

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Algimantas Gureckas
October 14, 2010
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Algimantas Gureckas, conducted by Ina Navazelskis on October 14, 2010 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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ALGIMANTAS GURECKAS

October 14, 2010

Beginning Tape One

Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. **Algimantas Gureckas**, conducted on October 14th, 2010 at the **USHMM** facilities, museum here in **Washington, D.C.** Thank you Mr. **Gureckas** for agreeing to speak with us today, we very much appreciate this. And I'd like to begin our interview with some background about yourself. If you could tell – if you could tell me where you were born, the date you were born, your full name, and we'll start from there.

Answer: Okay. Should I tell about my parents, or about just myself?

Q: We will, but just start – let's start with you.

A: Okay, I was born on June 2nd, 1923 in **Tauragė, Lithuania**. And my name is **Algimantas Gureckas**.

Q: And were you the only child in the family?

A: I was the only child in the family, right.

Q: Okay. And tell us then a little bit about your parents, who were they?

A: Yes, my father, he was studying in **Russia** because when he was young, the country was under the Russian – the so – the Russian's rule, the Russian Imperial rule. And when he finished his studies, he was drafted into the Russian army, fought in the se – in the first World War, was wounded, became an off – wer – went to officers' school, and became an officer. And after the war, when **Lithuania** tried to

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become independent, he came back to **Lithuania** and joined the Lithuanian army and served there. When the Wars of Independence were completed –

Q: And what year was this?

A: That was in 1920 – well, the Wars of Independence were completed in 1920, and – and he was discharged from the army in 1922 because the army was reduced, the war was over.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And so he became – first he served a short time in police – in Lithuanian police and then in Lithuanian court system.

Q: Okay, can I interrupt just here for a second?

A: Right.

Q: A few questions come to mind. What was your father studying in **Russia** when he was a student there?

A: He – he studied law. I don't know – I don't think he completed it. And he was –

Q: I see, and where did he study?

A: In **Saint Petersburg**.

Q: In **Saint Petersburg**.

A: Also went to the military school in **Saint Petersburg**.

Q: Okay. And what rank did he achieve, being part of the tsarist army at the time?

A: Just a lieutenant –

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Q: He was a lieutenant?

A: – which, the Russian name is different, but I – I – it corresponds to lieutenant.

Q: Lieutenant. Do you remember the Russian name?

A: I am not sure, I think it's **propotshik**(ph), but I am not quite sure about that.

Q: Okay.

A: And he served in **Kiev** when the first war s-started.

Q: The first World War? The se –

A: First World War started, yes. And he wa – br – right there, I mean, because he was serving in the army right there, you know, so their reg – regiments went to the front right from the first days.

Q: I see.

A: Yes.

Q: What was his name?

A: Was **Patrus**(ph) **Gureckas**.

Q: Okay. And your mother, can you tell us a little bit about her, what was her name?

A: My mother – my mother, **Maria Wayshnitta**(ph) **Gureckas**, she was born on the farm, and when **Lithuania** became independent, you know they established offices, various, and there was a need for the secretaries and all that clerical work, considerably, so she went through a cour – some courses, and then started working in Lithuanian bureaucracy as a secretary.

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Q: Did she – did she finish high school, did she go to college?

A: No, no she didn't, she didn't.

Q: No, okay.

A: She just went to that, you know, secretarial school. And – but she worked in Lithuanian finance ministry and then in the foreign affairs ministry until she got married.

Q: How did your parents meet? Did they ever tell you?

A: Yeah, I think they did, but I am not quite sure at this time. I – I th – I think they met through my cousin – cousin, who is – was much older than myself, he is second – second cousin. And he lived together with my – with my father. They were – were both officers, and about the same age, although he was my cousin, not an unc – uncle.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I think through him somehow, you know, they met, but I am not quite sure. But the way, my cousin was – was killed in **Siberia**.

Q: I see.

A: Was executed there –

Q: I see.

A: – as a Lithuanian officer, right.

Q: Because he was a member of the Lithuanian military, is that why?

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A: Right, and he was quite active in – in – in that military, he was already in reserves, but Soviets still, you know, has –

Q: So you're talking now – you're jumping a little bit to World War II –

A: Oh, yes.

Q: – and afterwards, okay.

A: Right, right.

Q: Let's go back to the beginnings. You said your mother came from a farm. Where was this farm? Where is – where, let's say, would you say is her roots? Where – what part of the country, and do you – did you visit this farm, did you know about it?

A: Oh yes, yes, I know that farm –

Q: Where was it?

A: – it's – it's in southwestern **Lithuania**, which is called **Šeduva**, and between two small villages – well, more than villages, towns I would call, between **Pilnuskai**(ph) and **Kazlų Rūda**, and you know, a nice farm there.

Q: How many acres, do you think, or hectares would it have been?

A: S-S-Something about 30 hectares, maybe some – some – somewhat more than that.

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: And my father also comes from farming family, but strangely it – he lived in a town. They had land – well, he lived in a town, but they had land outside, and they farmed, yeah.

Q: What was the towns name that he lived in?

A: **Užpaliai**.

Q: **Užpaliai**.

A: That's in – in a different part of **Lithuania**, it is north – northeastern part of **Lithuania**, called owsh -- **Owshnatia**(ph).

Q: And what would be the lar – it – what larger city or town would **Užpaliai** be close to?

A: Well, **Utena** is –

Q: **Utena**.

A: – in that vicinity of center there, mm-hm.

Q: I see. And, so both of your parents actually come from farming families?

A: That's right.

Q: How did it – how was it that your father had a university education? Cause that wasn't very common in those days.

A: No, no. Really, I don't know why th – it was decided that he would have all that e-ed-education. I just know that, you know, some relatives of that – of my father's family were living in **Saint Petersburg** and working in factory.

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Q: Mm-hm.

A: So they decided that, well, this student could live with the relatives and go to school, instead of going to school somewhere in **Lithuania**. There were a few high schools in **Lithuania**. Instead of that he went to the same **Saint Petersburg**, and there was a gymnasium, so-called, high school, which was called **Saint Catherine's**.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: It was a Catholic, which was unusual, supported by the government.

Q: By the Russian government.

A: By the Russian government, because there were a lot of – **Saint Petersburg** was the capital –

Q: Mm-hm.

A: – so there were a lot of diplomatic personnel who – Catholics, Italians, some Germans, you know, and spin – Spanish boys who went to that school. And well, of course, a lot of from the Russian empire also; Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian Catholics.

Q: So in some ways he got an international exposure –

A: Right.

Q: – from a country that didn't have its – or from a place, it wasn't a country at the time, a state at the time.

A: Right, yeah.

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Q: In a way that most of the people of his generation wouldn't have had by going to such a high school gymnasium in **Saint Petersburg**.

A: Of course it was an advantage, and he was well th – he-he-he – he was aware of that, and you know, he had had that thi –

Q: Did you feel that –

A: – [indecipherable] of that issue.

Q: Yeah. Excuse me that I interrupted. Did you feel that kind of international horizon as you were growing up in your family, that your father had such a – such a world view? Or would you say there wouldn't really be such a connection from when you – because this is all before you were born.

A: Yes, yes. Yeah, I think, well, that generally he knew languages, and so read various – in various languages, in German, in Russian, in Polish. So –

Q: So, he spoke all those languages?

A: He spoke all those languages, yes.

Q: And you?

A: In ge – in German he was sil – still studying, perfecting it, reading German just to keep, you know, to learn the language more ca – more fluently.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But the Russian and Polish, of course, he knew full of – fluently from his – from his days in the school.

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Q: Okay. So we – you could say he spoke four languages; Lithuanian, Russian, Polish and German.

A: Right.

Q: Okay.

A: Right.

Q: Tell –

A: Which my mother didn't.

Q: She spoke Lithuanian only?

A: She spoke Lithuanian, then she learned German, but well, she knew some Russian. She could converse, you know, but not very fluently.

Q: Did – did this make a difference in your family as you were growing up, that your mother had not had the same opportunities, and so the same ability to – to grow intellectually as your father had had? Did they have – yeah, did that make a difference between them in how they understood things?

A: No, not – not in this – no, that was no problem because my mother was quite an active woman, and she learned whatever she could, things, you know. And I don't think that the people could say that she didn't have that much formal education. She had – she read a lot and she learned from the people she – sh-she met. Her brothers were quite advanced also in the independent **Lithuania**, and helped our family. For instance –

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Q: In what way – how were they advanced? What would you mean – mean by that?

A: Well, for instance, my – my uncle, my mother's oldest brother was quite – was a secretary for the – for the lawyer in **Vilnius**

Q: Mm-hm.

A: – which later became the president of **Lithuania**.

Q: The lawyer's name was?

A: **Smetona**.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: **Antanas Smetona**. And so he had that relationship, he knew people and all that kind of thing and helped hold the family, really, by –

Q: Through these connections.

A: – through his connections, including my father's family. For instance, he was in **Tauragė**, that's why – my what – my father went to **Tauragė** because he was there working.

Q: Your uncle –

A: My uncle was a county – like county commissioner –

Q: Mm-hm.

A: – of **Tauragė**, and could help, you know, with the people, my – my family there, before I was born. And the other uncles also, the other – the other one was an

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educator, th-then he was a director of the high school, and the other was a lawyer, and then became a – an attorney, a state attorney.

Q: Estate? That means like for –

A: S-State, no, state –

Q: Or state, for the – the state.

A: – for the – for the gr – yes –

Q: Government, mm-hm.

A: – like a p – so – so most – most of them were – yeah, well, there was – there were farmers in the family. There were like many ye – men in that fam – family, but –

Q: So they came from a farming family, but they became professionals?

A: Right.

Q: I see, and fri – did your father have siblings?

A: Yes, he had two – two – two – they were both farmers.

Q: They were both farmers?

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Q: And what was your father's profession in **Tauragė** where you were born? What was he doing there when you were born?

A: Well, there is no exact – exact equivalence in the – in the American legal system, but he was like a – a **prokurator**, a – an assistant –

Q: Prosecutor?

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A: – a-assistant prosecutor, right.

Q: I see.

A: And – or you could call investigating judge, or something cl – in between those things.

Q: And so his law – you say he didn't finish his law –

A: No, he didn't.

Q: – studies, but nevertheless they served him –

A: Yeah.

Q: – in – afterwards, it's an interesting thing that as a new country, did **Lithuania** adopt the old Russian Imperial legal system, and that's why it would have been useful?

A: Yes, yes, he did.

Q: I see.

A: He did, yes, mm-hm.

Q: Can you tell me, what are your earliest memories?

A: Well, of **Tauragė**, of – of [indecipherable]

Q: Okay, what do you remember? Do you – what do you remember? In your mind's eye, when you go back to being a child, what are – what are the images that you see?

A: Yeah, well, m-mostly, you know, the – the apartment we lived in. The rooms, the others, and then my father and my mother.

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Q: What i – what was it, a large apartment?

A: No, no, there were not. **Tauragė** was bombed during this first World War.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So, it was – you know, there was not too many good apartments left, and they were quite expensive, but it was – you know, rebuilding quite, quite quickly, and so it went better as – as the time progressed, and of course i-it really was like a new city growing up –

Q: Mm-hm. How –

A: – on the ruins of the – of the old city.

Q: Did you have servants, your family?

A: Yes, usually they had a girl who helped my mother with the home, cooking, everything.

Q: An-And how – how would you describe your very first childhood years? Do you have – you – what kind of memories do you have of those?

A: I think they were very happy, you know **[inaudible]** you know. They traveled. They traveled to visit my brothers – my grandparents in – in my mother's farm where she came from.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So that was also very interesting, you know. We – we didn't visit my – my fr – we visited, but I can't remember my father's – the house where he came from.

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Q: Were you closer to your mother's family than to your father's, growing up?

A: At the beginning, but not later. La-Later, you know, we used – for instance, we used to vacation every year at my uncle from my father's side.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: We used to vacation because he had the very nice pla – was a very nice place. He had a farm, and there was a forest right next to it, and there was a lake.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And he had the – you know, a boat, and –

Q: Is this the uncle who was secretary to the lawyer?

A: No, no.

Q: No, this is another one?

A: No, no, this – that's – this is from my father's side who –

Q: I see.

A: – who was just a farmer, but he had a lot of experience because he served in this Russian Imperial army during the Russian Japanese war, so he was in **Manchuria** in **China** as a soldier, yeah.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And so he – he had a lot stories to tell, you know, about those things. And so I – I – we loved it very much there, and was really a beautiful place because some of – some of the farmers in that area used to take the vacationers –

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Q: What is the area called?

A: Well, it's **Zarasu, Zarasay** district I would call, you know.

Q: That's where his farm was?

A: It's a hilly – well, hilly country with a lot of lakes and forests. And saw some – some – some of them, you know, just all the tourists for summers there, you know, farmers.

Q: Did yo – did you grow up in **Tauragė**?

A: Yes.

Q: Until how old?

A: Un – about – yeah, at – 10 years old. Then we moved. For awhile we moved to a very small town, **Skodvilla(ph)**, not far from **Tauragė** because my father was appointed a judge there. So, we went there, but we lived very short time, because I had to go to the high school, and that was in **Tauragė**. There was no – none high school in **Skodvilla(ph)**, so I went back to **Tauragė** and lived with some other people, and my parents thought that –

Q: Would this – excuse me, this would have been middle school? At age 10 would you have been joining high school, or would have been later –

A: Well, in the Lithuanian system, what they called a – was a grammar school for four years, and then a – there was what they call high school, which was called gymnasium for eight years.

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Q: I see, I see.

A: And that was th – th-the – the education, and so I – I went with that so-called gymnasium to the first class in **Tauragė**, but my parents thought that th-that arrangement was very unsatisfactory. He requested that he would be transferred to a – the larger city where I could live with my family. And so he took again, he took, instead of being a judge he took again th-the previous position of prosecutor – assistant prosecutor I would call, in **Panevėžys**, which was a larger city, not much more sophisticated than **Tauragė**. **Tauragė** was sophisticated town. I di –

Q: What made it sophisticated?

A: It was very near to the German city, **Tilžė**, and there was a lot of traffic between **Tauragė** and **Tilžė**, and the so-called **Lithuania Minor**, or **Klaipėdos kraštas** was also very near **Tauragė**, just a few kilometers away, and the relationship with that German influence, German cultural influenced area, you know, had an effect on **Tauragė** also.

Q: Did it – this re – leads me to a question I was also thinking about. As you were growing up, your very earliest years, did you sense that there were others in **Tauragė** who were not Lithuanian? Did you – you know, did you know of other nationalities, other groups of people, and – who made up the population of **Tauragė**?

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A: Was quite mixed. Of course, there was a Jewish people. There were Lithuanian people who were Catholics, and there were Lithuanian people who were Lutheran Protestants, about the same amount, half and half Lithuanians in – in that area. And that –

Q: Were there Germans?

A: No, they were not German – and there were Germans also in –

Q: Okay.

A: – in **Tauragė**. So – and we were aware of that, but it-it wasn't a cause of any hostility in – at all, you know, we –

Q: Were there Poles in **Tauragė**?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No.

Q: So the population would have been made up of these – were there any Russians in **Tauragė**?

A: Maybe a family or two, but very few, if any.

Q: So you would hav – i-if I were to describe **Tauragė** at the time when you were born and the first 10 years of your life, was a city that was made up of Lithuanians of both Catholic and Lutheran religion – religious affiliations –

A: Right.

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Q: – of – of Jews, and of Germans.

A: Right.

Q: Ethnic Germans.

A: Right.

Q: Yeah.

A: Right, yeah.

Q: Who predominated in the town? Which group do you think had the greatest group of people?

A: Lithuanians, but were about – Ca-Catholics and Protestants were about the same, about even. When we went to our cla – **[clears throat]** in our gymnasium – in gymnasium in the first class, when the religions – religion was one of the subjects which you had to take, and when the religion subject came up, I mean, th-the class just fell in – in – in half. Half of that was Protestant, went to their class, and the others were Catholics and about – about even, I would say.

