -- on railway tracks?

A: On railway tracks, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: But the soldiers were coming from the front, back.

Q: I see.

A: So we did what the people advised us, and we were in Radvilishkis, the three of us. We were on the street and then I see a man coming towards us. I say Mama, doesn't he look familiar to you, I just can't point -- how do we know him? Mama couldn't remember. And then it dawned to me. After going to Palegise it was usually, we used to go to a big estate and spend another month in that es-estate, and he was the brother of the owner of the estate. Tall man, looked very much like my uncle from Siauliai. Silver hair, big, tall. So I approached him and I said, do you remember me and my mother? He looked at my mother, he said, you know what? I think I remember you from year after year staying at that estate. And he helped us to go around Radvilishkis. He put us on the next soldier train, and we escaped already the Soviet civilian authorities. Now again the same thing when -- when we approached Kaunas, we told -- we were told get off the train little bit before. When the train stops, don't go to Kaunas railway station, it'll be even worse. Because Kaunas already in Russian hands for quite awhile. See, the area where we were was liberated only in the si -- October, and Kaunas was already liberated much earlier from the Germans.

Q: So we're talking October '44.

A: '44.

Q: And Kaunas was liberated probably in July or something like that.

A: Somewher -- something like that, you see. So that's what happened, but we didn't know what happened to my aunt's apartment. So we walked to the apartment and that's what we found. We found that she moved all her stuff to one room, let the [indecipherable] into her apartment, but at least she had one room. In those days Lithuania had the cards for food.

Q: Ration cards.

A: Ra-Ration cards. I entered right away the university. So we had cards better than the regular person. My aunt went back to work, she was a manager of Spodos Fondas. I don't know if you know Spodos Fondas. It was a huge chain of -- like Plymptons in America. Stationery --

Q: Mm-hm. Oh yeah.

A: Huge chain. She went back to Spodos Fondas. Now Mama started to look for work. Wherever she went, the moment she filled out papers Gens [indecipherable] Mrs. Gens, nothing worked. We had [indecipherable] we had nothing. So, you know, I was pushed against the wall, I said, Mama, what are we going to do? On my student card and my aunt's regular card, we'll starve. It's worse than during German occupation.

Q: Yeah.

A: There's nothing to eat. I said, you know what? I'm going to Vilnius. I have to find some survivors in Vilnius, I'll see what I can finally find out. To make a long story short, I go to Vilnius, and I knew that in every institution the Kadros Kirov would be again in the hands of Jewish people. I go to one ministry, I open the door and were five of them standing. They couldn't believe that I am alive. They said, Ada, you alive? What about mother? Said, Mother is alive. Said oh, we all knew that you are dead, both of you. Because we disappeared. See, we disappeared so quick that there was no time even to think otherwise. So I said, look, we are alive, yes, but you know, we probably will die from hunger cause we have no money, nothing to sell,

and how do we survive? So he said, oh, don't you worry. I said Mama was looking for a job, she speaks perfect Russian, when she men-mentions her last name, nobody gives her work. So one of them said, you know what? Don't you worry. Mama comes to work for my ministry, I'll he -- make her a head of administrative si -- administrative de-department, and I'll keep Mama's dossier under key. And as long as I'm the ch-chief, she -- her papers are in the si -- sealed, under a key. No problems. When I came back to ha -- Kaunas, Mama said, how did you dare to do that? You know that I don't want to be a prominent person. I don't, you know, that I'd want to [indecipherable] anywhere. I said, Mama, we have to eat.

Q: Yeah.

A: So either or. Either you will be a prominent person --

Q: And we'd eat.

A: -- or we eat.

Q: Yeah.

A: And th -- that what we did. Now, one day --

Q: So, which ministry was this part of?

A: [indecipherable] ministry.

Q: Commerce ministry.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Commerce ministry. One day he pays us a visit.

Q: In Kaunas.

A: In Kaunas.

Q: And who was this man?

A: He's in Canada. Tevya Sheriss. He said, Mrs. Gens, I have to tell you that I am not able to keep your papers under the key much longer, and I would advise you to do something about it. She looked at him and said, what do you mean? He said, I am Polish citizen. I am going to Poland, I'm repatriating to Poland, and I would advise you to repatriate to Poland. Mama looked at him, said, how can I repatriate? I am Lithuanian. I speak Polish perfectly, but I am not Polish and everybody in Kaunas knows who I am. So he said, well, try to think of something. And we had in each location, a Polish repatriating committee. So repatriating committee would check your Polish ancestry, but then Lithuanian KGB had to stamp it. So it wasn't so simple. So Mama -- we went to many places in the area of Vilnius, where nobody knew who Mama is. And we tried the Polish committees, to talk to them. They said fine, we'll do it. Because Mama had perfect documents from her high school and from work at the Polish refugee committee from the first war. And they said -- another thing was, I spoke perfect Polish. So, no Lithuanians in those years spoke Polish. So she -- he -- she would tell, look at my daughter. We're Polish people. But they said, what about the Lithuanian? You will not go through the Lithuanian KGB. So Mama came back to Kaunas and said, I don't know what to do. There is no way to get official papers, and there is no way af-after he unlocks his [indecipherable] and goes to Poland that they will keep me there. So, I don't know who was the person to help us, but we went through Polish committee legally, absolutely. Now there was a question of getting Lithuanian exit stamps. Somebody took the papers, somebody did the work and somebody got paid. And in our transport were all the workers of Kaunas theater. Ballerinas and drama, everybody was from the theater. At that time my uncle and his wife were still with us, and Mama said Froizim, how about we try the same for you? And he answered, Elenka, there is no way. I am too -- too -- I -- I would show in between those people, I would stand out. I cannot risk. I went through so much, I cannot risk

to be caught at the border. Because we didn't know the arrangement, was it enough bribe, not enough bribe, will we go through? Because we could have been on one stretch to Siberia, crossing the Soviet border illegally. When we arrived at Suwalki and crossing bord -- crossing point, we see that were two young ladies, they went to -- with big baskets with everything in the basket, to the guards, and we see that they handed the baskets and they returned to the -- there was three trucks -- two buses and a truck. And we see that they are lifting up the -- the -- the big wooden plank that crosses the border. We enter Suwalki. We enter Suwalki and now, can you imagine, in the whole transport of our people, only Mother and I speak Polish.

Q: And yet everybody's a Pole repate -- repatriating to Poland?

A: Right, right, to Poland, yes.

Q: That's a big bribe.

A: Yeah, the big bribe. So anyway, Mama looked around at [indecipherable] we can't stay here very long, because if they catch -- the Poles -- Pole -- Polish were under the Soviet influence.

Q: That's right.

A: We can't stay here very long. Let's try and get out as soon as possible. But was easy said, not so easy done.

Q: So you wanted to abandon all those drama and theater people from --

A: We -- we were -- yes --

Q: -- Kaunas.

A: -- yes, yeah. Now what happened. My aunt was on the same repatriation paper, there were three of us. And at the last day she said, you know what? I am afraid. I'll stay, I cannot go. Because 75 percent was doubtful and it looked that we may not cross the border. So she stayed behind. Now, that friend of mine, Mr. Sheriss, before he left he gave us a name and address in

Lódz and he told us look, you get in touch with that person. Do you know what the Jewish aliyah is?

Q: Isn't that transfer to Israel?

A: Yes.

Q: Going to Israel.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yes.

A: From all over the world. He said, she is a liaison for Jewish aliyah and when you tell her who you are, she'll help you to get out of Poland to other destinations. So we come to Lódz, we find the address and the lady who opened the door said, oh yes, she was in here, but about couple of weeks ago, she went west. That was our only connection in Poland. She went west. Ah, but she says, you know what? There is a doctor from Vilnius. He lives in the same courtyard. Dr. Romanofsky. Go and talk to Dr. Romanofsky, maybe he'll know -- because she is from Vilnius, he is from Vilnius, maybe he'll know where did she go. So Mama stays in the middle of the courtyard, I ring a bell to Dr. Romanofsky's door. The door opens up. Mrs. Feigenberg opens the door, and the German nurse stands behind her. And Mrs. Feigenberg [indecipherable]

Q: A German nurse?

A: Yeah, worked for -- for her husband.

Q: Okay. And this is --

A: This is already free Poland.

Q: Free Poland?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: I understood immediately. I was sent to see Dr. Romanofsky and I found Dr. Feigenberg, one of the doctors that my father pulled forward to live in the hospital. He couldn't live -- he couldn't leave vil -- Lithuania, so he bought himself papers of a deceased Polish doctor, Romanofsky, with his diploma and everything and he arrived Poland illegally himself. The Russians wouldn't let him go, and he lived in that apartment as Dr. Romanofsky. That's when -- Mrs. Feigenberg, when she saw me, she almost shouting me not to call her Mrs. Feigenberg.

Q: And there was a German nurse behind her?

A: Working for her.

Q: I see.

A: She was a German national.

Q: I see, okay.

A: She was working for her husband as a nurse. Not a German for -- but she was a German --

Q: I see.

A: -- by -- by nationality. So anyway, you see, that was a split second. If I would have a blabbermouth, I'd say, oh, Mrs. Feigenberg, how nice to see you. That would have cut into his career. So now the Feigenbergs took us in and we stayed more than two months with them. And in the meantime the aliyah started working to get us out. Why did we go to Torun? We went -- when we left Łódź, we went to Torun. During the German occupation, when it was quiet in Vilnius, when they didn't round up, you know, the young people, I used to take English lessons from a Polish lady. And then you were -- we got very friendly. Her father was a director of a theater in Toruni. And somehow she's jokingly told -- said, you know, Ada what -- if you ever happen to be in Poland, if you ever happen to be close to Torun, come and stay with us. I used to help them a lot. They were afraid to leave the apartment because of the [indecipherable] the --

the roundups. I used to go get food for them. So anyway, the relationship was very nice. And Mama said, you know what? We're sitting with the Feigenbergs already two months. How much longer can we sit? They were very nice to us. In the meantime, they discovered that Mrs. Feigenberg's deported parents survived Siberia and are on the way back to Poland to join them. So we went to Torun and we started to ask where is the theater. We found the theater and we asked, by any chance is Mr. such and such with the theater? They say sure, he returned back to his regular director of the theater. So we went to see -- to see them and we stayed with them for awhile. See, sometimes, you know --

Q: That's right, there's connections.

A: -- there's connections, yeah.

Q: Mr. Sheriss, before I remember -- before I forget, how did you know him in Vilnius, was he in the ghetto?

A: One of the friends.

Q: He was a friend?

A: A friend of mine.

Q: A friend of yours --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- but was he in the ghetto?

A: In the ghetto.

Q: He was in the ghetto.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay, so you --

A: Well these -- that -- oh, the whole five or six, when I entered the room, they were all my friends from ghetto. And when I told them, look, we have nothing to eat, do something, so they said, let Tevka do it for you. He can do it. He is a big chief and so he did it, yeah. So now we were --

Q: In Torun.

A: -- in Torun, and we followed now aliyah. There was a group, was supposed to go via Austria. Our group was supposed to go through five borders [indecipherable]. And we were placed -- we were brought to Berlin with a group of Jewish people and placed in the building for Jewish refugees. And while in that building, next day, Mama said, you know, I don't feel very good in here. We are in the Russian zone of occupation. The Jewish people are already shu-shu-shu-shu-shu-shu-shu, something is wrong with me and you. They can see that I'm not Jewish and I don't believe it's safe for us to -- to be in here. The man who was in charge of the group, his wife was eight months pregnant so he is -- was worried about his wife more than about the group, and I said Mama, we'll have to do something, but I don't know what, let me think. What can we do? And I found out from the group that in the west Berlin there is a huge refugee camp, but huge, for thousands of people. And they were supposed to be transported to that refugee camp. But before to get to the refugee camp, you had to go in Berlin through Jewish committee to be issued a certain ausweis, a paper to show that you are a -- a Jews --

Q: Identification paper.

A: -- I.D.. And when Mama went to that place, they look at my mother and said, sorry, you don't look Jewish. So I hoped that there was -- somebody would be from Vilnius. I said, do you have anybody from Lithuania, from Vilnius in here? They said no, we don't. So there was no way to say that I am Gens widow and daughter and so on, per -- they didn't know anything. So when we

came back I said, Mama, you know what? You stay here. I'll try to go to the west zone and see if I can get into that camp. Because it was too dangerous. We made through so much, so that suddenly, you know -- and I went to the camp, and I figured it's no sense to talk to some employee. The director was American General Taylor, not the famous Taylor, another General Taylor and asked his -- I asked his secretary that I would like to talk to the director. And she looked at me, said well, young lady, you can sit and wait. I don't know if he'll be able to see you, but at least you can wait. I did wait probably three hours. I sat in the waiting room, finally he saw me. And you know what, it was nothing to hide. I couldn't lie. I told him the truth. I told him about my father. I told the Jewish aliyah has do -- supported us as far as Berlin, but now we are stuck. We cannot get Jewish I.D.. So the first reaction he said to me, you know young lady, this all sounds like a fairy tale. I said, it sounds like a fairy tale, but this is truth. Because there was no way out. We were sitting in Soviet zone of occupation. So he said, don't worry at all. Here are the two stickers. Go and get your mother, get her to the camp and here you go, we'll transport you through Hanover to American zone and that's the end of your problems. Now I come back to the Jewish house. My mother is half alive. The ladies are putting her cold compresses on her head because I didn't return for so many hours. Mother thought that maybe the-the Russian soldiers got me, or whatever. She is half dead. And I walk in, I says, Mama, don't say anything. We didn't have much, I had a rucksack and she had a rucksack, it's all we had. I said, take your rucksack, get slowly dressed and we're getting out from here. She said, where to? I said, we're all set, we're going to that refugee camp. So, they didn't see us walk out, you know, somehow you find a moment when people are in another room, we walked out. And we got to the western Berlin and we got into the camp. Naturally the first thing they did was put a DDT behind your clothes, but they gave us food, place to live and everything.