Q: You went to a public school, supported by the state?

A: Right.

Q: Were there religious classes for people who were not Christian?

A: Not in **Tauragė**, but in **Panevėžys**, yes, but they were not that – there were, you know, some, but they were not that regular. They had their – their religion ins – instruction of their religion.

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Q: Whoever else though would be – it could be Jewish, it could be [indecipherable]

A: No, Jewish. It – that was – there was no noticing – there was O-Orthodox –

Q: I see.

A: Orthodox **Karayim**.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Which was very s-s-strange, I mean a small national and religious group.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: They had their – their religious sa – lessons.

Q: You said that **Tauragė** was sophisticated in – a great deal because there was a German influence –

A: Right.

Q: – very close by. It would have been probably what was **Prussia**, no – you know that –

A: Right.

Q: – for more than most part of –

A: Right.

Q: And that there were friendly relations. But if I – if I try to kind of follow the dates, you say you were born in 1923.

A: Right.

Q: You lived there until you were 10 years old, so that would have been –

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A: 1933.

Q: – '33.

A: Right.

Q: 1933 is when the Nazis come to power in **Berlin**.

A: Right.

Q: And – and you were 10 years old, so maybe it's unfair to ask, but I will ask anyway, did you – do you think something changed after the Nazis came to power in '33, with German relations in the town, in **Tauragė** and in the region in general, was there any friction that developed, was there any – anything that changed in that? Did it – you think it had an influence at all?

A: We had an influence but I am not aware of any increased friction. There was influence. The Jewish people were very much concerned, and the Lithuanian people, because the Germans became quite aggressive in – in **Klaipėda** area, which was –

Q: What was **Klaipėda**?

A: Pardon me?

Q: What is **Klaipėda**? What is **Klaipėda**? Gi – it's a f –

A: **Klaipėda** is, oh, **Klaipėda** is the – is a – a haven city of – of **Lithuania**, a port city.

Q: It's a port city.

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A: A port city of **Lithuania** and the third in the size on – in the country. The capital city **Vilnius** is first, **Kaunas** second, and **Klaipėda** is the third. And at that time in **Klaipėda** was, I think the majority of the population in **Klaipėda** city, a majority may be German about that time. In the countryside not so. In the countryside Lithuanians pre-predominated, but they were also very much influenced by the German culture through it – through centuries, really, they were under the German rule there. And the – during the – when the Nazis came to power, they became very aggressive in that area. They wanted to – it was part of the **Germany** before the first World War, and the **Germany** wanted to recover that territory, and they very – b- became very aggressive against the Lithuanian. So we were aware of that, that there was a hostile force right next to us.

Q: Were they close to each other, **Tauragė** and **Klaipėda**? As – as –

A: **Klaipėda** not so c-close, but the **Klaipėda** area, **Klaipėda** territory was quite near. I don't know how many kilometers, maybe seven, eight kilometers from the **Klaipėda** area, which was au-autonomous area which had, you know, their own laws, German laws, and their th – bo-both languages were official, Lithuanian and German. And so we became that **Lithuania** is now Lithuanian – Lithuanian character and Lithuanian rule and **Lithuania** is under attack, under – under pressure when the – when – when **Hitler** took over in **Germany**, right there, because before that there was no such hostility. But in **Tauragė** the German population, as far as I

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know were quite loyal to the **Lithuania** and there were no fric – friction I am aware between Germans and Lithuanians in **Tauragė** itself.

Q: And were there discuss – do you remember any kinds of discussions about this wider political context that you just talked about at home? Do you – I mean, I'm – I'm again trying to look through the eyes of a 10 year old boy.

A: Yeah.

Q: How much of this would have been in the atmosphere, how much would it have been talked about?

A: Well, a lot, a lot.

Q: A lot?

A: In the family and outside the family with the f-friends o-of – of my family, you know, the other families, which were –

Q: Do you remember such discussions taking place?

A: Yes, yes, and well – well, so – one thing about – well, this is out of the time frame, but I was surprised when I came to **Lithuania** and I asked about some Germans now, after **Lithuania** became independent, I went to **Tauragė**.

Q: And what year was this? Just to establish what we're talking about.

A: 1990.

Q: Okay, so 1990, what –

A: In 1990 I went to **Tauragė**, my – I went with the local Lutheran bishop there.

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Q: Mm-hm.

A: And his wife was from **Tauragė**, and she told me about all those people I knew, you know, and all that kind of thing. And I was surprised that th – most – one of the richest people in **Tauragė** was German, and he was an authority of the German community in **Tauragė**. And I was surprised that he didn't go to **Germany** when the Germans had the chance to go to **Germany** ah – when the Soviets took over the li – **Lithuania**.

Q: After the end of the war you mean?

A: No, before this –

Q: Oh, I see, there's ger – okay. Before –

A: Before the war, wha – when the Soviets took over **Lithuania** –

Q: The first ti –

A: – they had an agreement with **Germany** that the German na-nash – German, ethnic Germans could go to **Germany** –

Q: Okay.

A: – to leave **Lithuania**. And I was surprised to know that he, that German, didn't go to – to – to – to – to **Germany**, because he was so hostile against **Hitler**, and the Nazis knew that, that for him to go to the – to **Germany** would be to go to – directly to a concentration camp. So he just stayed there with his family, and of course was

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deported to **Siberia**. And – and I think that he died in **Siberia**, but his children, his – his daughter, he had three daughters, they came back to **Lithuania**.

Q: Would have he been deported – we're jumping ahead of ourselves a little bit, but do you think he would have been deported after the war, or during the first Soviet occupation?

A: During first Soviet occupation.

Q: Occupation.

A: Yeah.

Q: And why? Because he was German?

A: Yes, of course.

Q: I see.

A: **[indecipherable]** if – well, the – the Soviets considered such people spies.

Q: I see.

A: No matter, that – that was enough, that he was German, so he was a spy in their eyes.

Q: What about the Jewish population, was it a large Jewish population in **Tauragė**?

A: Yes, yes. Well, about a third of the p-population I would say.

Q: **[indecipherable]**

A: Maybe more, yes.

Q: Okay. Did you know anybody who was Jewish? Did you have any friends?

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A: Yes, yes, I had a friend for awhile, but they moved out later, so you know, and then I didn't have any Jewish friends after he moved out.

Q: What was his name, do you remember?

A: I don't remember now, no.

Q: Okay, do you remember anything about him? How old – how old were you when he was your friend?

A: Six, seven.

Q: Oh, so you were young.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Did your family have any interaction with – with Jews, either in a professional way, in a personal way?

A: Both, but infrequently. Since my father was working in his capacity as an assistant prosecutor, I would say the young students, after they graduated from the law school in **Lithuania** had to, if they wanted to work in the court system – but also, if they would like to become lawyers, they had to go through a – some practice in various capacities. So my father always had some young, just graduated young man or – or ladies, one of – of them was – was a lady, who just went through the practice several months – well, not a year maybe, maybe a year, I don't know exactly what the term was. So some of them were Jewish, and I remember ra – you know, Mr. toris -- **Terispoltis**(ph), wh-who was practicing with my father, and also

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had, you know, just a relation. He visited us and I remember him very well, you know.

Q: What was he like, do you remem – what do you remember of –

A: Oh, very friendly and funny young man. Well, I liked him very much, and well, I do – I didn't want to go into small incidents like that, but there was, you know, I was about five years old, I think. I don't remember it very well, but they tell me that I found my father's pistol, and I took that – that pistol and I went through wh-where my father's office was, and where Mr. **Terispolstis**(ph) was working. My father was not in the office, he was on some – I don't know, some errand. And so I went to Mr. **Terispolstis**(ph) and said, look what I found, you know, and showed the pistol. And he said, oh, that's nice. Just s-show it to me. And he just jumped, you know, on me, because he was afraid that the, you know, stupid kid –

Q: It could be loaded, yeah.

A: – that yeah, it could be loaded, and – and he took that pistol away. Well, I was kind of shocked, but then everybody was telling that story, and so it gav – kind of became a hero in the story, and I – I don't know.

Q: You don't know if it was loaded, or did you?

A: No, I don't know.

Q: You don't know, yeah.

A: No, I don't know.

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Q: Your p – let me ask something else, di – i – your parents – you were an only child. Do you consider yourself that you were close to your parents? Were you a close knit family, or –

A: Yes, yes, I was. In particular – well, no, when I was small with my mother, but when I was growing up, I became very close to my father.

Q: What – in what ways would you describe that closeness? Did he – did you discuss –

A: Yes, we discuss things of – various things, whatever. And he sometimes took some educational things, you know, told me about finance, about his work, about the problems they have, or – well, they had s – he had some arithmetical exercises, some arithmetical puzzles which he – that was educational, so – so he spent time with me, and we – we were very, very, very close.

Q: What would – how would you describe him as a person? What kind of personality did he have?

A: Well, he was out – very outgoing, yeah, with a – with a lot – lot of humor. And very patriotic Lithuanian.

Q: Those were his values?

A: Yes.

Q: Was he religious?

A: Yes, he was.

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Q: And may I ask what was the religion, was it Lutheran or was it Catholic?

A: It was Catholic.

Q: It was Catholic.

A: He was a Catholic, yes. My mother was also a Catholic, but he – she became religious when she became old, but – well, she was religious, but not – not to the extent my father was.

Q: I see. And yourself, were you – did you go – were you s – did you go to any religious classes outside of what was offered in the school, or required in – in school system?

A: Not – not under – u-until the Soviet occupation, when the co – of course religious instruction was abolished, and there were outside and in the churches they had some educational lectures, discussions, something like that. Just then.

Q: Okay.

A: Before that, no.

Q: I'm jumping back a little bit. Do you know of a – anything of what happened to Mr. **Telipolskis**(ph)?

A: No, I don't.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't.

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Q: Do you have any other memories of the Jewish community in **Tauragė**, or anybody that you would have known from there, or who had interaction with your family?

A: N-Not – I know my father, you know, was interacting with some, and some – with some Jewish people, some – some lawyers and doctors, but they were not that close, they didn't come to visit us, or – I – I d – I don't know much about them.

Q: Were there any discussions at home that you remember as a child and growing up, about who the Jews were?

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: What – what was usually said?

A: Mostly it was in connection with the religious differences, and with the discussion about the – a Holy Bible, the Jewish Torah and the Catholic interpretations of that. You know, something like that. You see, I had a c – a cousin from my father's s-side, my father's oldest brother had a ch – a son, older than myself, who became a Catholic priest. So – and he visited our family quite often for awhile, he lived with us, but not for su – but – he was no – th-that time i-in – in th – high school, but later he became a c – a Catholic priest. And he visited us and there was a lot of religious discussion also going on with him.

Q: And what kind of – I mean, the religious discussion can – can be very broad.

A: Yes.

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Q: It can be both subtle, and it can be very simple.

A: Right.

Q: And wa – were there – how would you characterize these discussions? Were they of real interpretation of what the Bible was and what the Torah was, or were they more sort of the kind of, you know, a more simple interpretations?

A: Well, I would s – I – I would sel – I would say b-both. It was – but when – when – when my cousin became a priest and I was a teenager, I think – a-and – and my father also joined those discussions, I think they were – they were quite, quite advanced in – and – and in – it was not a primitive thing at all.

Q: So what were the – what was the nature of them? What a – what are the kinds of comparisons that would be made? If you can remember, you know, in general.

A: Well, first recall s – discussion about – about God itself, whether – whether you know, believing or not believing, and then, you know, going – going f – well, that was not – it had nothing with the Jewish, it was generally.

Q: Yes.

A: Whether there is a supreme being, you know, and cause of everything, of existence of the world. And as far as the Holy Bible is concerned, of course, the question about the Christ, about his importance and what – what – who was he real – really, **Jesus** from **Nazareth**. So those – those things were, you know –

Q: How was that answered?

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A: Well, of course, in a Catholic way, you know, that he was a per-person – a divine person.

Q: And I guess what I'm trying to –

A: Part of the divinity, something like – yeah, something in th – in that way. But it was discussed, it wasn't discussed in which way, you know, what – what proves that, why we – do we believe it li-like this or something. It was not something given, you know, so –

Q: Yes. And in what way was there – what was the Jewish element in this discussion, in these types of religious discussions?

A: Well, they are part of the Catholic – Catholic religion. My – my cousin told once, you know, or even several times that, you know, that there are some elements in Catholic liturgy which was saved from the old-time Jewish customs and – and – and which the Jews, the rabbinical Jews have lost. So even that the Catholics have something from the older Jewish religions, it was not ant – anti Jewish at all like its – itself, it was a discussion of the relationship of the Jewish religion and the Catholic religion – well, Christian religion, which really split off from – from the Judaism, and why did they split off, and – well, of course they then – the – the person of **Jesus** of **Nazareth** comes into that. That's why you know, and what he – what was his message basically, and why did they had to split from the Jewish what – what the

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Jews had rejected and the Catholics accepted – I mean Christians accepted.

Something like that.

Q: Well, you know, there have been religious discussions about Jewish influence on Christian religions that – that were very broadly accepted in – in many populations, Catholic populations of the –

A: Right.

Q: – Jews killed Christ. And this was trying – this was part of what I was trying to get at –

A: Oh, I see.

Q: – was that something that was part of such discussions and an interpretation in such way, it was, you know, a sense of did – not necessarily within your own family, but in the larger community, when Jews were discussed, was that something that would come up?

A: I don't know in the larger community because tha-that type of discussions were kind of inside of the family. Rarely, you know, sometimes we talk with other priests. It was not subject which people would just meet and start discussing like this.

Q: Did – yes, of course.

A: And – but in my family in particular when – when my – my cousin became a priest, you know, those things came up regularly. And there was, yes – well, there is something in – in – in the gospels which calls about the je – y-you know, the Jewish

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people demanding that **Jesus** from **Nazareth** would be executed. You know, and there was something of that. But it – my cousin, my – my – my cousin also, he was a Catholic priest, had no hostility against the Jews as such. He was also interested and fascinating i-in relationship and in – in the common heritage with the Jews. So, I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: Well –

Q: Okay. I – I – I wanted to get a sense of the nature of these type – with th – the nature, the – the questions that were – that were raised, and –

A: In my family, I – I would say there was not much religious or ethnical prejudice against neither the Jews, nor Germans, except the Poles.

Q: Okay.

A: Somehow in my family, the Poles, th-they just – they just couldn't stand them.

Q: And why not? Why do think that was the case?

A: Because of the – of the – of this whole relationship which re-resulted in the Polish army seizing the capital of **Lithuania, Vilnius**.

Q: I see.

A: And my father was at that time in the Lithuanian army, and my mother was in **Vilnius** in – in the foreign industry of **Lithuania**, had to flee from the advancing Polish army, and you know, th-the – th-they took it personally, really.

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Q: I see.

A: **Why** didn't – they didn't take any – any other, you know ... any other relations, inter – inter-ethnic relations, they didn't think – ta-take, you know, with any hostility at all.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But with the Poles, yes.

Q: I see. Okay. We – we might come to that point, to w-wider explanation of this.

Let's get to **Panevėžys**.

A: Yeah.

Q: When you are in **Panevėžys**, and your father has taken the same position that he had –

A: In **Tauragė**.

Q: – in **Tauragė** –

A: Right.

Q: – so that the family could be together, and you would be able to go to school and be at home and so on.

A: Right.

Q: And you are how old at this time?

A: About 11.

Q: About 11.

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A: Mm-hm.

Q: And how long did you live in **Panevėžys**?

A: Oh, until I went to the university in **Vilnius**, so it's – it was in 1941. Eight years, I would say.

Q: About eight years.

A: Eight years.

Q: So it's from 1934 to 1941?

A: Right.

Q: Something like that.

A: Right.

Q: What kind of a place was **Panevėžys**? If we talk about – you know, I asked about **Tauragė**, what was its make-up, how would you describe **Panevėžys**? How different, or similar? Wh-What – what was this place?