Q: So this is the first time that you are not really under any occupation in years.

A: In years, right, yeah. But we -- we were staying in the Jewish house in the Russian zone.

Q: That's right.

A: See, Berlin was, remember --

Q: That's right.

A: -- Russian, American, French and British. And a huge, huge truck trailer took us to Hanover.

Q: What part of Berlin was this huge camp? West Berlin?

A: Wa -- wa -- that was in th -- in the American zone.

Q: In Zehlendorf? In -- do you remember?

A: I -- I don't know whether it was in Zehlendorf. I remember the name Zehlendorf, but I don't know whether in connection with that or not. It was one tremendous big --

Q: Camp.

A: -- camp. They brought us to Hanover and when we disembarked in Hanover, we were told that's the British zone of occupation, that the Britishers are returning the bolts and the Soviet prisoners of war back to Soviet Union. And that already Soviet prisoners are war -- of war are committing suicide to the left and to the right because they know that their fate is going straight to Siberia. That wasn't very pleasant because we never expected that Baltic people would be returned to Baltic states. Now, Britishers were as naïve as Americans. They figured Baltic states are free, you -- you don't have to be refugees --

Q: Go home.

A: -- go be home. And while we were on the transport, somehow a young man attached to us and he said, you know what? I know somebody in Hamburg. I'll take you there and we'll see what we can do further. So we stayed with that lady, afternoon and then we went to the railway station

and got into the transport of coal, black coal. And we hid in that carriage with coal -- there was a -- you know, a transport that had all kinds of merchandise and they had coal in between. And we knew that nobody was going to look for us in that carriage with coal, and we went as far as Munich.

Q: Wow, clear across the country.

A: We looked like a devil, black. When we arrived Munich -- and you know, this is something that goes from mouth to mouth, a -- a place was called Deutsches museum, German museum. That was a center for all refugees in American zone. They used to come for i-information and everything in that Deutsches museum. A --

End of Tape 10

Beginning Tape 11

Q: Okay, so now you're in Munich.

A: Now I'm in Munich.

Q: Covered with coal dust.

A: Covered in coal dust. So we -- we di -- we wer -- were in gi -- a separate room, we're -- we were directed to a big, huge room with people, but we had food, we had showers, we could wash u-up, we could change our clothes, we had alrea --

Q: And you had the stickers from General Taylor.

A: And we had the stickers from General Taylor, right. But that was only half of the story. I went out to look for Lithuanians because we were already out of the cl -- not clutches, but out of being supervised by aliyah. Their role was to bring us to west and we were already in west. So I stepped into the hole and then right in front of me stood two men speaking Lithuanian. So I approached and I said, by any chance -- but you know, that's a stupid, stupid question. I said by any chance do you know where the Venslauskas family is in Germany? So he turned to me, said, you know Panana, what? If you wouldn't have found us two here, you would never find out where they are. They are in a tiny farming village, living with a farmer. He said, I can give you directions how to reach them, and you can take a train up to a certain distance, but from that distance you'll have to walk about 10 kilometers.

Q: Oh my.

A: Uh-huh. And there it was winter and I figured, well that's the only way to reach. And these are the people who helped us escape.

Q: They had helped you escape --

A: Remember?

Q: -- when you had to hid -- hide --

A: Hide, and th --

Q: -- in ji -- in Zemaitji.

A: -- that's the people -- person who took us from the train to his estate.

Q: I see.

A: So now, okay, I take a train. Mama stays safe now in the west and I disembark. The s -- name of the station was Donoverte. Hm, 10 kilometers, 10 kilometers, big deal. You know, you're on skiing five kilometers you don't even feel it. I start walking. I go, I go, and I see a German military camp. And [indecipherable] of the German military camp, you know, you have the s-sip -- open doors somewhere, I see German soldiers and the German ladies. So I went as fast I could around the camp, and I kept walking and a car stopped. He said, where are you going? Would you like a ride? I said, I'm going to such and such village, the farming village. And he said, who are you visiting? I said, I am visiting -- I want to find a Lithuanian family, and I mentioned the name. Oh, he said, he lives with one of our people over there, so I'll give you a ride. So he gave me the last couple of kilometers. I was already tired. It's winter, snow. I'm not equipped with snow, any skis or anything. He brought me to the door, I knocked at the door, I opened the door and here it is, I'm standing in the doorway and the person who was on the train stands inside of the kitchen. He says to me, you are alive? I looked all over Germany, between the refugees, trying to find you. I said, you didn't show up to take us away. He was supposed to come with horses, take us away, across.

Q: From where to where?

A: For -- from where we were hiding two years. Their estate was not too far. He was supposed to come in and we waited for him to show up, he never showed up. What happened, he was cut

away, couldn't cross any [indecipherable]. The Russians were coming from that side, he couldn't go -- he couldn't come in. So he knew that we were left behind. So when he saw me there he said, where are you from? I said, from Lithuania. He said, I don't believe it. Nobody comes out from Lithuania now. I says, well, we came, we managed.

Q: And this was already winter of '46, of --

A: '45.

Q: Winter of '45.

A: '45, yeah.

Q: Okay, the war is still going on --

A: So could have been the six, January, February, because it -- I remember snow.

Q: And the war is over?

A: Oh yes, war was over in May.

Q: All right, then it's '46.

A: [indecipherable]

Q: Winter of '46.

A: '46.

Q: Winter of '46.

A: Beginning of -- the end of winter '45, beginning of winter '46.

Q: Correct.

A: So I said, where is everybody? Where is Mama, where is grandmother, everybody? He said, they are not too far from here. They are in -- in the refugee camp. And he came with me to see my mother, and then he took me to meet his family, already here, in -- in the west. So now he explained to me the situation, he said now -- now you go to Lithuanian committee, get yourself a

DP card. I said, what's a DP card? All I have is from General Taylor, di -- ad -- written notes to accept the Lithuanian two women into the camp. He said, oh no, no, no. You go to your nationality committee and you get a displaced person's card. In short, DP card, that's why the ec -- expression depokas.

Q: Did you ever have passports leaving Lithuania? Did you ever any identity papers?

A: I was too young. I was too young.

Q: I see.

A: I was too young.

Q: Did your mother have a la -- let's say, any identity papers?

A: She had her Lithuanian passport.

Q: Okay.

A: But not ta -- saying that she is Jewish.

Q: Okay. Just saying that she is Lithuanian.

A: She was Lithuanian. And not Polish, either.

Q: That's right. So --

A: So now he explained to me that I have to go to Lithuanian committee in Munich and get Mama and myself DP cards. So I go to the Lithuanian committee, and Mr. Carvalis was the head of the committee. He listened to my story and he says, you know what Panana Nela? I knew your father very well. I'd do anything to help you, but my hands are tied. Nobody at this date can get a displaced person's card. You are past the period. Finished. Everybody who came from Lithuania as refugees, everybody's set, everybody has a card, everybody is registered. No more cards. And I cannot tell now Americans that you just came from Soviet Union via Jewish aliyah. You see, too many -- too many contradictions.

Q: Too many aliases.

A: Too many aliases. So I said, so Mr. Carvalis, so what do you advise me? He said look, two blocks away is Jewish committee. Go to Jewish committee. Carvalis knew my father, said, go to Jewish committee, tell them who you are and have the Jewish committee help you because the Jewish people still kept escaping Soviet Union in those days and a lot of refugees came in '46 - '47 - '48, running away from the Soviets. So now I go to Jewish committee and naturally in the Jewish committee everybody knows who I am. So I said, gentlemen --

Q: They didn't in Berlin, but they did in Munich?

A: Munich were Lithuanian Jews. In Berlin were German Jews. So German Jews, me telling that I'm Gens' daughter didn't get anything. Here when they saw me, their approach is, what can we do for you? A different approach. So I told them that I was brought by aliyah, that the lithu -- I went to Lithuanian committee, they cannot help me. They says, what's the problem? We'll give you here. We'll get you a DP card and that's it. And what they did for us, you know, like in each place there are two classes. They sent Mother and me to Saint Ottilian. Saint Ottilian was a German sanitory -- or -- or a --

Q: Sanitorium.

A: -- san -- sanitorium for SS officers. So after the war, that sanitorium was taken away from the SS, they left some SS doctors working and gave it for the inmates of concentration camp, the Jewish inmates of concentration camp. And since Vilnius is considered a concentration camp, we were given a status of concentration camp inmates and sent direct to Saint Ottilian.

Q: Wow.

A: We come to Saint Ottilian and the first doctor who looked at my mother was Dr. Berman from Kaunas. He said Mrs. Gens, how are you? You look like the Jesus Christ crucified. There's

nothing left. Mama was awful looking. All that tension, all those borders and everything, drained her completely. And Dr. Berman was her doctor when she had pneumonia for the seventh time, he was treating her for pneumonia, he didn't even expect her to survive. So Dr. Berman did everything in his power to put her back on her feet. So we had the most -- most wonderful conditions, except that we lived in a palatta, in a -- in a sickroom, I mean if -- a room for probably 20 people at least. But we had wonderful food, and we could relax and the nervous tension was gone, you see? And we stayed in Saint Ottilian for quite awhile. But that was only for privileged people. And then --

Q: So that your -- your friends from Vilnius --

A: They put us on the track --

Q: -- helped you -- helped you --

A: They put us with aliyah --

Q: Aliyah.

A: -- with -- the whole way -- you see, we lost connection. We found Dr. Feigenberg, how to continue the connection --

Q: That's right.

A: -- and somehow we managed. And we stayed with them very long, until Mama was back on her feet. And then we decided that I'll go to Munich and enter university. So when I came to Munich and went to the university, they wouldn't accept people born in '26. They were a -- they were having hordes of German soldiers coming from Russian prisoner's camp, and priority was for the older ones, not for born in '26. How much I tried, how much the Jewish committee tried. They said, we don't make any exceptions to that regulation. So I figured, well, if I can't go to

university, I'll go to conservatory. So I went to Munich conservatory, continued, you know, tra-la-la.

Q: Music.

A: Yeah. Then they -- they started to talk about registration to United States. We registered to go to United States as refugees, but I was past 21, and my quota was very bad. There were thousands of Lithuanians, but very small quota. Lithuania was a small country. So I had to wait years for my quota and my mother refused to go without me. So we stayed, and one day a -- do you know Veruch's reform --

Q: Yes.

A: -- the monetary reform.

Q: Monetary reform 1948.

A: One day we woke up, 20 marks a person. Well, 20 marks a person, it's a beginning. You know, again, everything. We were already very well set. We had the [indecipherable] cards. I was attending conservatory, and we weren't rich, but we -- we managed to survive.

Q: I have a question that [indecipherable] you said at one point when you were in Germany you were looking to see where is Hingst, where is Murer, where is W-Weiss?

A: Mama didn't want me, she was so f -- so against, but I wanted -- I wanted to find out what happened to these people.

Q: Were you able to find out?

A: No, no. I found out later that Murer was arrested by the Soviets, spent several years in Soviet Union, but when he returned back to Austria, they found him not guilty, but at least I think he sat for six years in Soviet camps. Well, that's good enough.

Q: At least that much.

A: Weiss -- Weiss died in German c -- prison. This is unforgettable things, I shouldn't have listened to my mother, I should have gotten somehow to Weiss to find out about my father. She wouldn't let me. She didn't want anything to do with the Germans. And that was the only liaison that could have helped me to find out about him. He may not have wanted to talk to me, but maybe there are some memoirs or something, you know. But Weiss was dead. I went to see Mr. Wiesenthal when I was in Vienna and I asked Mr. Wiesenthal maybe he can help me to find out about what happened to my father. He said he has absolutely no idea. There are no --

Q: No traces.

A: -- no traces, no.

Q: No documents.

A: No documents, no.

Q: Do you know if there is any documentation in German archives that would have been passed on by the Gestapo or --

A: It could. It could, it could.

Q: I see.

A: It could.

Q: But he didn't have it at his fing --

A: No.

Q: -- he didn't have it.

A: He didn't have an -- it. No. I think the Gestapo -- I think Gestapo kept paper work in order, so you see, the -- those -- when I worked for office of special investigations, they got lists of collaborators of the members of the sondercommando in the German documentation --

Q: Archives.