A: For – for me it was – it was different. And I came from **Tauragė** and I felt superior, because it seemed to me like it's much less sophisticated city, much less sophitis – sophisticated school, and much less sophisticated friends I had in my scho – in my school, you know?

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: So I felt, you know – you know, a loss of **Tauragė**, you know? The interesting sophisticated city. Now, there were – there were some Germans in – in pen – in **Panevėžys**, but really few of them.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: There were some Poles, there some Russians, which didn – we didn't have in **Tauragė**. So ethnic – ethnic – you know, was completely different. There were a lot of Jews in – in – in **Panevėžys**, and there was a very small community, but influential, and a community of **Karayims**.

Q: Tell us what are **Karayims**. Who are they?

A: **Karayims** are – it seems like they are of Turkish descent. Their language is similar to Turkish language. Racially they look like, you know, like Turks or Tartars, but religiously they are Jews. They are Jews, but they do not accept the talmu – Talmudic Judaism. They just accept Torah.

Q: I see.

A: And refuse to co – you know, to accept any other authorities outside of Torah, any you know, rabbi's interpretations, **Talmudian [indecipherable]**, they just reject that.

Q: Okay.

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A: And the Jews consider them co – you know, ra – I think that Jews didn't consider them really Jews at all. They dom – do not consider themselves rabbinical Jews. There is a hoso – there was some hostility between Jews and **Karayims**.

Q: And yet they were in **Lithuania**. They somehow or other had –

A: Yeah.

Q: – arrived there, come there.

A: Well, they were brought here, ye – to **Lithuania**, all this – going through old – old history, but **Lithuania's** ruler, **Vytautas** the Great –

Q: Mm-hm.

A: – on his – when he was ruling **Lithuania**, **Lithuania** was really an empire because took a lot of territory up to the **Black** Sea, and he went to the **Crimea**, and in **Crimea** there was that **Karayim** community. And he brought several families, I think 40 or more families to **Lithuania** with the purpose that they would be his personal guard.

Q: Oh.

A: You see, they're outside. They're complete outsiders. They just rely on the grand dukes of **Lithuania** and he i-is guarding them. He couldn't trust Lithuanians because there were, you know, well, there were some of his friends, but there was friends of his cousin, who was his rival, and all that kind of thing. The cris – **Lithuania** was becoming Christian, there were still old pagans, who didn't like the ca – so he – he

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thought that he'd better rely on the people who nobody could even communicate with at the beginning. Well later they learned, of course, Lithuanian language, but – but still, they were – and they worship his memory even now.

Q: I see.

A: Because they –

Q: 500 – 600 years later.

A: Yes. And they were living in **Trakai** where **Vytautas** was mostly residing and they had, you know, the duty to – to protect the castle, go to the guard duty in castle.

Q: So there was thi – such a small but influential community in **Panevėžys** as well?

A: Right.

Q: Okay.

A: How they came to **Panevėžys**, I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: Because they were di –

Q: Describe just a little bit about your high school years. What kind of a high school was it, and –

A: Really, really, my first impression was wrong, the high school was very good, you know, and compared with other Lithuanian high schools was wa – ca – was not the first, maybe – well, of course it wasn't the first, the first was **[indecipherable]** the most ad-advanced. But – but it was a very good school, and had very good

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teachers, and – in most of the subjects. And the people were friendly, and so I enjoyed that – that, very much, you know. I was a poor student, because my father send me to grammar school one year earlier. Usually i-it started at seven, he sent me at six. And I was not a good student, neither in **Tauragė**, nor in **Panevėžys**, until the fi – my fifth class, fifth year class where I w-was left for a year, you know, to repeat the course in – in that school, because my mathematics we-were not good. Of course I was also sick, I missed classes, and so I was le – let to repeat the course in the – in the first ye – fifth year. And that helped me a lot. After that I became a good su – student. So my father overestimated me. I was just an average, exactly as – as – I am – I am not –

Q: As you were supposed to be.

A: Yes.

Q: Yes. And do you remember what kind of atmosphere there was in these – 30's, in this town, **Panevėžys**, about how many people did it have at that time? Was it – yes, it was a city I believe you told me.

A: Yeah, about to – I would say, 30,000 maybe.

Q: Okay.

A: Maybe more, yeah.

Q: And –

A: Or it will be more, would be more, m-maybe 40,000, close to 50.

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Q: Okay.

A: Something like that.

Q: So in – in those terms for such a small country it's not inconsequential.

A: **[indecipherable]** yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah. What – what do you remember from those high school years, both personally, and what was going on in the wider society? What kind of discussions, what kind of events?

A: Well, it was rather quiet years until – until the situation in **Lithuania** became dangerous, and the first ultimatum, the Polish ultimatum came through, you know, and then the people are aware that the country is in danger. And then, of course, was a lot of discussion and concern, and taking positions and such like – like that. But general – the relationship between nationalities – well, I said taura – **Tauragė** there were no – no – no hostility. While in **Panevėžys** definitely there was, because there was a Polish gymnasium also.

Q: I see.

A: And there were Poles in – in – in – in **Panevėžys**, and that was already the host – ho-hostile element, because they were considered disloyal to Lithuanian state.

Maybe they were not, but the Lithuanians looked at them thi – with – with suspicion that they might be disloyal.

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Q: Were there any – were there incidents that would have fed into this, or was this just the general accepted point of view?

A: No, there were no particular incidents, but there were na – th – our – the young people, the teenagers, Lithuanian, Polish, we didn't fight or anything like that, but we ignored each other, mostly.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Sometimes I had some discussion with them, but discussions –

Q: Did you know anybody personally who were –

A: Oh, I met one of them, but no, no, no, I didn't have any friends in there.

Q: Uh-huh. The – and in – can you repeat just a little bit, if it would be – or – or explain just a little bit, what's the essence, it was a – was it th-the takeover of **Vilnius** that was the reason why there was this friction, or was there something more to it, was it a broader, deeper, longer lasting –

A: Well, we – we – we had the suspicion that the Poles generally were against the Lithuanian state. That we – they wanted to recreate the Polish Lithuanian commonwealth. But in the modern times we were susp – sus – suspecting that they just wanted a – to annex **Lithuania** and – and that's all.

Q: I see.

A: And we felt that they denied, you know, the Lithuanians, in their mind that they were denying our right as – as a nation to keep our own state with our own capital,

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historical capital. And that – that was the hostility. Now, it was quite clear I never, you know, th – even thought about that, that between Lithuanians and Poles – b- between the young people, the teenagers who went to different gymnasium, that between those gymnasiums there were no – no relationship really. But I don't know why there was no relationship with the Jewish j – schools which were in – in **Panevėžys**.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: There were no relations. We had some Jews who went to Lithuanian school, and wa – by class, you know, classmates. But – and we were fine, we were friends, we were o-okay. But the relationship between the Jewish gy-gymnasium and Poland – and Lithuanian gymnasium was just nonexistent. And I don't know at – even now I couldn't explain why it was so, because there was no such hostility at all, and Lithuanians considered Jews, you know, the Jews also supported Lithuanian claim to **Vilnius** usually, the great majority, I wouldn't know about all but ye – th-the great majority was supporting that. And they [indecipherable] **Lithuania** recovered **Vilnius**, the Jewish community was – was quite friendly, and wh-while the Polish, of course, people were very hostile.

Q: So, let's take – let's start with the years that – le-let's go up to these years where things start to get tense. And you're saying the first one was when – had to do with the Polish Lithuanian relationship?

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A: Right, 19 eight –

Q: What happened?

A: – 1938, the – **Poland** demanded that **Lithuania** take up the diplomatic and – and economic rel-relations with **Poland**, which would –

Q: Which it hadn't had until –

A: Which **Lithuania** didn't have after – after **Vilnius**, you know, was like a completely – there were complete – complete l – l – no communication between **Lithuania** and **Poland**.

Q: And **Vilnius** had been occupied or taken over at what – what year? It was –

A: 1920.

Q: Nineteen – so for 18 years there had been no diplomatic relations?

A: Right, right, and the Poles demanded and demanded, you know, with ultimatum. That means, if not, there would be war.

Q: I see.

A: And **Lithuania** accepted that. The Poles didn't require that **Lithuania** renounce **Vilnius** as a – or – or renounce, you know, Lithuanian claim to **Vilnius**. It didn't mention **Vilnius** at all.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: It mentioned the relationship. But still Lithuanians felt that it was demeaning, that it was –

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Q: Why do you think that they even – 1938 would have been motivated by it?

A: Well, we suspected that they always want to take over **Lithuania** eventually.

That's one thing. But at that time, **Poland** considers itself a great power in **Europe** and **Germany** just took over **Austria** and **Poland** wanted compensation as a great power, you know, so at least, you know, they – they took this step against **Lithuania** to showing that they are also – can act, you know.

Q: So this was the – this was how it was perceived basically, in – in **Panevėžys**, in **Lithuania**?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Yes. And – and it is right. Now we know, you know, the backgrounds and so, and basically that was – what was **[indecipherable]** at that time.

Q: I just drew a blank. I think maybe we should change tape here. Okay.

End of Tape One

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Beginning Tape Two

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. **Algimantas Gureckas** on October 14th, 2010. Mr. **Gureckas**, I wanted to continue our – our discussion about – about the rising tensions in – in your world, in **Panevėžys**, in **Lithuania**. And we were talking about the Polish Lithuanian relationship. As you're speaking, I'm thinking, how much of this did a 15 year old boy know, because that's how old you were in 1938; how much of this was discussed at home? How much do you – can you remember that you knew of it at the time?

A: Well, a lot, a lot. It affected everybody, affected my family, you know, and so also affected me. I also felt, you know, that Poles were – were trying, you know, somehow, you know, to show our superior – their – their superior powers, or their superior might against a smaller country, and didn't like it. Didn't like it at all. Although I was skeptical at that time about **Vilnius**, you know. I thought well, you know, we are no-not going to recover **Vilnius** ever. I didn't tell anybody not – not that my father, nor – nor my mother, nor – nor my friends. But I thought wow, that's – that's an unrealistic, we might as well forget about it. But – but this was then a Polish ultimatum, the Polish demand, you know. It still hurt. Still hurt very much, you know.

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Q: I want to also kind of make a remark is, as I'm listening to you, you're saying that these events, which are political –

A: Right.

Q: – in nature, which are intra-governmental, nevertheless affected your family a great deal, and I take it to mean affected in a sense of not in a personal way that their lives changed from one day to the next.

A: Right.

Q: But their feelings, their – their s – their senses and so on were affect – and that speaks to me of – of people who were engaged in a civic process.

A: Right.

Q: Because there could have been people who live in a country, as there are today in the **United States**, and as there are all over the world –

A: Right.

Q: – who – whose world consists of, I go to work in the morning, I do my job, I come home, I have no interest in – in politics, or in what goes around me. I can't affect it anyway, and what happens in **Washington**, what happens in **Moscow**, is none of my affair, okay? And clearly that was not the dynamic going on in the cir – in the – in the circle of people that you grew up with. Is that so?

A: That's true. That's true, I – I – I s – I – I am sure that there were such people, such people are disinterested in – in – in politics, interethnic relationships, and so I

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am sure there were so, but that was not in our – in – in our circle, in our family, in the friends m-my family had.

Q: And why would you – how would you explain their engagement then? How would you explain their **engagement** to events that really are outside and beyond their personal lives? By that – still at that point, I mean at some point history doesn't im-impact, but how would you explain this interest?

A: In – in such a – well, as I mentioned before, you know, the – the family history, the people – the – my father's experience i-in – in – in – in the War of Independence, and before that he was in **Poland** during the World War I, you know, an-and the relationship even during that tsarist times, even in their gymnasium, there was already hostility between the Lithuanians and Poles in their classes, he told me. So that –

Q: I'm asking not so much about that particular relationship, but in – in a – I guess more direct way would say, why should your parents care what goes on between **Kaunas** and **Warsaw**, or **Kaunas** and **Moscow**, or **Kaunas** and **Berlin**? It's ha – you know, what made your family engaged in caring about these political events, in general. Why would you – how would you explain it?

A: I – I don't know, I don't know. But I know that even my grandfather from my mother's side, even he was very committed to the Lithuanian national –

Q: Idea.

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A: – and ethnic ideal, right. He was working he – with them, he – he – he was helping during the 1905, 1905 there was a revolution in **Russia**, and in **Lithuania** it took a national character; Lithuanians against the Russian suppression. So, why – my father hid, you know, the – the revolutionaries – my grandfather.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: My mother found out, I mean, that he hid the revolutionaries who were trying to get – when – when the revolution was suppressed, trying to get into **Germany** and later maybe to **United States** to escape from that pole – tsarist oppression. So, you know, it's tradition going way back. And I don't know how to explain. It was a small country, and the fe – people felt that, you know, these things really affect them. The country's independence was precarious during that time, and of course, I mean, my father was working for the government, so i-if – if – if the country is occupied, I mean, he has no job. I think maybe that also had something to do. I – really, we didn't pose those questions that way, so I am not sure.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: That's what it seems to me, but –

Q: The other question that comes to mind, and again this is in – in my mind an irony because I wouldn't – I'm not as familiar with the history at the time, is why would **Poland** be someone you'd be – there would be more of such negative feelings about than the **Soviet Union**, which is right next door? What – well, so is **Poland**, but –

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but what kind of discussions were going on, what kind of sensibility was there about the **Soviet Union**? What role did that play in **Panevėžys**, you know, and what was going on? What did you know of what was going on in Soviet **Russia**, and the union itself?

A: We knew some, we knew the – you know, my ma – my f – my father see the beginnings of the Russian revolution in **Russia**. I would say so. Again, the Polish thing. **Soviet Union** was supporting **Lithuania** in this Polish Lithuanian conflict. Or supporting **Lithuania's** claim to **Vilnius**.

Q: All along?

A: All along. The only one of the great powers. The Germans also didn't recognize the Polish **annexion** of **Vilnius**, but the Germans were not willing to, you know, to take stand, or support **Lithuania** or something like that. So they kept more or less outside of that – of that issue. The **Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan** supported **Poland**. So the only great power supporting – **United States** were behind the area, you know, they didn't – it was time of isolation, they didn't – tried not to take any stance in European affairs at all. So the only real power supporting **Lithuania** was **Soviet Union**. Now, my parents, being good Catholics and Lithuanians, they disapproved of the communist system as such. But there was little discussion of that, you know, all of the memories of revolution as my father said, I mean he thought that revolution was, of course, a cruel period of time. A lot of things happened, but

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he thought that, you know, after all this time, there was some – some normality in the country. Even he didn't wanted to believe that there was a constant terror or something like that. Although, you know, w-we read about the terror in – against so-called, you know, the – the short trials of the c – other communists against **Stalin**, and –

Q: You read that in the Lithuanian media?

A: Yes, yes, that was – so di – that was looked – people didn't believe really that all those people, you know, were traitors or something like that, and there was going a struggle for power. But as far as **Lithuania** is concerned, that was outside of our real concerns.

Q: And did news of the famine in the **Ukraine**, was there anything like that that – that touched your –

A: N-Not – we didn't know a thing about it, no.

Q: Okay.

A: Nothing at all.

Q: In the 30s, as this was –

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay, okay. So – so in other words, from what I get – a sense I get from you is the Soviet **Russia**, or **Soviet Union** was rather benign in it – in a – in a –

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A: That – that was our – our impression, mo-most of pre – impression of my parents, of the people they – they befriended, they discussed those things, yes, that was – that did p – it was, you know, a – was supporting us.

Q: Okay.

A: For our right cause, we imagined that the Lithuanian cause was –

Q: The right one.

A: – a right cause, so –

Q: So, what happens after 1938? We're finished with **Poland**. **Poland** requires this ultimatums – says this ultimatum, requires diplomatic relations. Everybody's upset, but they acquiesce.

A: Right.

Q: What happens then?