A: -- archives. So there could be that something is in there, but how to find it, I don't know. See Mama is -- Mama is gone. If Mama would be alive, maybe I could try to do something. Now that she is gone, I mean that's -- it would have given her a peace of mind at least, to know. Now this way we don't know anything. So anyway, that's it, so --

Q: Nuremberg. Your daughter mentioned Nuremberg.

A: That I was in Nuremberg, yeah.

Q: So how did this happen?

A: When I was -- now -- now I'm back to the Jewish side.

Q: Yes.

A: There was a close [indecipherable] where we were staying was a huge Jewish camp, town of Landsberg. And there was a big concert in Landsberg. Dr. Feigenberg was one of the chief people in Landsberg, so he told me look, take a train, come to Landsberg. I come to -- it's like a ghetto concert. All Jewish [indecipherable] everything, and Dr. Feigenberg came to the door, took me by the hand and marched me to the first row, like I was used to. And I recognized on my way, our companions from the Berlin Jewish house. And they're looking at me and they know that Mama wasn't Jewish, they could -- they could see it, her blue eyes and everything. And they're looking at me what I'm doing sitting in the first row. The Jewish people had their -- well, how would you say? I remember one expression, Papa tried to match -- if somebody had a yellow schein and had no wife, he would match them, not to sleep in one bed, but give a wife a chance. He had one of his people who used to be chargé d'affair of Hungary in Kaunas, Mr. Browdig, of a very rich family, and he was given the work as a -- like a minister of foreign country. And one day we were standing, Mama, Papa and I, Mr. Brownig -- Browdig comes over and he says, a -- well, in -- in -- I'll tell you in Russian, see if you understand. [speaks Russian

here] The attached wife of Mr. Glassman sits in the first row, and my wife sits in second row.

You see the hierarchy? It was -- in the ghetto it was very important who you are. And during the concert, who you are sat in first row and second row. And then came the [indecipherable]. I'll never forget that. My mother smiled and said, Papa, I'm going to second row. I'll make place for Browdig in first row. [indecipherable]

Q: And she did.

A: She did, yeah. But you see, to be insulted by the fact, could -- my God, you know, first row or second row. Well, but that existed. So anyway --

Q: You were in the first row and it was a concert.

A: It was a concert exactly like in ghetto, all Jewish faces. Exactly. But then we decided that's enough sitting at Saint Ottilian and we moved to Munich, where I entered conservatory and we registered with the American consulate. During those days of registration and all kinds of, you know, checking of the papers, th-this and that, I opened the door. It was the big caserna, the --

Q: Canteen?

A: -- can -- no, no, army barracks where the immigration process was going on. I opened the door and I see Mr. Josef Mushkat. I'll show you mush -- Mr. Mushkat on the big picture.

Mushkat was a member of Papa's higher police, and he was in charge of orphans, orphanage, taking care of them, schooling, feeding, everything that was necessary to do for orphans. He saw me, he came over. The first question is, where is Mama? I said, Mama is outside. Cause I came to get some information, Mama doesn't know anything, so she's outside. So he grabbed me by the hand, we went outside, they both cried. And then Mr. Mushkat says, look, nobody knows me here as Josef Mushkat. I am under a different name and I don't want them to know that I'm Josef Mushkat. I said, look, as far as we are concerned, you can be whoever you are. So, I haven't seen

Mr. Mushkat from that day, any more, cause I had no business going for information, I got what I needed. I cannot explain why -- I can't explain -- I think he got tired to be a Jew. He was Polish, high class, intelligent person. Writer. He gave us a book in Polish language that he just recently wrote, and I think he had enough being a Jew and wanted to be a regular Gentile.

Q: He wanted to just change his identity.

A: Yeah, he wanted to change his identity.

Q: An -- but you never saw him again?

A: I never saw him again, no. If he -- if he was afraid to be exposed, why should I put a person -- I went through so much myself not to be exposed, why should I make someone uncomfortable by thinking that I might un-unknowingly tell somebody, you know. So now I can talk about Mr. Mushkat because he would be my father's age, so he's definitely not alive. But I never mentioned to anyone from --

Q: That you had seen him.

A: -- Vilnius that I've seen him here. So -- aha, so after the financial reform, I got a letter from a classmate who lived in Munich very close to where I and Mama lived, her parents and she. She wrote me a letter that, listen Ada, I'm working at the UNRRA in French zone of occupation. We badly need a secretary for the office of communications to work with the director and there is a very big tension between Latvians and Lithuanians. Everybody would like to have that job. The problem is you need French to talk with -- the whole UNRRA personnel is French. You need English to get through the directions from Switzerland, that they come in English. You need German to talk to the German authorities, and you need Polish, Russian, whatever, and Lithuanian to take care of the refugees. The Latvians have perfect people, no French. Perfect English, perfect German, no French. So Lithuanians are asking us do we know anybody that

could fill. And we all feel that the only person to fill that place is you. So, I read that letter and said, Mama, French zone is so far away. We are set in here, we're waiting for departure. What the hell will I be doing in the French zone of occupation? I'd never --

Q: And the -- the French zone of occupation was in the north, or --

A: Sa -- it -- it -- no, Salzburg. [indecipherable]

Q: Salzburg.

A: [indecipherable]

Q: Okay. So yes, of course, it's quite far away.

A: Quite far away. And said, I never worked in my life. I don't know office work. We used to have class magazines, you know, class newspaper, so I would do it with one finger. But we still had a typewriter at home, and the others didn't. So I said Mama, how can I work? Couple of days after, I get another letter. Two days after, I get a cable. So Mama said to me, look, said, she started with 20 marks like you -- we did. She already paid for the cable, she paid for two letters. So get a ticket, go over there, explain to them that you're not able to take the job, you never worked in your life. And you'll see the world and you come back. I -- I come over and they -- they tell me the picture. The secretary of communications was expecting a baby in two months. The father of the baby to be was a director of YMCA, Polish nobleman. So now the situation is awful. The lady can't bend down any more, the rumors that the father is a director of YMCA, they want to get rid of her as soon as possible. It shows it very badly during, you know, the -- the entire, you know, community. So I told [indecipherable] I spoke to him in French, I said, mon colonel, I -- I would li -- take the job gladly, but I have never worked in my life. So he said, Mademoiselle, please just stay. Whatever you can do, do. Whatever you cannot, not. At least stay until we find somebody to fill that place. So that it -- that's -- that what happened. I started

to work, I started to work and then I figured there's nothing to it. I handled the correspondence. I handed the director his correspondence, I can handle correspondence to the others. I see what has to be done and I accept, you know, instructions from Geneva in -- in English, I sort them out. What's there a -- what's there to be afraid? And you know, I started to work, I started to work and very soon I received an army uniform, and I -- I am a lieutenant of the French army, official. So, my girl -- my lady -- my girlfriend who got me, she was always a civilian, so she can say look, you just came. I'm already here several months and I'm a civilian and you're [indecipherable] army officer. So anyway, I stayed there and one day the director called two of us. He said, look, the Australian military mission is coming to round up refugees for Australia. Talk to your families and see if any one of you is interested to go to Australia. I'll attach you as UNRRA officer to the Australians to travel around that area, the whole French zone of occupation. And then that'll help you -- open you the doors in Australia. So I talked to my mother, I went to Munich back, and M-Mama said, you know what? Your quota is so far away and we're sitting so close to Russian zone of occupation, why don't we go to Australia and that's it. And then, later on if we decide that we want to go to America, the quota will follow you. And the Estonian girl, she came back, she said no, my family is not interested to go to Australia, we'll stay in here until our American priority date comes in. So they attached me to the Australians and I traveled with them for a long time, getting refugees processed for Australia.