A: Well, the next year the Germans demanded the **Klaipėda** area.

Q: Mm-hm. And?

A: Well, that was another shock. You know, the Lithuanian – c-clearly you couldn't fight against **Germany** with any – with any s – you know, possibility of keeping glu – **Klaipėda**, so they took over **Klaipėda**, and that was the first occupation of Lithuanian territory, and that was first – the refugees we met. The Jewish people, and the Lithuanian people who were committed to Lithuanian cause became refugees. They didn't want – and **Panevėžys**, they came even to **Panevėžys**, the

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people. And there were appeals, you know, that – you know, for living space, for other things, for jobs for those refugees. So my parents decided, you know, that we had a nice house, it was our own house. We have too much space, we can – we could rent, you know, the upstairs, you know, to somebody. And we rent it to a girl who came from **Klaipėda** as a refugee, and well, simply, we – he – she worked in – in – in **Misetas**(ph) co-company, you know.

Q: **Misetas**(ph) company.

A: As a clerk, you know, as a clerk, you know, so th-that was a refugee, we came to our – to our house. And there were more those refugees, one of my father's – th-the legal students who were taking practice with my father was also from **Lithuania Minor**, and he came, you know, to work there, so we met him directly, and of course the Jewish people took care of the Jewish refugees –

Q: Okay.

A: – you know, who came from **Klaipėda**.

Q: Okay, so wa – so it was still sort of separate communities, it was not an integrated sense of these are all Lithuanian citizens, but it was more, each takes care of its own.

A: Right.

Q: It just happens naturally like that.

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

Q: Okay.

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A: Yeah.

Q: And who was this girl who came from **Klaipėda**? Did you talk to her?

A: Yeah, shu –

Q: Did she tell you about what had been going on there, and what she saw, and things like that?

A: Yeah, yeah, she did.

Q: What did she say?

A: She – she was not from the – that area. She was from l – from **Lithuania**, she was Catholic, you know, Lithuanian – Lithuanians from **Lithuania Minor** are usually Lutherans. She ca – when a young girl she came to **Klaipėda** to work there.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And now she became a refugee, because she – she lived for years there, you know, and – and came back. So she told, you know, about the – the Nazis, how they acted there, you know, how they at-attacked Lithuanians and Lithuanian institutions. They became more and more, you know, aggressive as the time went on, until it was, you know, really a problem for the Lithuanian even to exist there. The Nazis were trying to, you know, to – to – to – to – to dominate that area at all, and of course, you know, they demanded **Klaipėda** for **Germany**, and **Lithuania** couldn't resist, and you know, they – they just had to flee that – that country. **Hitler** himself came to

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Klaipėda, you know, and well, was a very sad moment for **Lithuania**, but we felt that's – it was a superior – superior power, couldn't do much about it.

Q: Were there any people that you knew of in **Lithuania** who were Lithuanians who supported **Hitler**? Who thought that the i – that the ideology of the Nazi party was one that had some positive attributes?

A: Ye-es, yes, but not in our circle, in our family circle. The closest I know was our Catholic priest, a teacher of religion in our school. He was impressed by the order and discipline of the Nazi movement, and during the lessons, you know, sometimes he made **Germany** – the Nazi **Germany** as an example of, you know, of a disciplined, purposeful society. But that was really ther – we heard about other people, you know, who – who were f-friendly to Germans, but there were very, very few of them, because **Lithuania** was under direct attack at that time, with **Klaipėda**. Everybody was very sad that **Klaipėda** was lost.

Q: Okay. What – and you were, by that point, 16 years old?

A: Right.

Q: And how – is your life changing at all? I mean, your personal life, do things keep on going the way they should be, even in spite of these –

A: Yes, yes. It didn't – my personal life didn't in – didn't change m – at all.

Q: What happened next, that you remember?

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A: Well, the next thing was that summer, 1939, from ow – ou-our school, there was an excursion to **Vilnius**, because the diplomatic relations were established, the communications were already established, you know, we could – we could go to **Vilnius**, you know, to visit the city. So my – my school decided to have an excursion. So, I to – my parents, you know, agreed that they had to pay some money, I don't know, for that, but they agreed that I go on that excursion, and I went with a group of my classmates to – to **Vilnius**. And it made a great impression on me, the city. The great impression of the old Lithuanian history connected to the city, where there were signs all around. The Lithuanian coat of arms, you know, was on the city gate. Ancient.

Q: There was a – there was a – still a city gate in 1939?

A: One. One. Yeah, one was – because **Aušros Vartai**, it wou – had – it had the chapel, had some religious meaning, so it – the gate was not demolished, all other gates were.

Q: **Aušros Vartai** means in English, Gates of Dawn, yes?

A: Gates of Dawn –

Q: Yeah.

A: – but I think it was Lithuanian mistranslation **aušros**, it should be **aus-austrayo(ph)**, I think where – meant –

Q: Okay.

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A: – well, it's – now it **Aušros Vartai**, so whatever.

Q: Okay.

A: So, but – but an-anywhere else, at the churches, at the bridges, we could see our – the coat of arms of our country. The old ones. Of course, the new offices had Polish signs, but nothing has – did – as far as history – well, there was some in combination, when the co-countries – was a Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth while the countries were united in one commonwealth, there was a – also a no – Polish eagle, Lithuanian knight, and so on, you know, bi – from those times. But always, always the Lithuanian knight. And [indecipherable] thing, and so Lithuanian students met our excursion, and he was a leader of our excursion, so the city told about how Lithuanians lived under the Poles, you know, and we went to Lithuanian s-s – girls' school, the girls – the – it was summer, so the girls went home, so the school was empty, so – but they accommodated us. So we were – we still in **Vilnius** were in midst of the Lithuanian community there, which was very small, and really oppressed, but they were proud because they felt that they were oppressed, and they were right that there was something wrong, you know, with the Polish government, that they – they were oppressing the Lithuanians anyways.

Q: Did they have their own schools, though, Lithuanian language schools in **Poland**, or – or you don't know about that?

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A: Yeah, they – they had some, but there were – one of the – the other were, they closing those schools, and they had the one high school in **Vilnius** itself.

Q: Okay.

A: Just the only one. There were bef – many more before, but they were closed.

Q: Okay.

A: But in **Vilnius** there was one.

Q: So in some ways this 1939 summer excursion is both an – something new, because you get to see the city for the first time in your life.

A: Right.

Q: And it's a summer vacation, and it's positive.

A: Right.

Q: And it's – it's something that you see of – that you can relate to and identify with. And at the same time it's the summer of 1939.

A: Right.

Q: Which is not exactly a summer without tension.

A: Oh yeah, in **Vilnius** was – in **Lithuania** that was not that obvious, but in **Vilnius**, yes.

Q: How did you feel it in **Vilnius**?

A: Well, there were – there were all po – oh, there's su-such like – first of all, there were military demonstrations of the Poles. There were parades. We were, you know,

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looking at one of the parades i-in **Vilnius**, of artillery regiment there, and we were comparing that because there was artillery regiment in **Panevėžys** also. So we were comparing how it is and we looked, you know, boy, our soldiers look much more, you know, much better, better clothes, better – and didn't impress us as – at all. But there were also the signs all over the **Vilnius** that – in Polish – that we are not going to retreat from our seashore. And they were – they were ready to fight. They we – knew the war is coming, or at least suspected the war is coming, and they – they are not going like the Czechs or Lithuanians who gave up **Klaipėda**, or the Czechs who gave up the **Sudetenland**, they are going to fight. They are not going to give in to the Nazis – to the – Nazis they didn't mention that, just to the Germans.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Yeah, so – so it was obvious, the war is coming.

Q: To you?

A: Which was not obvious in **Panevėžys** –

Q: And **Panevėžys** is two hours away.

A: Yes, but this was quite, you know, quite my place. And here, you know – and we met one Polish girl, who was just graduated from – from the high school and was visiting her relatives in **Vilnius**, and we talked with her, you know, and beca – she was very friendly, we talked in German with her.

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: And she knew German, and she knew, you know, that the war is coming, but he – she didn't think, you know, about all those horrible things. So – so what, you know? What – what are the Germans going to do to me, you know? Well, nothing, you know. It doesn't matter, you know, so –

Q: Well, this is somewhat of what I was getting at earlier, is that, you know, some people say wa – some people will say, there's all this high politics going on.

A: Yeah.

Q: How does it touch me, a simple person?

A: Well, for that girl, didn't touch it.

Q: Yeah.

A: Sh – she didn't care. I am sure, I mean –

Q: Yeah.

A: – it touched her terribly, eventually.

Q: Yes, yeah.

A: And pretty soon. Just a few months.

Q: Yeah. So this is where you started to feel that there's something going on, in – when you went on this summer excursion to **Vilnius**?

A: Yes, it changed my opinion. As I said, I was skeptical about Lithuanian claim to **Vilnius** because it's – it might be right, but it seemed too unrealistic to me. But after this excursion I changed my opinion completely.

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Q: In what way?

A: In what way? That this i – that's what the Lithuanian capital is. I mean, the Poles took it over, but that's – that's what it – the capital is. That's what the Lithuanian law says, that's what's Lithuanian constitution said. The capital city of **Vilnius** is **Lithuania's** capital. So – and I thought that's right. That's what it is. Maybe – maybe we d-don't recover the **Vilnius**, I don't know, you know, but –

Q: Also, before then –

A: – but then, doesn't change.

Q: – you had e – you had – before then, you hadn't necessarily been convinced of this argument.

A: That's right.

Q: But at that point, once you went there and you saw these signs, that these were – that there was so much that was of Lithuanian –

A: Right.

Q: – history there, and Lithuanian presence there, that yes, it is – it is the rightful capital.

A: That's right.

Q: Okay. You go back to **Panevėžys**.

A: Right.

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Q: What happens after that? You know, there's the summer, and then September first comes. September first is not that long after your summer –

A: Right, right.

Q: – excursion. So, how did events play out? What happened back in **Panevėžys**, once you returned from the trip?

A: Yeah, first of all, as far as I am concerned, a lot of people, starting with my family, with my father and more my m-mother, were very much interested in my experience, in my –

Q: Ah.

A: – and even the people who – who were friendly with our family, the other families also were very much interested in that experience. Nobody saw **Vilnius** for 19 years, and now suddenly, you know, I saw that – that city, and everybody wanted – and even Lithuanian officers were interested, in my opinion how did the Polish army look to me? You know, and all that kind of thing, you know. I was –

Q: You were pretty much the hero.

A: – a center of attention.

Q: Yes.

A: Th – that – I – I was just –

Q: That's not bad.

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A: No, no, well, I – I was just so – so proud, you know. Not so proud, but I tried to be, you know, controlled about it, but I felt very well about that.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know, that I had that experience. And then suddenly in [indecipherable] the – the vacation was ending, but the school didn't start yet. School starts on September the first. But the week before I went to the gymnasium, I don't know why, I met some of my friends and there, you know, I found out before – before the newspapers came out, or something like that, I found out about **Ribbentrop-Molotov** agreement.

Q: And what was the militor – **Molotov-Ribbentrop** agreement?

A: Well, it was that they committed themselves, both countries –

Q: Who were these countries?

A: **Germany** and **Soviet Union** committed themselves not to fight against each other, even in a c – in a cong – if the conflict with a third countries comes, that they wouldn't be involved, they would keep neutrality in that conf-conflict. So, since we knew that there were discussions between British and French and the Soviets, how to stand up against German ag-aggression, suddenly this disappeared, you know, suddenly **Soviets Union** said no, we are not going to make a stand. And the British and French, you know, just – just went home. That was the whole power situation. And the people thought that if there would be agreement between **Great**

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Britain, France and the **Soviet Union**, that there would be no war, because the superiority of this combination should have been clear even to **Hitler**. So they thought, that's it.

Q: So are these discussions, you know, I – it still is hard for me to imagine that a 16 – by now 16 year old boy –

A: Yes.

Q: – is thinking like this at that time. What I can imagine is that a 16 year old boy is listening to grown-ups talk like this at that time.

A: That's right, but af-after – after visit to **Vilnius** I became political.

Q: I see.

A: Before that, I – yeah, I heard th – I was interested in those things, but you know, not – not that much.

Q: Okay.

A: But ah – ah – at that point, you know, I became – I be – really interested in what was going on.

Q: So when you her – hear, a week from school – before school starts, that there is this **Molotov-Ribbentrop** pact –

A: Right.

Q: – and you – you go to, where was it, your school area, even though it hadn't begun, is this where you learned of it?

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A: From my friends.

Q: From your friends.

A: From my friends, yeah.

Q: Your friends. And your friends are your same age – they – about the same age?

A: Yeah, the same age. Well, they heard on the radio or something, but they, also their parents.

Q: Okay.

A: Their parents. I – we – we started discussing, I said no, so what, I mean, so what?

There is no wars on, does it matter much? And my friend said, you know, well, my father said that, you know, this means war. Because, you know, the Germans were ma – will be not d-deterred by the superior power of three great countries, **Great Britain, France and Soviet Union**. So that means the war is coming. That was his father's opinion [inaudible]

Q: And you're sharing it with your si – we – amongst yourselves –

A: That's right.

Q: – at that time.

A: That's right.

Q: Okay.

A: That's all – so we – we didn't deduct ourselves really –

Q: Okay.

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A: – but it came from our parent in the generation.

Q: Okay.

A: From our parents.

Q: All right, so this is a –

A: In this case my friend's parent, mm-hm.

Q: So here we are.

A: All right.

Q: It's a week before September first.

A: Right.

Q: And then what happens?

A: And then the school started September first, and the war started, of course, and that was news, and everybody was listening to the radio, and everybody was following what's going on, and quite soon it was clear, you know, of the German superiority, which we thought even before. I didn't see it, but other people saw the German army in **Klaipėda**. We saw Polish army in – in **Vilnius**, and it was obvious, you know, that the Germans were much better prepared, and much stronger army than the Poles, and even before the war started, we thought that the Poles are going to lose the war. And of course, we – we kids, you know, were, because of that hostility with the Poles, we thought that's – that's a nice time for **Lithuania** to recover **Vilnius**. The Germans are attacking **Poland** and pole – Polish army

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definitely is losing, like in the first days it was quite obvious a German attack was, you know, the **Blitzkrieg**. They – they went very, very strongly wi-with air – air attacks, armored formations. So we thought well, you know, why Lithuanian army doesn't go there and recover **Vilnius**, because Poles will be not able to resist any more.

Q: Was there any sentiment of changing, I mean any voices amongst Lithuanians that said well, maybe we didn't like the Poles very much for what they did, but my God, what's happening in **Poland**, and it's terrible? Was that – was there any sympathy being expressed in the so – in those circles that you were in, of **Poland's** getting it now, and it's – it's not easy?

A: Not in the those circles I was in.

Q: Okay.

A: Not in my co – friends, classmates, no. Not in my family. But, our director of-of our school told us Germans are not going to win this war. It is world war, and the Germans are going to lose, and we shouldn't interfere in the war now. He didn't say that, you know, he – he simp – in sympathy with Poles or something. Maybe he was, I don't know. But he was convinced that the Nazis are going to lose. And it seems like not some kind of a military or – or – or economical analysis, but because the Nazi ideology, that generation knew Germans from the first occupation during the first World War. And they were convinced that the Germans were always overdoing.

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Q: Overreaching themselves?

A: Overreaching. In the first World War, and from the Nazi ideology they deduced that the Nazis are ric – ready to do the same thing, to overreach more, even more than the – during the first World War. So they were – and our president, **Antanas Smetona** also was of that opinion. Some of the officers of Lithuanian army, some o- of the diplomats said, I mean, it's a chance to recover **Vilnius**, let's go, and Germans were encouraging Lithuanians, encouraging, you know, that wil – **Lithuania** wil – would go and recover **Vilnius**. And the British said, in that case, **Great Britain** will declare war against **Lithuania**. But well, now this is the question, who will de – will win the war, and **Smetona** was convinced that Germans are going to lose, and he didn't – we didn't know about that time, but we knew, you know, later, that **Smetona** was against that, and that's why **Lithuania** didn't – didn't attack **Poland** at that time, because of **Smetona** and of thinking, which our director told to us

[indecipherable]

Q: Would you say, you know, would you say your family belonged to a particular kind of political wing in **Lithuania**, or was it fairly typical of, let's say the mood in society? From what I understand there was a Christian democrat, and a more nationalist, or national political forces.