Q: How interesting.

A: Very interesting. So, not to take too much time for that, I -- when we had out of first ship, it was a 1,800 people on it and you had cream of the crop of UNRRA personnel. Both s -- Hungarians, Romanians, Latvians, Estonians, Lithuanians sent whatever was left over, Ukrainians, Polish, Russians. And we arrived Australia --

Q: I don't want to get out of the European --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- continent yet.

A: Yeah, yeah, not yet? Okay.

Q: Not yet, because we haven't talked about Nuremberg.

A: Oh, yes, so Nuremberg, what happened at that concert.

Q: [indecipherable] two minutes, okay.

A: We can start.

Q: Well, in -- in that case -- in that case, let's finish up when you get to Australia and then we'll go back to Nuremberg.

A: Okay.

Q: Okay.

A: On the ship I continued in the office processing the paperwork. There's tremendous paperwork because you are crossing Suez Canal. You have to make lists and lists and lists to report to the British. So when we came to Melbourne, and then we were sent to a reception center -- the same day we arrived reception center, I was put to work for immigration department already in Australia. And our sh -- pol -- the policy to get those refugees was domestics and laborers, domestics and laborers. So everybody got -- got an I.D., men as laborers, women as domestic servants. I was the only one, because of my Australian cooperation, with Australians in Europe, I was given office worker. So I was not a domestic. Two years contract, you do whatever the government says you to do. You go wherever the government sends you to work. No, yes, but or anything, you just go. Two years over, you're a free person, do whatever you want.

Q: When you arrived in Australia, how old were you?

A: In '48, 22.

Q: 22.

A: 22.

Q: Boy.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Quite a life until age 22.

A: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, I know.

Q: Yeah.

A: Don't wish anyone -- I don't wish anyone -- so we'll still have to --

End of Tape 11

Beginning Tape 12

Q: Okay.

A: I mentioned -- I mentioned that I went to that -- the concert in Landsberg.

Q: That's right.

A: In Landsberg they already formed a symphony orchestra and the members were all survivors of Dachau. And there were, from Lithuania, the previous members of our Kaunas symphony. They all knew about me and they took me in, just took me in like a mascot. I was the youngest one, and you know, I ha -- I didn't have anybody but my mother and I felt very secure with them. So one day they told us that, you know what? We have a possibility to go to attend Nuremberg trials, we want to take you with us. I said, fine, why not? Now, I don't remember a concert before the trials. I believe they gave a concert. I remember the theater, remember sitting in the loge and remember being left by myself, so they must have been on the stage giving a concert. And they gave a concert in the [indecipherable] uniforms, it's a striped blue and white.

Q: As -- as concentration camp inmates.

A: [indecipherable] inmates, right. So a day after that, we had a two day pass to the trials.

Q: Did you know who was on trial? Was it widely publicized?

A: That was a big Nuremberg trial, with all of them, Goebbels, Goering, everybody, ger -- they all sat in a row.

Q: Okay, that one. Okay.

A: And that particular day, they were trying finance minister Speer. As you know, in a -- in a hall with all military it's all drab. Uniforms, uniforms, uniforms. I had on a dress that was burnt orange. Not yark -- not the sharp orange, but burnt orange, but still it stood out in that immense place. And I was telling my children when I came back from that place that the heads of those

German inmates automatically turned to see that s-speck of light, of different color than the drab uniforms. Anyway, Mr. Speer was start -- was a -- a -- questioned, and he was told that, did you know -- he was asked, did you know about the concentration camps? And he said no, I never knew about that. And then they opened the big screen, and on the screen you could see golden frames of eyeglasses, golden teeth, golden jewelry. And they said, how do you think, Mr. Speer, your treasury got all this stuff without you knowing where it comes from? Speer kept s -- not -- no answer. So that registered in my mind, it was so impressive. Suddenly you opened the screen, you show the picture and he has no way to say any more, I didn't know. So that was how I ge -- came to be in Nuremberg, because that -- the s -- the survivor's group took me with them for their concert and then we -- two days in a row we attended Nuremberg trials.

Q: Now, a lot of people have said that Nuremberg trials was victor's justice, particularly because the Soviet Union was involved. Did you feel that way?

A: No. I think justice was done. Soviet Union or France or -- or whoever, justice was done. I feel no remorse about them being punished. Let it be Soviet Union's influence, so what? So what?

Q: No, no, no, the question was not that the sov -- because the Soviet Union was there, that that's a bad thing, because these were really criminals and they should have been. But because the Soviet Union itself was guilty of so many crimes against humanity --

A: Yeah, oh, okay.

Q: -- then, it -- di -- it made it a politicized event.

A: Okay, but that came out later. In those days, how much did we know in -- in the west about the Soviet Union? It started with Solzhenitsyn, with his books, with opening our horizon to see what's going on in Soviet Union. Just Lithuanians telling that we had three days of deportation

was not enough crime. The whole crime, the whole gulags and everything came after that. So in those days we didn't know about the gulags as much as we know today.

Q: I see.

A: So I would say that, nevermind what the world is telling today, naturally the Soviet Union found another way to kill the people. More humane? I don't know. Freezing and Siberian tigers? Is that so more humane than sitting in a concentration camp and being gassed? Wa -- how would you compare one with the other? There is no comparison, both are equally bad. But --

Q: In other words, that -- that sort of thought didn't cross -- given that your parents had the political views that they had, given that your father had -- had spoken out against the Russo-Fin -- the Finnish war that the Soviet Union started, given the whole political proclivity that this -- your family was not a pro-Soviet family in that you were not happy with the Soviet Union coming in, those thoughts weren't crossing your mind when you were sitting in the --

A: No.

Q: -- in Nuremberg.

A: No.