A: Right.

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Q: Which one would your family would have – thought they would have identified with more?

A: My father was close to Christian democrats.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But he didn't belong to the party. And later he drifted closer to this national movement of **Smetona**, of the president, but he was also critical of **Smetona** quite a bit – a bit, but – but he was like in between those two. Now, from my mother's side, everybody was **Smetona's**.

Q: So they were much more of a – of – from the national –

A: Yes, from –

Q: Okay.

A: – starting from my grandfather, through all those brothers, you know, everybody, including my mother was from the national group of **[indecipherable]**

Q: Would you have called them nationalists?

A: Translating would be, yes, but they were not any kind of Nazis, they were anti – anti Nazi, anti-German. And there were, you know, some – s-some who – wh-who were pro-German, and pro-Nazi, like **Waldemartas**(ph) and so, but i-it – it – **Smetona** was hostile to that –

Q: Yes.

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A: – that type of thinking, and – and those who followed **Smetona** was hostile against the Nazi thinking, not only as – as German, but generally against Nazi and fascist things. Fascism of Italian type had more sympathies. There were not too many, but Italians type was closer. There was no racism in – in **Italy**, in – at least at the beginning, na – and – so, but in – in – in our circles, no, you know, there was no – no sympathy for the Nazis.

Q: And yet – and yet, there was temptation –

A: Yeah.

Q: – that – that this – this, let's say encouragement, on behalf of the Nazis to then take **Vilnius** –

A: Yes.

Q: – was tempting. It wasn't – it wasn't something that was dismissed as we just don't do that, unless fa – is – until **Smetona** said so.

A: Right. **Smetona**, well, is not – he is not the only one. Also, as I said, our – director of our school also was of that opinion, and – and there was other people, older people who said, you know, don't do that. Now, even if **Lithuania** would have attacked **Vilnius**, that doesn't mean that it would be pro-Nazi because he is all – the **Soviet Union** supported **Lithuania** in the Polish-Lithuanian –

Q: Conflict.

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A: – conflict, and here also, you know, Lithuanian – **Germany** would have become – become allies for that moment, but lith – from Lithuanian viewpoint it would be just like alliance between Finns and Germans, you know. Not – they – Finns didn't become Nazis at all, they were allies during the second World War with the Germans, but they still were a democratic country, and had nothing to do with the Nazi ideology at all. So that was the idea. Of course, it was unrealistic. If – if would have happened, of course, Nazis would have taken everything that – but the hope was that, you know, well, so we are allies, just like we were allies with the Soviets, now we're allies with the Germans. But **S-Smetona** was against that, **Smetona** was a very strong leader, maybe a d – we could call it dictator, and without him, you know, nothing – nothing happens.

Q: Okay. So – so the **Molotov-Ribbentrop** pact is – is – what you hear of is between non-aggression between the **Soviet Union** and Nazi **Germany**.

A: Right.

Q: That's what becomes [indecipherable]

A: That's what we knew, and there was [indecipherable] so nobody kne-knew about them.

Q: Okay. So what happens later, in the early fall, as things progress, and – wha – how does life in **Panevėžys** change? Or does it?

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A: Yes, of it – it does. First of all, the war, you know, the – some of the things, the commerce became affected. There were some Lithuanian ships which were run on the mines, and we – one of the sailors, a brother of our classmate came back, I mean his ship was sunk in the **Baltic** Sea because ran on the mine. It's –

Q: It hit a mine. It hit a mine.

A: Well, hit a mine, well, there were non-contact mines also, you know at that time.

Q: Okay.

A: But that's a technical thing, so anyway, I mean the ship was blown out of the –

Q: Of the water.

A: – of the water, right. So, you know. And then of course – and of course the concern whether **Lithuania** could become – still be neutral when such a great war is starting around. And when the Soviets attacked **Poland** also, from the east, then everybody became concerned what's – what's now. Because the Soviets are taking over all the eastern portion of **Poland** – well, really the Ukrainians, Byelorussians and Lithuanians living there, but doesn't matter, you know, it's – was still **Poland**. They took **Vilnius**, the Soviets, and now, you know, everybody became – now we are involved. Soviets recognize **Vilnius** as **Lithuania's** capital, now they – are they going to turn it over to us, or will they find, you know, some kind of thing to – to get out of it, of the – the commitment. And there was mobilization. There was declared, you know, the Lithuanian army was mobilized to protect its neutrality, not

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for war. But the Polish army, you know, went over the boundary to **Lithuania** and was disarmed, so they had – **Lithuania** army had to be there to disarm the Polish army coming over, and to intern them as the neutral country's supposed to do in such case. And a lot of Polish military came over, and refugees – generally refugees, not military refugees from **Poland** came to **Lithuania**, and they found quite – quite a bit of understanding and sympathy then, you know. **Poland** was defeated and broken and then, you know, it seemed like, you know – not – not an enemy any more you had to fight, you know. So the – there was sympathy for them and – and – and all the routine mobilization, we thought wi – the Lithuanian army being mobilized that they will go to **Vilnius**. And we – we were all, in our class I think everybody was, you know, why our army is not going there? But as I said, the director explained to us, we didn't believe him, but that's what it was, the older generation decided it would be foolish to get into that war. And – but then we were very much tol – concerned, what will be next, you know, everybody was concerned. There was organization, so-called **Sauliai**(ph).

Q: What is it? How would you translate it?

A: It is close to national guard, p-partly like a reserves, part like national guard.

There was a military people a-after they served in the army, they were released into reserves, and they voluntarily joined that organization, which was a military organization, but not quite. It differs, for instance, from the national guard in that

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was – that he – they had also cultural thing. They had dances, they had lectures also, you know.

Q: So it was somewhat civic?

A: Somewhat civic, yeah. But it was very popular, a lot of people in the – men, and also women belonged to that organization. And it's also part – was part of the – of the country's military capa – ca – capacity, and so – and we were a-also our – the students of – in the high school, in the higher classes, now also belonged to that organization. I belonged too, voluntarily, whoever wanted, there was no pressure at all to join, but I joined it. And we were also called to duty then.

Q: Okay.

A: Then the mobilization came and we were sent to – on the guard duty in – in the city as a – I'm writing in my memoirs, there will be no – our students were not quite military minded at all, you know, they might have m-made – made a – a – a play out of it, and it was a serious thing, so we – we were removed from the guard duty and sent to a place where there were no people.

Q: Well, what do you mean by made a play out of it, they – they –

A: Well, they were starting, the girls were going to – to the school o-on – through the bridge – the bridge, they were supposed to guard the bridge. They started on, you know, ch-checking their bags and all that kind of thing, and it was a flirt really. And it was – and when – when the leaders found out, they were terrified. They said, I

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mean, the p – the parents will complain, so we will go before court martial for this thing, you know. So they took off of – of duty us completely and sent to guard gasoline tanks and – and outside place. They want –

Q: Where there were no girls whose bags you could check.

A: No girls, no. And no people at all, just a gr-great, friendly dog who came to visit us, that's all.

Q: Okay. So that is how, in the early fall, things seemed to be developing.

A: Right.

Q: What happens next?

A: Well, mobilization was called off, we came back to our classes. Our cl – school was taking over for – for military ca – no, the girls' school was taking over for the – the military. The girls went to our school in the daytime, we went during the nighttime to our school, because it was different schools, girl and – and boys' school. And – but it was a short period of time, and of course there was news that, you know, **Lithuania** is recovering **Vilnius**, Soviets are letting have **Vilnius** for **Lithuania**. Not all the territory which **Lithuania** claimed and the Soviets recognized before, you know, they – they just returned a quarter of the territory, but with the capital city. And also was news that, you know, the military bases, Soviet military bases will be introduced in **Lithuania**. The Soviets will have military bases in **Lithuania**. So, everybody was really happy that **Vilnius** is returning to **Lithuania**,

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and everybody was concerned that the Soviet army is being introduced in **Lithuania** and having bases here. It was not a big surprise really, because before that **Estonia** and **Latvia** already were forced. They didn't get anything, but they had to take in Soviet bases, Soviet guard [indecipherable]

Q: Did you know that in **Panevėžys** at the time?

A: Yes, yes, that was in the news, in the newspapers, everybody. So, **Estonia** first, **Latvia** second, **Lithuania** after that.

Q: I'd like to interrupt here and say, you know, when **Germany** at –

[background conversation, tape break]

Q: Okay, this is a continuation of our interview with **Algimantas Gureckas** on October 14th, 2010. So, Mr. **Gureckas**, you were at the point where you were explaining the introduction of Soviet military bases in **Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia** had them. I wanted to go back for a minute to the first declaration of war, when **Poland** was attacked by Nazi **Germany** and then is also attacked by the **Soviet Union**.

A: Right.

Q: Do you know – was there a sense, did you – was there any discussion or did you have a feeling about – I'm doing all of this as a preface, what the Jewish community was thinking, how people in the Jewish community were reacting to these events, the local Jewish community in **Panevėžys**. Was there any – any knowledge – I mean, I

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don't have a sense that you know, was much contact, but did you – do you remember anything about that?

A: Well, personally I didn't have, at that time, connections. We had Jewish friends in our – in our class, but – and one was fairly close to me, but we somehow didn't discuss much about this situation. But it was from my parents' contacts, we knew that, of course the Jews were concerned about the German attack, and the German strength, which they showed, you know, and the power. And of course everybody knew how hostile the Nazis are against – against the Jews. So, the concern was quite stunder – understandable. But that's – that's about – about it. I mean, there were concern, but –

Q: Yeah.

A: – I don't know. Of course they – they were not in favor that **Lithuania** would attack **Poland**, you know, but [indecipherable] they didn't.

Q: Yeah.

A: So – so it seemed – so I – I don't know. I could transfer my [indecipherable]

Q: Okay.

A: I had no –

Q: Okay. So, when we're talking about those military bases, you – you get the news in school. Do you remember how you got the news that **Vilnius** is going to come back into Lithuanian control, do you remember where you were?

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A: Oh, everybody was at – at the radios at that time.

Q: Okay.

A: We [**indecipherable**] the Lithuanian delegation, government delegation was in **Moscow**.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So we knew that it will be decided one way or the other, and so everybody was just glued to the radio and listening when the end – when it was announced, you know, the news, and eventually it was, you know, that this – the treaty between **Lithuania** and **Soviet Union** is signed and **Vilnius** is really – really turned to **Lithuania**, and the military garrisons will be introduced in **Lithuania**, Soviet military.

Q: What date was this, do you remember?

A: It was, yeah, it was 1939, October 10th was they signed the treaty and we knew about that October 11th, in the morning, from the radio.

Q: From the radio.

A: Yeah, and then, of course, newspapers. And the newspapers were a great disappointment because they showed new boundary between **Lithuania** and the **Soviet Union**, and as I said, I mean, just a quarter of the territory was being returned to **Lithuania**, three-quarters was just kept, **Stalin** for himself. And the problem is that the Lithuanian areas were the farmers, and generally the population was

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Lithuanian in that area. They fell to the – to th – to the Soviet side, you know.

Lithuania didn't receive even those territories which were ethnically Lithuanian.

Q: Are these – was this part of **Belarus**, where these –

A: It became part of **Belarus** then.

Q: – [indecipherable] **Belarus**, mm-hm.

A: Par – became part of **Belarus**. Later the boundary was adjusted when **Lithuania** was occupied, but the areas like **Druskininkai**, like **Švenčionys**, they were part of **Belarus – Belarus** at that time.

Q: So you got bad – good news, bad news basically –

A: Yes.

Q: – October 11th.

A: That's right, that's right. So the – the enthusiasm was – was k-kind of muted at that point, and there was a meeting, you know, and i-it was muted, until really the Soviets – Soviets kept **Vilnius** for a couple of weeks yet, and they were r-really plundering the ke – the city during that time, and eventually the Lithuanian army took over **Vilnius**. And s-somehow you know, at that point, when Lithuanian army marched into **Vilnius**, the country became split personality, the people said now we are going to celebrate, we are going to worry tomorrow. Everybody knew that there is a lot of to – something to worry, but today we are celebrating, tomorrow we are –

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are g – are going to worry. And that's what we did, we celebrated and then we started to – to worry right away after that, after the celebration.

Q: And – okay, so now **Lithuania's** in **Vilnius**.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you – when was the first time you saw a Soviet soldier?

A: Oh, that was an accident, the – well, again, after **Lithuania** – the Soviets had called the government delegation from **Finland** in – into **Moscow** and started discussions with the Finns, and they had also, you know, demands, which the Finns re – refused. So, in – in a month's time the Soviets attacked **Finland** and became Finnish Winter War. And now everybody was for Finns in **Lithuania**. **Soviet Union** was supposed to be our ally, and well, ally, but we – we – we still were for the Finns, they were so – so heroically defending their country, you just couldn't help it. Now, one of the Soviet planes was bombing **Helsinki**, ar – or some other Finnish cities, anyway, was one bomb – on the bombing raid. The Finns were shooting back, and the p – the pa – the plane was damaged, couldn't navigate very well, but turned south, went over **Estonia**, **Latvia**, came to **Lithuania** and near **Panevėžys**, crashed. Well, really, crash landed, I would say.

Q: Crash landed, okay.

A: Crash landed. The pilots came out and said, I mean, how far is **Riga**? Well, they flew over **Riga** already, but they couldn't tell any more. So, the Soviets from their

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barra – from their military bases in **Lithuania** came, the Soviet soldiers to that place, dismantled the plane and brought it to the railroad station and took it. And we saw then that plane, it went through our gymnasium, through the street in front of us. Everybody was at the – at the window, and we saw the plane, all warped by bullets, which wa – wa – that – and we saw Soviet soldiers taking that plane away. So that was the first time we saw the Soviet soldiers, taking away that damaged plane.

Q: So y – so you – the – so, in other words, the garrison had already been established, but you just hadn't seen them yet.

A: No – yeah, th-they were – they were close, they were –

Q: They were close.

A: – they were – they were not – not – not going to be – to the streets or anything like that. There were – there were garrisons who were there, but they were closed.

Q: Closed.

A: They didn't let their soldiers room around – roam around at all.

Q: Okay. And that plane is what you see, and it's in – and it's in bits and pieces, and it goes by your school window, and it's of great curiosity to everybody.

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: Okay.

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A: Yeah. Also a bittersweet thing, because you know, w-we like to see the – the plane warped by the Finnish bullets, but then the so – Soviet soldiers in **Lithuania** was, you know, a bitter part of it.

Q: Yeah. How many – how many more minutes do we have?

Q2: Well, we've only got two.

Q: Then let's finish right here.

A: Okay.

Q: Let's finish right here and we'll continue more after lunch.

Q2: As we were talking about the Finnish.

Q: As we were talking about the Finnish yes. All right.

End of Tape Two

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Beginning Tape Three

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Algimantas Gureckas** on October 14th, 2010. Mr. **Gureckas**, where we left off, you were describing to us how you saw the downed Soviet plane which had fought – which was flying against – in the Finnish – the Winter War against **Finland**, how it landed near **Panevėžys**, and you saw the dismantled parts of it being taken by Soviet soldiers, and it aroused a great deal of curiosity amongst the – the kids in school, and you all went to the windows to take a look. I wanted to ask a question about, let's say, how kids felt then when these events were happening. And bring it back to the very beginning of tensions. Did you, as – as young students have an urge to do something, whether it was against the Germans, or against the Poles, or against the Soviets, to defend your country? Were there any such student types of discussions or ideas going on, or even actions that were taken?