Q: You saw that at least --

A: I saw the criminal element who ruined my life, who ruined my mother's life, who killed my father, who killed millions of people and that was what I thought. Nothing about the Russian gulags or anything at that time. Later on we started to compare one with the other, and as I say, what's better, to be gassed or to be frozen to death, you don't know what's -- what's better. But the -- in those days, no. I figured that justice was done and they deserved it.

Q: And their -- again, this was only, I believe, 21 or 22 --

A: Right, right.

Q: -- of an en --an entire machinery.

A: Right, right. Papa used to talk about Mr. Murer. He was of impression that Murer was a drug addict. He said that there were days when you could talk to him like to -- talking to normal person, and there were days when he went berserk, you couldn't talk to him. And he thought that the withdrawal symptoms when he didn't have drugs, were main reason when he was so inhuman. That was my father's opinion because he said it's impossible to have the same person behave this way and that way.

Q: The -- erratic.

A: Erratic, right.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: He would come into the room and he would start, up, down, on your knees, up, down. Don't - do -- he made workers jump up and down for no reason. So Papa got suspicious that -- suspicious that he must be under influence of drugs, because he could compare Murer with the others. Nobody behaved like Murer, nobody. He was a single person with such bestiality. And he said, well one day he'll pay for it. But you see, six years is not much. Six years is not much. Well, Soviet gulag for six years is quite a bit, but it's not much. And then to be exonerated by Austrian authorities? And it's strange because Austrians were always believed to be more away from Hitler, not such supporters of Hitler. He turned out to be very, very supportive of Hitler. So now that's how I got to Nuremberg [indecipherable]

Q: So those were the two days that you --

A: The two days. We spent -- I think we spent more than two days, but I mean, one day for the concert, then two days we spent in the trials.

Q: But it wasn't -- and you also sa -- mentioned at another point that you were on your way to Australia at some point afterwards, but that wasn't your first destination. Didn't you say --

A: No, America.

Q: -- the aliyah. The aliyah to Israel.

A: Oh, I -- oh, you -- yeah, to Israel, you see, what happened, it was Palestine. Some people manage -- probably you had to have big money -- managed to get it -- exact wording is I -- landing permit. A permit to enter, legally, Palestine. I was talking in the Jewish committee, I said look, for all that Papa did, try to get Mother landing permit. I don't care about myself, I can go with aliyah. I don't -- I'm not afraid of difficulties or whatever, but not my mother. She went through too much, physically. She can't go with aliyah. And they tried. They tried, but they explained to me, you need the big money to be able to procure a landing permit, or you have to be very, very famous figure. But not many people have received a permit. And I was to be on this boat. I believe that was the Exodus boat. If you remember the story of Exodus, I was supposed to be on that boat, but when they couldn't get Mama landing permit, I said, I'm not going alone and I'm not leaving my mother in Germany. So, since there is no way to get her, I'm just resigning and I'm not going to go by myself. That was the only reason why I didn't go, because a lot of my friends were already in Israel and we had family in Israel from before. So I didn't mind going, and Mama didn't mind going, but not in her physical condition. She was --

Q: Did she speak much about your fath -- you said that at some point she just stopped.

A: Stopped.

Q: Did she talk much about her life with your father, after the war?

A: No. Not much, no. I -- I don't believe -- I don't believe she was able to. I remember when we were in hiding, some days we did things around the house and Mama liked to take birds, geese,

ducks, into the fields. She said that gives her peace of mind, not to talk to people, she can talk to the birds. And that would quieten her down. Cause I told you, she would sit in one corner, looked -- look -- look at another corner. She took it much harder than anyone I have seen. Much harder. And well, she was preoccupied with my children because I had a big number of children. She helped me to raise the children.

Q: But it must have been very difficult for you to see that and know that there was very little you could do to relieve it.

A: I couldn't. And that's what it was, you know, I tried -- I tried my best. Look, I pulled her -- it was through [indecipherable] of let's try, let's go, let's do, let's do, but she -- I think the reason that we left, she was afraid. Not for herself, she was afraid for me. That's the only reason why she agreed to try and risk crossing the -- we crossed probably five borders. First one was to Poland. Next one was to Berlin. Next one was to American side of Berlin. Next time to Hanover, and then to Munich. Five borders. And it's not so simple. Today when we speak, it seems like nothing. It wasn't so simple. I forgot to tell you, when I mentioned to you that we were leaving Łódź with aliyah, my aunt remained -- my mother's sister remained in Kaunas. She gave up, she said she was too scared and she stayed. And then, couple of days after we left, she figured out that she can't stay by herself, she wants to join us. So she went to the Polish commission and she told them the story and she said now, can you help me? So they said fine, we'll do now something different. We had --

Q: Did she speak Polish?

A: Yes. They said, we'll give you a copy of the original repatriation document, but it has two ladies and the youngster. You take a lady with her daughter, instead of your sister and your niece. And that was one of our known young ballerinas and her mother. So they traveled on the

repatriation document budreika a-and she brought them to Poland. Now, on the way, since we knew each other and she -- she was helping the Jewish people very much, when she came to Berlin, the same story with aliyah, she doesn't look Jewish. So the -- our Jewish people got her on aliyah same way, and aliyah brought her to Germany.

Q: Can you speak a little bit about her? We haven't talked much about her role in the war, and so we're going back. But you said she worked closely with Ona Šimaitė.

A: Yes.

Q: How was she involved in the rescue of Jews, or how was she involved in Ona Šimaitė's work? How did -- how --

A: Tatta --

Q: -- how -- what role she play?

A: -- Ta-Tatta knew Šimaitė through us.

Q: Okay.

A: She was in Kaunas, Šimaitė was in Vilnius. I knew from discussions with Tatta, several names in Kaunas of people who helped Jewish people. I don't believe there was a connection of Kaunas people with Vilnius people, there was no connection. And Šimaitė was connected to Tatta through us. And Tatta did whatever sh -- was in her abilities to help Šimaitė. Sh -- Tatta worked more in Kaunas, where there was a group, and all these people were Russian nationals in Lithuania. They were Lithuanian Russians. There was Dr. Kutraga. There was -- you know, it's difficult -- the lady, she had a beauty -- beauty salon. Her -- her -- her son was in our basketball - - what was it, playing [indecipherable] I'll -- I'll remember the name. Anyway, I knew the first names of some of them, and these people really did at most that was possible to do. Pulling out, getting places to live, getting places to hide. It was a very well organized group.

Q: And were any of them caught, as far as your knowledge was concerned?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: Šimaitė was the only one that was caught.

Q: And do you know the circumstances of her capture?

A: No, because we weren't there. Tatta -- Tatta remained in Kaunas when we went into hiding and then one day she told us that Onos neera, Ona isn't any more here. So we understood. So after I found out that she was very brutally beaten up, she was thrown into concentration camp, but we didn't know whether she s-survived or not. She never looked back. She never looked back. And later, from the press, I found out that she was in France and that she went to visit Israel, but they think climate didn't work for her. She returned back to France and she died in France. And then when I found her brother's article about her, I realized that she was who she was, a being that you couldn't put on higher pedestal that she was, but she was also a communist. Well, which -- nothing to do with it.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah. But Tatta was cooperating with Šimaitė. I -- I wouldn't give you any details because I really don't know how they did it, what they did, but I know that she helped her carrying the waste, getting food, you know, things like that. Course Tatta was mostly spending her time in Kaunas and then she would come to Vilnius, stay with us and what -- help with Šimaitė.

Q: Your uncle when he returned from Dachau, you said earlier that he didn't speak much about what had happened in Siauliai in the time that he was the ghetto police chief --

A: Right.

Q: -- but that he did talk about Dachau. Which --

A: He talked about Dachau, talked about his experience over there. He talked about the conversations they used to have, the inmates, what would the conversations be about.

Q: And what were they about?

A: And he said that most conversations were fantasies, what we would like to eat. What we would like to be served. And he said that at one point it was really tough. Somebody said that he would like to have some herring, and the pain, not being able, was so obvious that people were telling him, shut up. Don't mention it any more, we don't want to hear it. See, y-you're deprived for so long that even mentioning it makes it bitter -- bitter memories.

Q: Yeah.

A: But he never complained. And in his first letter that I received it, that was very interesting how I found him. He wrote in his first letter that morally I am not broken at all, but physically, I am finished. HIAS looked for him, Joint looked for him. All those, you know, the bort -- the -- the -- the notices, everybody. Nowhere. Disappeared completely. So one day I got a letter from HIAS. We found --

Q: And HIAS is?

A: Hebrew aid -- aid -- like -- like Joint, same thing.

Q: All right.

A: They're two different organizations both -- both being the same thing. We found trace of your uncle. Get in touch with such and such person in Israel and you'll get more information. So what --

Q: And this is about what year?

A: Oh, that was quite a bit after. Must be '56. Must be '56 because I remember we were able already to send parcel. When the Polish repatriation started in Soviet Union, they let the inmates

from gulags join the families outside, repatriate to Poland. One of those families on the way, the father joined from the gulag and the father was telling stories with whom he was in gulag and how it was in gulag. They came to Poland and from Poland with aliyah they reached Israel. After they reached Israel, very shortly after, the father died from heart, he was overworked in gulag. Now, those people probably went to HIAS to join to look for their relatives, whatever. His son saw my uncle's name on the board, looking for, do you know about him. And happily, he remembered that his father was mentioning my uncle's name during his stories from gulag. So he reported to HIAS that all I can tell you is that my father was in such and such camp together with him. And that must have been already the time when they started to let them go from gulag.

Liquida --

Q: So you didn't even know he had been in the gulag until that point.

A: No, no, he disappeared from the ground of the earth. And they sent -- I mentioned to you that my aunt had to hide that her husband is in Vorkuta. She didn't know exactly where, but she had to hide, and she told that he found another woman, he left her and he is somewhere with that woman in Soviet Union. And then when finally he was released, they found each other. There is something that I don't recall. I know that somebody somehow was found through my uncle in Montevideo. Whether he wrote to Montevideo, whether Mother's brother wrote to Montevideo, but somehow members of the family got together through Uruguay, but I don't recall now which one. So anyway, when he returned, she told that he doesn't want that other woman any more, he returned to the family. Now the aunt, what happened when they arrested him in Klaipėda, she grabbed her daughter, same way like Mama and I, and disappeared. She knew that it's -- next is her turn, they -- she disappeared. And as much as we all looked for her, Mama's brother went through every nook and nook, wherever you could think to look for her and he wrote exactly, she

disappeared from this earth. [indecipherable] there's nothing else I can do, I can't find her. So later on we learned that she had acquaintances in Moscow, she went to them. They sent her to Moldavia and she was living in Moldavia. She was a very intelligent person. She got a job as a postmistress. [speaks foreign language here]. That was her address. Until he returned, and he told us that when he saw how she lived, it broke his heart. In all those letters, I have so many letters from him, he described the misery, the conditions in that [indecipherable] unbelievable. And he didn't have anything. So when we found each other -- I believe he must have written to Montevideo.

Q: To be able to trace her back.

A: To trace -- no, to trace us.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: To trace us. That was the way how we found each other later. I mean, I got the -- from HIAS that he is alive, but I couldn't trace him in Moldavia. I believe he wrote to Montevideo, to Mama's brother, cause we knew all these addresses by heart. And that's --

Q: Did you ever see your uncle again?

A: No. He died. I see s -- I -- I went to s-see his wife, his her -- Elana, her daughter, but not him. So after I mentioned to you -- I show you the pictures, you saw his face. So physically he said he was gone. Vorkuta pulls the last strength of your body, and that's the underground work.

Q: Oh yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: What year did he die?

A: He died -- he died -- he died -- she got married -- wa -- I have to look at the date when she got married, he died very soon after her wedding.

Q: So he never left the Soviet Union?

A: He never left the Soviet Union, no. But Sonia and aha -- so Elana's -- how did Elana get out? Her husband was Polish citizen. He was Ukrainian, from that. So the way to -- or sh -- or they left when it was let my people go. That could have been. I think that was how the -- that let my people go time, and they left for Israel.

Q: I see.

A: And when I went to Israel, I found more of my father's relatives. Distant cousins, closer cousins, they couldn't believe that I am alive. In Lithuania everybody thought that we are finished there, we don't exist any more. It was such a surprise to see me alive.

Q: Thank you.

A: You're welcome.

Q: Miss Ada.

A: You're welcome.

Q: For sharing so much with us today.

A: I think it's the first time that I -- I really sat and thought about it, tried not to forget. There is so much that it's easy to forget.

Q: Well --

A: And then don't forget -- don't forget how many years it's ago. It's 1950's or 60 --

Q: Yes.

A: -- 60 something years, right. Yeah.

Q: Well, without you we wouldn't have --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- this view, this insight, this glimpse into a part of what was a catastrophe and how people lived through that catastrophe.

A: Yeah, people -- people can take quite a dose. People can. If you have an optimistic outlook and if you are not looking, you know, half full, half empty. If you look at half full, that helps.

Q: Thank you.

A: That helps, yeah.

Q: Thank you.

A: You're welcome.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: You're welcome.

Q: This concludes our interview with Ada Gens Ustjanauskas on November 17th, 2008, for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

End of Tape 12

Conclusion of Interview