A: Well, I could tell about one really ridiculous thing, because we were 15 years old when the – there was a tension about **Klaipėda**, a problem, the Germans were pressing **Lithuania** at that time, and it was clear that they will, sooner or later will demand that **Lithuania** return **Klaipėda**, together with the **Klaipėda** territory to **Germany**. So my classmate, and my close friend, he told me that he heard a rumor that there is no organization, but secretly Lithuanian army is mobilizing, taking the volunteers, registering the volunteers, and he – he kind of suggested that we might

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be interested in that. So I – I said yes. My father was fighting for **Lithuania**, now it's my turn, y-you know. And we went together with him to –

Q: Did you tell your father?

A: No, of course not. That would be the end of the story. No, we went together with him to the military office in **Panevėžys**, and just asks whether, you know, they – they need any voluntaries to fight for **Lithuania**. Well, the sergeant there was kind of a – excited. I mean, he was – he was dumbfounded really, you know. And we couldn't understand why – why he was you know, so kind of confused. We just wanted to fight for **Lithuania**, that's all, that seems so – and he, an elderly sergeant, you know, was a pr – now I can see, you know, why – why he was – the children want fight for **Lithuania**, well – but that was the end of the story. They said no, thank you, you know. If we need we will call on you, and we'll call nev – everybody. But now – now, we don't need your service. But good – good boys, you know, grow up. You will be good soldiers someday. Okay, so we went back to class, and somehow, apparently my friend told ma – our – our friend **Rubinsteinas(ph)**, a Jewish friend. He was one of our gang, **Shalamas(ph)** **Rubinsteinas(ph)**, and he – apparently my friend told him about that story, and he was all upset that we didn't take him with th – with – with us. He also wanted to fight Germans.

Q: Wanted to fight.

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A: Yeah, so that was the oh – the only really disagreement we had with him i-in our – in our friendship. So – so that's – that's the story. After that, of course, we were i-in that organ – organization, Šauliai, I would call like national guard. And we took seriously our duties, you know, whenever we were called upon.

Q: To check the girls' bags.

A: Y-Yeah, well that's – I didn't do that.

Q: Okay.

A: I was supposed to be responsible for that guard, and I didn't check on – on it. But yeah, yeah, so on.

Q: Yeah.

A: That's like that.

Q: But there was – was there any such talk – did it ever – first of all, did this story – this event ever reach your parents' ears?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: We didn't tell that.

Q: Okay. And number two, did – did anything similar happen with – with Poles or with lith – with the Soviets, or anything else that was developing at the time? Was there any other talk amongst the kids in school of any sort of resistance or activity, or anything like that about things – these histor – these [indecipherable]

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A: No, n-nothing against the Poles. I mean, the thing went too f – too fast. We didn't – we didn't even realize what the ultimatum was ac-accepted, you know. And I was sick at that time at home, you know, so I – I don't know how my friends reacted, and – at school. But no, this thing became only when the Soviets occupied **Lithuania**, then – then we found tha-that we have to resist that somehow. And that's another part of my story, you know, when a – when the Soviets annex **Lithuania**, occupied and annexed **Lithuania**. Yeah, I was looking for a place, you know, I could join some resistance group. And the only group I knew was the Catholic organization, adate –

Q: What was it called?

A: **Adaytis(ph)**

Q: I see.

A: **Adaytis(ph)**, and this organization was illegal under the independent **Lithuania**, **Smetona's** regime, because they – it was legal in the universities, but not in the – in the high schools, because **Smetona's** regime thought that it's too early to get into political things. **[phone ringing]**

Q: Excuse us, please, can we stop the tape, please? **[tape break]** I want to come to that –

A: Yes.

Q: – but we're getting a little ahead of ourselves chronologically.

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A: Right.

Q: So let's go back to October, when the bases appear, yo-you hear the news, the **Molotov-Ribbentrop** pact, the bases appear, the plane is down, you see the – the parts going on. How did life change after that? How di – did it – did you feel it impact you in any way when those bases first arrived?

A: No, the things quieted down. While the Soviets were fighting against the Finns, they didn't put any pressure on **Lithuania**. The bases were there, you know, but there were no conflicts as far as we were conc – you know, aware. And it seemed like, you know, we were a gr – very upset and apprehensive i-in the fall, about October, November. But in the springtime of 1940, it looked like the things quieted down.

Q: Life hadn't changed much.

A: The life, they didn't change much. Of course, war was going on, as I said, you know, and there were – there were less selection in the – in the – in the – in the m – on the market because of the blockades, you know. But life was going pretty normal by that time.

Q: So th – the government – what had happened to Mr. **Smetona**, President **Smetona**? Did he stay around? Was he still president?

A: Yes, he was still president. Government was fank – functioning as it always did. It seemed like the things quieted down. Of course, we were following war. The

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Germans were landing in **Scandinavia**, in **Denmark**, and **Norway**, and then, you know, they attacked in the west, a-and – through **Netherlands, Belgium** and **France**, and the big battles of 1940 was going in the west. So everybody was following what's going on, because it was –

Q: Was this through Lithuanian radio, or – or newspapers, or was this also internation – did you get any kind of international broadcasts?

A: At that time Lithuanian b – was sufficient. We got from Lithuanian newspapers, Lithuanian radio the information. Of course, other s – radio stations, German, Russian and others were available, but we didn't – we didn't feel like we have to use that at that time.

Q: Mm-hm. Okay. And what would be the next – you were then what year of high school? In June – in April of '40?

A: It was a six – sixth year, I-I was yeah, finishing the sixth class, yeah, mm-hm.

Q: Okay. And what would be the next major event that you recall from that spring, or, you know, as the months went on?

A: Well, the occupation. Because –

Q: What does the occupation mean in this ken – in this sense? You have bases, but how does that change to occupation?

A: Oh yeah, the bases were limited in certain places, and they were closed, they didn't let their soldiers roam around, you know, they were all in – in the bases. And

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suddenly, you know, the Soviet army – well, as a – as I told, I mean, I – my father came – we knew that our government delegation is in **Moscow**, there are some kind of problems there, but nobody thought it's a great deal. And then suddenly my father came from somewhere, called me, and said, you know that the Soviets are occupying the country, taking over the country. And that's what happened, and that –

Q: Do you remember that conversation?

A: Yes.

Q: Where were you at the time?

A: At home. At home.

Q: And how did he look when he told you this?

A: It was already vacation started, you know, and then it was June, and vacation started, classes were over. And my father were all upset, and excited, and I had my friend with me. And he said, let – let the friend go. So I said, oh, my – my father has something to –

Q: Who was this friend?

A: – for me to do. Well, it was a younger boy from the high school, and – but two classes lower, because he was younger. He was just – just as a – his relationship was strange. He was related to the Polish Marshall **Pilsudski**, who was – died – who died by – by that time he was dead. But he was related through his – his mother side, you know. And I don't know whether he considered himself Pole or Lithuanian, but he

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was also very much interested in politics, in wa – in th-the war going on here. We came, we discussed those things. I was kind of try to be diplomatic, you know, I didn't show my an – our hostility –

Q: Anti [indecipherable]

A: – to the Polish, you know, and I tried to be diplomatic, and then my father came and said let – let him go, and then I said, my father has something to do, has a task. And then my father said, you know, the Soviets are occupying **Lithuania**. And that was in the afternoon. Night, we slept during the night. During the night the Soviet troops came from **Vilnius**, it took **Vilnius** first and went to **Panevėžys**, and started – well, then the tanks, th-the – the motorized troops, you know, were going – it – it was not a – a garrison, it was not a base. It wa – they were all over the place. And a – taking over, you know, and taking over the military establishments in **Lithuania**, taking hi – the barracks, the –

Q: How did it look in **Panevėžys**? What were the – what did you see from that time, the next morning?

A: Well, the next morning we came up, they were already went through **Panevėžys**, they were in the ba – in the military barracks somewhere, and they went farther from **Panevėžys** over **Ciulai**. We still saw some tanks, some military cars going, you know, on the road, but not ma – the mass, which was before, you know, during the night.

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Q: Mm-hm.

A: I didn't see that – that massive movement, it was during the night, and somehow I didn't hear it, and – although there should have been some – some noi – a lot of noise, but somehow I slept well. And that's it. And wi –

Q: Was your house in the middle of town, was it on the outskirts?

A: A-All – all over, in the outskirts, because –

Q: No, I'm talking your place, where you lived, where you –

A: Oh, in the – in the middle of the town, really.

Q: Okay.

A: We had our house quite near the center, right near my high school. And – well, it's difficult to say, but you know, there were also reports in the radio, in the press that the president has left **Lithuania**, he fled **Lithuania**, so he was condemned that he didn't stay with his country during the critical time, and all that kind of thing, and this –

Q: Was this – was this still the Lithuanian press, or was this already –

A: Still the Lithuanian press, it seemed like Lithuanian press, but apparently the control was already in – in the Soviet hands, or at least in the communist – Lithuanian communist party's hands.

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: Yeah, so – and – and then, you know, that same day, it was Sunday. Saturday there was the ultimatum and they marched into **Lithuania** and in **Panevėžys** Sunday afternoon, I saw the first communist demonstration in **Panevėžys** in the main square. The people didn't – didn't walk the streets. It was Sunday and the city was kind of empty. I went to s – into this – the city to take a look at what's going on. Nothing. Were – were very few people going dur – during the streets, in the streets. Not like a regular Sunday. And then I went to the main square and there was a demonstration, not a big one, maybe 50 - 60 people there.

Q: Young, old?

A: Mostly young, I would say, mostly young people. And they were – had the red flag there, and they were speaking in Lithuanian, you know, against the sovi – **Smetona** government, against the – the whole system, against the fascist government, as they called here – **Smetona's** government. And the others were listening to that, and j-just seemed like all of them – of the people were Jewish.

Q: How did – how did you know? I mean, how did it seem – why would – why would you make that assumption? How did you – yeah, how could you tell?

A: Well, typically from – from the racial features, and from the accent the speakers used. The listeners, of course, I don't know. Well, I didn't check all, I was kind of aside, you know, I wasn't in the demonstration itself. So it's difficult to say, you know, the composition, but it – the impression was like most of them or even all of

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them were Jewish. Now, my fa – the Jew – the communist party was illegal in **Lithuania** before that. Even when the – when the bases came in, it still was illegal. My father was working in the court system, and some of the – of the clients, as he called, he had some communists also, who were accused just of the communist activities. And so he was concerned that now, you know, that things changed, and those communists will became very influential. And –

Q: What did he say – what did he tend to say about those communists that were his clients, earlier? Did he have opinions about them?

A: Yeah, he had a negative opinion, because one of the – of the important communists which he was exam – examining his activities, was from a very rich Jewish family in **Panevėžys**.

Q: Mm-hm. Do you remember their name?

A: From very rich – pardon?

Q: Do you remember their name?

A: No, I wouldn't, but I – I could find, because he was important later on, so maybe I could find out later, but I don't remember exact now. And so i-i – even that, you know, for him looked kind of ridiculous or – or – or unacceptable that from such a rich family, you know, he becomes communist, and is working against the Lithuanian government, really. And I must say, later he was concerned that he will

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become imp – im – important person, which was right, he became very important person. But became not in **Panevėžys**, but in **Vilnius**.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I ent – the – the story is interesting. He was afraid that there will be some revenge. There was nothing from that. He didn't –

Q: Who was – who was afraid there would be revenge?

A: My father.

Q: I see.

A: My father was afraid that they – he will re – take revenge against him because he was conducting that investigation. But there was none.

Q: Okay.

A: He was – he was in **Vilnius**, he was doing his – communists were there, you know, and whatever, and there was none. But there were some other people, you know, who take revenge, mostly criminals.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Who also thought, I mean, they might be – so, th-they had the problem there, but this communist wasn't – he just ignored.

Q: So when you s – okay, when you saw this demonstration, what – do you remember what your feelings were at the time?

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Q: I was afraid. I was afraid that the revolution is going on, from what I heard what happened in **Russia**, you know, with all the cruelties of the revolution might happen right – right here, right now, you know, in – in **Panevėžys**. They decided – they decided that they sh – you know, they should go and disperse the police, this – the fash – fascist police, as they said. And they – they march with their red flag, they march toward police, I didn't follow them, and I f – later find out that the Lithuanian military officer in **Panevėžys** telephoned the Soviet forces, whichever the commander was in **Panevėžys**, and asks whether, you know, that's supposed what's – what should happen, because they were trying to – to disperse the police, you know, and take the police headquarters in **Panevėžys**. And the Soviet commander said no, no demonstrations, nothing is allowed, and if you don't – if you don't protect the quiet in – in the city, we will have to take care of it and provide this – this – so th-ther- there would be no d – no demonstrations, nothing. So then, you know, h-he co – the c – the commandant, the Lithuanian officer called **Šauliai**, and we were also called, I – oh, we went to the **Šauliai** headquarters, we have given rifles, and we were supposed – there was – commandant's hour, was supposed to enforce that, to patrol the streets, and see that nobody walks during the nighttime, which we –

Q: And you did that?

A: Which we did, yeah. I did, and my friends did. That was quite – nobody was demonstrating nothing, nobody was walking around.

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Q: Did you, first of all, did you recognize anybody? Within that demonstration was there anybody you personally knew or recognized?

A: No, no, no.

Q: No.

A: Not at all.

Q: And did you know of Lithuanian communists? Not Jewish communists, but Lithuanian communists, who either would be there, or who had been in somehow or other known, or active?

A: No, not – not real communists. There were people, very leftists, you know, opinions, one – one – one – one doctor, he was a friend of the family. He was – he was very leftist, but he wasn't – he was very favorable about the **Soviet Union**. He – he had very favorable opinion, but he wasn't communist, he wasn't working for the party or anything like that, so.

Q: Did anything – do you know what happened to him when this – there was the fo – the Soviet occupation? Did his [indecipherable] change?

A: He became director of the – of the hospital.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And then I think he expanded that hospital very well. He – he would – as – as a doctor he was really, you know, valued under the system. But I – I su – suspect more than a doctor than – than a co – I don't think he was really a communist, even

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after – in particular after he saw, you know, the communism in – you know, in – in real life.

Q: I want to go back again to that demonstration. You said you were scared. Did you have any view of – did you have any – any thoughts about the demonstrators? You know, why they were demonstrating? Were you surprised to see it? Were you –

A: I was surprised, but I understood that there – there are communists, so we – we knew my father said that there [indecipherable] are the young, some young Jewish people, the communists wi – is popular between some young Jewish peop – men and – and la – and girls. So it wasn't really much of surprise. Still, it was a very small, I mean, there were thousands of Jews in – in **Panevėžys**. This – this group was small group, and apparently that's – that's the limit at that time.

Q: Okay, so you dispersed, and it went away, and it – it wasn't something that stayed.

A: Yeah, I don't know exactly, I didn't follow them, and I went home, and then I got the call, that **Šauliai** are called for duty. But what happened in between, except that thing the – our military, Lithuanian military officer telephoning the Soviets, that – I was told about that, but I don't know exactly how it went, yeah.

Q: Okay, so now it's occupied, there is no more Lithuanian government, the president has left. What else happened, what else changed?

A: Well, demonstrations.

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Q: More of them?

A: Oh yeah, well – but those were officials, you know. The people had to go into demonstrations. From their working places they were told that they better go, you know, and there was a threat, unconcealed threat that si – they will take care of all those who are against the people's government, as they say. And –

Q: How did you – I mean, from your story I get a sense that there was this – that there was a benign feeling for most of the independence years about the **Soviet Union**.

A: Right.

Q: That when there was the **Finno-Russian** war, then you were on the side of the Finns because you know, they were the weaker, or the – it was their territory that was being attacked, and so it was more that you were on their side than the Soviet side. But when did it stop being a benign feeling? When did it start being a threatening feeling? One where you're – where you're saying, these are our enemies? When did that – when did that change [**indecipherable**]

A: Beginning was the first – the intr – i-introduction of the military bases, that – that was the first, and then the thing, you get – you get deeper. But that – that was the first.

Q: Okay, so that's October, 1939.

A: Yeah.

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Q: And then in June 1940 there's a full occupation.

A: Right. But even then, before that, go – with the World War going on, in particular w-with **France** collapsing, many people were thinking that **Lithuania** might not be able to survive as independent country. And there was a discussion going on, which is better, that the Germans would take over or the – or the Russians? Because **Po-Poland** wa-was gone, you know, was conquered by the – by both of them and partitioned. And I would say – I was inclined that it ba – may be better under the Germans, my opinion. Not very strong, but I was leaning that way. But th – I would say the majority of Lithuanians we knew in – in the circle, were of the opinion that maybe the Russians occupation would be more benign, because the Russians are not that efficient, not that organized in our opinion.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And – and Lithuanian nation would have a better chance to survive longer – long time than under harsh and efficient German occupation. So even at that point, people were leaning more toward the Russians than the Germans, more toward the Soviets. Well, the Russians they were call – calling at that time, until the occupation itself.

Q: And why were you, you know, slightly more inclined toward – if – of – of the two evils, the German one would be the lesser?

A: That's difficult to say f-for me, I don't know. Maybe from the times of **Tauragė**, their culture were more familiar to me. And you know, we had very good German

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teacher, even a g – a German, Lithuanian German in **Panevėžys**, and German culture, maybe made impression on me. I – I – I like – I read – I – I knew German language fairly well. I started reading German books. Th – just that. It wasn't something very – very firm, you know, but I would say I was leaning that way.

Q: Okay. So it –

A: And the communist system somehow looked inefficient, distasteful. Thi – thi – I – I didn't realize the amount of – of violence in the nationa – national soc – socialistic German **[indecipherable]** I didn't re-realize that much, than what I f – later found out. And the Soviets were pretty obvious. Once they came in, they were obvious. They wer – they we – they were threatening. They were not – not – propaganda was before they came in.

Q: The pro – there was, or there was not propaganda?

A: There was a lot of propaganda but they didn't care whether we believed or not –

Q: Okay.

A: – because the main thing was the threat behind it.

Q: Okay, okay. So when they actually occupied –

A: Right.

Q: – then that changed? Then they cared that you believed it?

A: Oh, they cared all the time, but I – I don't know, you know, e-even being friendly to them didn't mean much, you know? Some ca – somehow –

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Q: Show me – explain to me how this threat made itself felt. Even – you know, you have a – up to th – I have a picture of Soviets in the streets, Russian soldiers in the streets, this demonstration, an ideology that's against the – the former independent government and so on. But what makes this scary? What makes this aggressive?

A: Well, they started arresting people pretty soon, you know, I don't know, ma – maybe not the first week, but the second or third week, some of **Lithuania's** ministers from the previous government were arrested and brou – and not arrested in **Lithuania**, but arrested and brought to the **Soviet Union**. And then, just in about a month time, you know, the – a lot of people get arrested, including my director of our high school.

Q: The one who said that **Germany** would lose the war?

A: Right. Yeah, he was arrested, I – a – a – a good man, you know, we knew, and a lot of other people who were considered, you know, like leading in this society, having influence in the society. There were thousands arrested. And the thing, you know, the – there was a prison in **Panevėžys** in the center of the city, built by the tsars, not far from the – our house. Our house was in the neighborhood of – of that prison. And right there, you know, the prison was – had bars in – in the windows. Now the bars stayed, but once the Russians came in, you know, they put like some boxes over the windows, so th-they couldn't see. Maybe they could see from the – one – from the top, the – the sun, some – some light, but they couldn't see anything

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outside. You know, even tho-those small things, you know, this – that – the prison not good enough, they – they had to make it much – much worse, you know, to isolate people they couldn't see outside. Yeah, and pretty soon even the – from our – from our gymnasium, from our – not from our class, but you know, they were arrested, even – even the students.

Q: Really?

A: Yes.

Q: Upperclassmen that means, older –

A: Upperclassmen, yeah.

Q: Upperclassmen.

A: Upperclassmen.

Q: Did you know any of them?

A: Oh yes, yes, yes.

Q: Can you surmise what – you know, individuals, why they were arrested, why they would have been arrested?

A: Yeah, one of them was active in that **Daiteninkai**(ph), that Christian Catholic organization, before – apparently therefore, he was arrested. Well, the resistance movement started already, so that might be the things they – and they were not very par-particular to get exactly their man, you know. And if-if they wanted to get their man, you know, and they didn't know who it is, so they took 10 of them, thinking

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that most likely one of them will be the – they are looking for. And that's it, that's – that was – pretty soon we found that that mattered, you know. The terror started pretty soon. Not the first days, but pretty soon. And of course, everything changed. My father lost his job. A lot of people were changed in – in governing positions, in – even in technical positions. So – but no-not only that, but a lot of people were losing their jobs and – in the government, and in administration. And everything that, you know, made very oppressive [inaudible]

Q: Did you hear of any – any murders? Did you hear of any –

A: At that time not yet.

Q: Okay, okay. Did anybody come home from those prisons, and so –

A: No, no.

Q: So no – people were arrested, but they didn't come back from being arrested?

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

Q: Okay. And that happens all in June, July, 1940?

A: July.

Q: July.

A: July. June was just a half a month ba – two weeks left. June 15th they took a – marched into **Lithuania**, 16th, so July. But fr – right from very beginning of July.

Q: So, what was the summer of 1940 like for you?

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A: Summer was easy because we went to the – on the vacation. Well, I – first of all, after this incident in – in – in **Panevėžys**, when we had to enforce the commandant's hour, it was vacation time, as far as the school is concerned. So I went to my mother's farm, which was where she was come from, and her sister was there, you know, running the farm with her husband. And so I went there, and I went there because I thought – I mean, this – this territory might be taken over by the Germans. There were rumors you know, that –

Q: And you preferred to still, you know – yeah.

A: Yeah, since I preferred to stay wi-with the Germans, you know, I-I thought maybe – now I found out th-that not – there was a division. The Germans were taking – supposed to take over part of **Lithuania** there. But nobody knew exactly, you know, where the – the dividing line would be. But eventually they didn't. The Russians took over the – the entire country. So, then they went back home and we went on our regular vacation with our – my uncle in the – in the eastern **Lithuania** in that –

Q: The one with the nice farm with the lakes and things like that?

A: With the lakes, yeah.

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: And wi-wi – and with – with the boat in the lake and all that. And it was a really quiet place. There was not much going. We heard on the radio, we read in the newspapers all the changes going on in the country.

Q: And this is by the – by this point Soviet press, Soviet Lithuanian press?

A: Y-Yes, it all – officially some of them that still had old names, but obviously they were run already by different people appointed by the new government. So it was a quite – we were – you know, we were disturbed what – about what it was happening, but at that particular place, nothing much was happening. And people were all concerned, everybody was tense. There was supposed to be elections to the people's parliament, where you know, there were exactly that many candidates as had to be elected deputies. People boy – boycotted th-that, or even if they voted, they drew, you know, the cartoon characters instead of the bulletins inside. But that was about it, there – there was not much, and the meantime they annexed **Lithuania**. This – this parliament was called into the session and accepted the request

[indecipherable] **Lithuania** would be included in the **Soviet Union**. And we were working with my father in the forest, and came out of the forest into the small town, and we saw that there were some red flags out, and we asked – I mean, what's – what's now? I mean, what's new? And there was a – a smith working at the edge of the town, and we ask him, what – what's now, I mean, why – why the red flags here? Said, well, they annexed – they annexed **Moscow** to **Lithuania**. So that was that,

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because they annexed – announced the annexation. So that was very upsetting, but in that village not much was happening, until, you know, my vacation was over, I came back to **Panevėžys**, and **Panevėžys** there were changes, there were cha –

Q: What kind of changes did you see?

A: Well, even the Soviet placards ne – red, you know, flags everywhere, you know, **[indecipherable]**. Pretty soon my father was fired from his job, had to look for – for s – for some other job, finally found in a bank, as a clerk in a bank. Those – those things, let's see, when – when did military took over? Part of our – yeah, I think at that time, yeah, they – they were **[indecipherable]**. We were supposed to have that much living space, we had much more in our own house, so they took the rest of it, and put the s – the Soviet officers into our house.

Q: So the German – the – the refugee from **Klaipėda** no longer was there in the **[indecipherable]**

A: No, I don't know, he – he a – she –

Q: She was gone.

A: – she moved out somewhere, yeah. And so they put – they put the Soviet officers there, and they – they changed. For awhile one family was there, then another, and finally there was a Soviet Air Force officer, and his wife was a Soviet army medicine doctor.

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: So th – and they had the small, small girl, and they stayed for quite awhile in our – in our house. And then another part of the house was taken over and one of the communist leaders, Lithuanian communist leaders were put in that part of the –

Q: Did you know who this person was before he took over that part of the house?

A: We knew about him, but we didn't know him personally.

Q: Okay. And how did that Soviet officer and his wife, or any of them behave? Did you – did – were they –

A: O-Oh th – oh, the officer himself, you know, th-the air force officer was a Ukrainian. Very reserved, very reserved, very quiet. His wife was completely different, very talkative, very expressive, liked to discuss things with – with – here in with me with my poor Russian, which she corrected all the time. And, was very friendly lady, very friendly lady yeah. And th-the – and the girl, you know, the small girl, they – they – it was difficult. He was in – in the d – on the duty, she was on the duty sometimes. So they brought a g – a girl from **Ukraine**, a young girl maybe 15 - 16 – 16 - 17 years old maybe, Ukrainian girl, to take care of their small do – small – small daughter. And that was strange for us, because that said, you know, y – y-you cannot live like this – this – I mean, you can't live like this, you have – you will go to **Siberia**, you have to prepare for that.

Q: They said this? Who said this?

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A: This girl, Ukrainian girl. N-Not the officer's wife, no, that – this girl which was brought to take care of their ch – their child, said, well – why – we – we didn't – we did – we didn't intend to go to **Siberia** or anywhere else, you know, why – why should we?

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, it was like **[indecipherable]**. Then she started talking about Ukrainian f-famine. Now, my father said, well, that's – that's – nobo – nobody heard about that, you know, and sh-sh-she might be a little bit, you know, she's – she's – you know, living in fantasies, you know, so we – we just – we just discounted that, you know.

Q: Mm-hm. You ignored what she was saying.

A: Yeah, yeah, it – it's – it was obvious nonsense, you know, so who c – who –

Q: Okay. And that happened in the fall of 1940? Sometime in the –

A: Yes, 1940, yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay. How did the very – did you know anything of what was going on in the Jewish community in **Panevėžys**, and what kind of discussions, how they were affected by the Soviet occupation, by this incorporation, what the sentiments there were? Did you have any contact with your friend who had wanted to go help fight the Germans with you? Did you – di – yeah, can you tell a little bit about what you did or did not know?

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A: Not much. First of all, was completely obvious and natural that the Jewish community was glad that **Lith-Lithuania** was not occupied by the Germans, and if it had to go down, you know, it's better that the Russians took over. With that, many Lithuanians would have agreed. But now, you know, the – the – we – we noticed pretty soon the hostility against independent **Lithuania**, against the previous, not only government, but the country itself. Now, it's very difficult to say how prev – prev – prevalent this – this attitude was. There was definitely some, in particular in the younger generation there. For us Lithuanians, was a gr-great surprise. We never thought that our relations are bad, we never thought that the Jewish people are somehow disadvantaged in **Lithuania** or – or discriminated against. Yet, the community was kind of separate, jewi – but we were – we were thinking and were convinced that that was the choice of the Jewish community. They wanted to have their own schools, they wanted to have, of course, their religions and synagogues and all that kind of thing, and their organizations. And we didn't mind, but a lot of their life was separate from Lithuanian. There were some Jews which were integrated into Lithuanian society, but there were very few of them.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: There were some – some doctors, s – in particular in – in professions. And now, you see, I – since the Soviet terror became obvious quite soon, it is very difficult to say. Those who were for the Soviet system became very loud. And they wanted to

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make, you know, career, to make a do – to – to advance in this new s – new society.

So they were a – loud, they were active, they were running around. They were tearing off the Lithuanian symbols, you know, from – from the houses or wherever they were – they were. Those who were against them whether Lithuanian or Jewish or whatever, were kind of subdued. Because the terror was there, there was no sense starting, you know, frankly, resisting that, or –

Q: Openly resisting it.

A: Openly, yeah.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So those who were against that were quiet and tried to be, you know, not – not obvious, you know, with – with –

Q: Not noticeably –

A: – their opinions there, so you know. So it's this – that's why it's very difficult to say how much of Jewish communi – community were collaborating with the Sov – Soviet occupation. But it – it was obvious that they were, because knew – officers knew – knew people with responsibility there, a lot of them were Jewish. Not all of them, some of them were Lithuanian communists, but there were not that many Lithuanian communists. All Lithuanian communists got good and significant positions at that time, tasks to do, but there weren't that many of them. And once they ran out of them, also the Jewish people came in and there were – there were

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more of them, I-lot – I – I don't know percentage-wise – in numbers wouldn't be more, but percentage-wise definitely there were more Jewish collaborators than Lithuanian collaborators with the Soviet government. There were also Russians. The Russians also was a split community because part of them were glad that, you know, the Russians were taking over the country. Even the tsarist refugees from the tsarist gov – from the Soviet government, who fled to **Lithuania** said well, it's – th-they might destroy us, you know, the Russians, who were against this – the Soviets, but it's still nice that the **Russia** is expanding again.

Q: Did you have someone say that to you, or did you –

A: Not a ma – to – i-i-is – as somebody told to my father that, exactly.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: A – a Russian he knew, you know, friendly. So – and so some of them collaborated, but some of them, of course, also tried to just disappear from the view, so not to attract any attention, so that they wouldn't be, you know, repressed like **[indecipherable]** or the – of the government.

Q: So in this – in this situation, it sounds like there's growing fear, growing terror.

A: Right.

Q: And also a sense of being betrayed.

A: Right, right.

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Q: But by whom? And – and it – as far as you could tell at the time, ou – that feeling of betrayal, where was it deepest? Where did it sen – seem to be deepest?

A: Against the Jewish community.

Q: Against the Jewish community.

A: Against the Jewish community.

Q: And –

A: Although we were aware – we were aware that some of them really are against the s –

Q: The Soviet system.

A: – Soviet system. But how many – how influential were – it was difficult for us to say. Now, my classmate, **Rubeinsteinas**(ph) – our high school or gymnasium was split in two. And –

Q: By this time you're 17 years old.

A: Yes.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And he – he went to another gy-gymnasium, so my contact didn't disappear, but wa-wasn't that every day contact that we had when we had the same – were in the same class. A-And instead we came wa-wa-wa – came the girls from the girls' school, we were mixed up now, before they were separate. And yeah, we got f – a j – a Jewish girl come in, there were many more – n-not many, but more, but I think –

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but I remember one of them, and the – it was obvious that this – this girl had nothing to do with the communist system or whatever, like that. She was very quiet, very nice girl, very good student. I really admired it – re – her. I –

Q: Do you remember her name?

A: Yes.

Q: What was it?

A: **U-Uditta(ph) Gormanita(ph)**.

Q: **Uditta(ph) Gormanita(ph)**.

A: Yeah.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And her – her father was a – a rich merchant in smaller city, not in **Panevėžys**, but not far from **Panevėžys**, **Ramigala**, and her uncle was in **London**, also a rich man – a rich merchant there. And I don't know, well luckily – so we – **Uditta(ph)** was a wonderful girl, was a wonderful girl, we were dancing with her. I don't know, I didn't fell in love with her, but I admired her, definitely.

Q: You liked her?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Yeah. Do you know what happened to her? What her fate was?

A: I don't know, but I s – I suppose just like other Jews were all – were rounded up and killed. I – although even my friends even now, when I talk with my c-class

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friends, cannot accept that fact, somehow say, well, maybe she s-somehow survived, but there is no chance. There was no chance. He was terrif – she was terrified when the war started, when the Germans attacked, and the Soviets. She was – we – I – that's the last time I met her, and a group of us met her, you know, she was terrified, she –

Q: Tell me about that. Do you reme – if you remember it, tell me about that last time you met her and what – what was the circumstance at that point?

A: Well, we were g – two or three of us, three of us, I think were – were running through **Panevėžys**, war already started, the Germans were bombing.

Q: You mean the war in **Lithuania** started –

A: Y-Yes.

Q: Y-Y-Yes.

A: [**indecipherable**] war in **Lithuania**, yeah, the ger – the Germans attacked Soviets, and we were looking for weapons, we wanted to fight Soviets.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: We – we wanted to – since **Lithuania** didn't resist when it was occupied, we felt that we just have a – **Lithuania** has a duty to, you know, to fight, to show that it didn't accept that occupation, that we really want to be free, and really w – we were looking for weapons, and didn't know where – where to find them. Previous arrangements were broken down, you know, and so we were going there, and the j –

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we just saw **Uditta**(ph) standing at the corner there, the ge – a German plane was turning circles around – around **Panevėžys**. [indecipherable]

Q: And she was at the corner of the center of the town?

A: Right, right. Pretty high up, you know, the plane was there, the Russian officers were shooting from their pistols, and that – it was much too high to reach in the plane. And **Uditta**(ph) was also looking at that plane with terrified eyes. And we said, **Uditta**(ph), why are you afraid, I mean, you – you – you did nothing, you – you were definitely – we didn't even conceive that the Germans would – what they did. We couldn't conceive, we thought, I mean, it's a – it was a civilized nation, you know, a nation of the western civilization. We – we didn't conceive that they – something like that, that they would do, start killing the people all, you know, without any discrimination, nothing. We thought, I mean – well, those who worked for the communists, those, you know, Jewish or not Jewish or Lithuanian or whatever, they are in trouble definitely, but Jew – **Uditta**(ph), you know, that wa – who – who could choose her, you know?

Q: Did she say anything when you said that?

A: Nothing. We – we tried to tell her, you know, that there is no reason to be afraid, but sh-she just listened and we saw that she – she just doesn't believe us, and she was right. She was right. Yeah, I – I remember her, you know, I-I – I put – when –

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when they were building this Holocaust Museum, you know, I – I asked, you know, that her name would be inscribed in here.

Q: Yeah. She made that kind of an impact on you.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah. I go back and I keep wanting –

A: Yeah.

Q: – you know, I have the same question that I keep asking, which is, and what happened then, and what happened then? So, if we can go back a little bit to when it – you know, before you talk about this incident with **Uditta(ph)**, your – the betrayal that I mentioned, that I brought up as a possibility before, as to who was betrayed a feeling of betrayal, did you ever feel that that last independent Lithuanian government also betrayed you by not resisting, by not fighting?

A: Yes, in a sense yes, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: In a sense, yes, yeah. Although that was just symbolic, of course, **Lithuania** couldn't de-defend itself, it was just too – too weak. The bases were inside already. But still, I think they should have fought. They should have fought.

Q: Were those kinds of discussions also going on, and did that feeling of betrayal come once the terror started, or did it come once the bases started? If you can make some – that kind of a distinction, I don't know if it's –

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A: No, i-i- not the – not the bases. The bases somehow was accepted as in-in-inevitable. **Estonia** had that, **Latvia** had that, war was going on, you know, the situation was unclear, how the war will develop was not clear. Somehow it looked too early to start and fight, you know, at that time. It – it looked like it's a right thing to play for time. And that was playing for time, but maybe we're – we're wrong. I mean, it would be much more effective fighting right – right there in 1939, but we were not Finns, we were not that organized like Finns, so **Lithuania** couldn't bring defend also, but would be more – would be more known, you know, would have attracted more attention in – in the world.

Q: It s – it sounds like what was going on in **Moscow**, and what people knew in – like your family in **Panevėžys**, as plugged in as you were –

A: Right.

Q: – to sources of information and contacts, that what really was developing was not known, that – that people were not informed. That's the impression I get from your telling.

A: Right. Yeah, right.

Q: Of – of these negotiations, quasi-negotiations –

A: Yes.

Q: – that were going on.

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A: Of course not, yeah, we didn't know at that time all the details. Now we – we find you know, the documents, that memoirs, you know, we – we know – know much more. So it – when I telling now the story, I have to watch myself to put myself in that time, not what I know now about those – the things –

Q: That's exactly –

A: – because I have read a lot of materials about those times, about negotiations, about decisions being taken at that time. But at that time it looked like in 1939, was distasteful and – and dangerous, but correct decision to accept the bases, playing for time. But not resisting in 1940, it seemed like the really was – was, as I say, betrayal. It was – it wasn't a decision which could be justified, really. So when we were trying to fight the Soviets when the Germans attacked, it was desp – because **Lithuania** didn't resist then, now we have to fight.

Q: I see.

A: Now we have to fight to show, you know, that we – we – we want to be free, we don't want to be occupied by anybody.

Q: You don't want to be part of the **Soviet Union**.

A: No, we don't want to – to be part of the **Soviet Union**, or of – of anything. No- Not of **Poland**, not for **Germany**. We want to be independent country. Our parents fo – our father fought for that, you know, and we want to have an independent country. That's – that was – that was the attitude.

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Q: Let's go back again to the fall of 1940, and then through the winter and the spring, people are arrested, the prison has it wo – its windows in the wa – in **Panevėžys** blocked off. The former government flees –

A: Right.

Q: – disappears, is arrested. There are – there is a sense that the Jewish community, the noisier part of it is pro-Soviet.

A: Right.

Q: No sense of – of how much anti-Soviet sense there is – sentiment there is. And what happens then, after that? I'd like to – the next half year, let's say from January 1st, 1941 until when the Nazis invade the **Soviet Union**, and what – **Lithuania** is now a part of it.

A: Right.

Q: What happens in that half year? **[technical direction]** How many minutes?

Q2: About three.

Q: Okay, fine, so we'll –

End of Tape Three

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Beginning Tape Four

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Algimantas Gureckas** on October 14th, 2010. Mr. **Gureckas**, I just asked you about what was the year – what was the next half year between January and June 1940, what events took place, what things developed, but I thought of another question I wanted to ask, preceding that. And that is, of all these betrayals that we're talking about: betrayal by the independent Lithuanian government, what was left of it, betrayal by the, you know, small group of let's say refugees from tsarist **Russia**, who liked the idea of Russian domination, even if it was with their internal enemies before, betrayal by the Jewish community, or betrayal by Lithuanian – Gentile Lithuanians, ethnic Lithuanians, who were communists themselves. Which betrayal do you think you felt in your heart most keenly? Or maybe another betrayal?

A: No, no. I think the Jewish, because several things. Russian community was so small that it was really insignificant. Our government, pretty – find out that there was a split of opinion about that, and there was b-betrayal in the high military command. So – also, you know, difficult. Now, Jewish, proble – problem is that – because maybe we were – or were – were mistaken, but we had the impression that the Lithuanian Jewish relations are very good. That there is no ispy – th-there was some Jewish communists, okay, you know – well, more than Lithuanian maybe,

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percentage-wise, but that was not really significant. The Jewish community supported Lithuanians in the **Vilnius** question. They supported **Lithuania's** independence, they – **Smetona** had very good relations with the Jewish community's leaders, you know? So we didn't see the reason why – we, as I said, maybe they felt being discriminated, because it was difficult for them, you know, to – to – you know, to become officers in the army, in the police, and something like that. There was some ethnic discrimination in **Lithuania**. But those who really wanted could, you know, like **Gensis**(ph) was an officer in Lithuanian army, and very valued. So there –

Q: You're referring to **Jakub Gens** who ended –

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: – ended up being the –

A: Commandant –

Q: – chief of police of **Vilnius** ghetto.

A: That's right, that's right. He was a Lithuanian officer from the time of the Wars of Independence. He became officer in the Lithuanian military school, and had a very distinguished career in Lithuanian army, in the war with **Poland**. So, just one example, there were other officers, Jewish officers in Lithuanian army. But benda – generally, **Lithuania** being a small country, just established, and in big tr – big conflict with **Poland**, and with **Germany** because of **Klaipėda**, were looking – they

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were discriminating not according to religion or race or anything like that, but about the perceived loyalty to the state. The most discriminated people, of course, were Polish. They just didn't trust any Pole that he wouldn't be just a spy, you know, somewhere. So, for pr – a Pole got a government sensitive position was practically impossible. Then, of course, Jews, because of some communists in there, you know, in the younger, and because of some cus – cosmopolo – **cosmopolitic** approach. A sophisticated approach which **Lithuania** looked at them kind of s-such small, ridiculous state, you know. They were yus – universal people, they – they were not – not that much ag-against **Lithuania**, but ri – but discounting **Lithuania**. And that also for having some – somebody like that in military or police would seem l-like risky, you know, h-h-he doesn't care about this country. So then, Germans. Lithuanian Germans ou-outside **Klaipėda** were mostly loyal, very loyal, just like I told about that, you know, which I re-reme – remember in **Tauragė**, **Greigoris(ph)**, who – who refused even to – to go to **Germany**. And the same thing in **Panevėžys**, most of the Germans are loyal, but Germans still, you know, some. And then later, you know, there were Tartars and **Karayims**, there were no discrimination whatsoever. Their – their religion was different, Tartars were Muslim, **Karayims** had their own religion, Jewish based, you know. The race, you can s-see **Karayim**, you know, you could see from – from the face, from the features. Nim – Kara – Tartars not so much, was **Karayims**. But that didn't matter at all. Their people even in – in the army made the

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career, good career, you know. There were generals, Tartars, there were colonels, **Karayims**, you know. They were as good or better than Lithuanians, no – no problem. So, the base of discrimination was perceived loyalty of the mi-minority.

Q: Well that – that sort of famous – I'm so sorry I interrupted –

A: Yeah, sure.

Q: – the **[indecipherable]** you – a sort of well known sentiment, legitimate or not, in most of the cases not legitimate, of a fifth column.

A: Right, right.

Q: That's what you're talking about.

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes. And is – being, you know, aware that we are – the country was, you know, a small country, weak country in – in between dangerous other countries. So that was one of the considerations, whether it – it was well taken or not, you know, that's a different thing, but that was the basic feeling. And now, basically, as I said, was the feeling that the Jewish community was a friendly community and there were not really big conflict. There were some conflict in – commercial areas between **Lithuania**, but the government wasn't involved in that at all. **Smetona's** government was against any anti-Semitism at all. And – and the people also, so –

Q: And yet there was acceptable, as far as what I've read –

A: Yeah.

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Q: – there, at least from some other historical sources that there – the rise of anti-Semitism throughout **Europe** in 1930s –

A: Right.

Q: – did not – did not bypass **Lithuania**, that as the decade wore on, within the society itself –

A: Right.

Q: – there were such sentiments. That's what many historians –

A: Yeah.

Q: – have claimed. Do you think that there – those are – outside of any, you know, any events that we're talking about now, would you say that that has validity to it?

A: Most likely so. It's difficult for me to say th – because we're talking about the circle, my circle, my – my parents –

Q: Okay.

A: – my dear friends, my friends, classmates, I didn't feel that.

Q: Okay.

A: A-A-And all that circle, I din – didn't feel that. Yes, I knew there were some incidents, some i-in between Lithuanian farmers and – and – and Jewish merchants, but it – yeah, there were so, there was tension between Lithuanians coming into the commercial area, trying to establish their businesses. There is a competition, sometimes this competition went out of bounds, you know, from both sides. The

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Jews tried, you know, to establish some kind of mo-monopoly, and push out – that Lithuanian out. Li-Lithuanian also, you know, appealing to some anti-se – anti-Semitic, you know, feelings. So, apparently there was, but I couldn't tell ma – much because it was way beyond my circle. In my circle that – this – this wasn't felt at all.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah, there were some – for instance, there were some – some Jewish families changed their house language, their family language from Yiddish to Russian, and Lithuanians resented that, you know, he – he – they give up Yiddish, why then don't – they don't pick up Lithuanian? And Yi-Yiddish didn't – didn't bother anybody, Hebrew didn't bother anybody, but Russian, why Russian, you know? But – but – but I heard myself, I mean, f-father and son Jewish speaking in Lithuanian. So there were those who did that, you know, and w-went to Lithuanian language. Even in this museum I saw a Jewish girl writing in ghetto her d – her diary in Lithuanian because she – she ju-just didn't know ji – Yiddish that well. So, there were – it was – it was a big community, it was varied situations, but generally, right or no – or not, but in the people there was a sense of betrayal because they thought that the relations were good, and they didn't see the reason why the Jewish community is acting that way, or much of the community, in particular the younger generation. The older generation, of course, didn't partici – participate in – in that, but as I said, they just – they just were in – behind the picture, you know. Nobody cared much about the – the

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rabbis or something like that, how – how they look at the things. Now, I also write in my memoirs that, one interesting thing that one of our – our family's friend was Dr. **Bridges** family, Dr. **Bridges**, **Andrew Bridges** was a doctor, you know, his specialty eyes, you know, and he had some Jewish friends, some Jewish also doctors. And during the Soviet occupation, the first year of – the first Soviet occupation, he-he was told by one of his friends, Jewish friends, that the Jewish community leaders from the independence period, were concerned about this reaction of the younger generation, and they called some of the active – well, pro – pro-communist, younger, active people and talked with them, and asked them not – not to overdo things, that it is dangerous, that the Jewish community, living hundreds of times bet-between other nationalities, tried not to become hostile to the people they are living between. Tried to be neutral, you know, and th-th-they e – taking sides, they couldn't have survived, because they would also, you know, provoke a lot of hostility. And they asked those younger generation Jews to tone down, to tone down. And they said the younger – the young people just lef – la – just laughed at them. The old people they don't understand anything, and their rules, I mean, are obsolete and – and didn't want even to listen to them. So apparently even in the Jewish community, there was some perception that somebody is o-overdoing the things. Now, was – as I say, you know, those who were against this reaction, you know, they we – they were – they were i-in – invisible, they tried to be-become

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invisible. Now you asking about the period from – in early 1940s. Really the breakthrough was the annexation earlier, in 1940, August, I think the third or fifth, about that time. Right after the annexation, the thing changed. Now the terror intensified consid – considerably, and the resistance started getting organized. So now, la – a lot of people, even in – in – in – in – in my class, like **Grimkas(ph)** and **Ar-Arbuk(ph)** were arrested from resistance. But even the **[indecipherable]** resistance, the people who were prominent in the – in the society generally, most of them were arrested, th-thousands now. Now it became a mass thing. Now there was nationa – nationalization; the business establishments, commercial establishments, industrial things were nationalized. I was my-myself, we – we s-students had to go there, write, you know, in the – whatever belongs to that merchant establishment, and to be nationalized with the owners. Now, somehow you know, the Lithuanian owner who owns some business or – or – or – or business establishment, they – they were just thrown out. Now the Jewish, usually you know, still remain there as a specialist. Just because usually there were some in the family, or in – in their circle who had influence with the new government. So apparently they tried, you know, to help each other. And pretty ba – became pretty obvious, you know, the things are nationalized, the Jews are still in their places, running the business as before. Of course now, in government's name, for – in government's account, Lithuanians are just without a job, you know, just – just waiting around. What's the matter, you

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know, it's always the – these – these things started accumulating. The resentment against the Jewish reaction increased strongly. As the terror increased, increased the – the – the – the reaction. Also, because some of them, you know, even communist Jews went into the security e-e-establishment.

Q: Were these people known by name, or was this just what was dis – this was understood, or discussed, I mean, what was the basis of this point of view, this – this – this belief that there were Jews in the security establishment?

A: Well, they were visible.

Q: I see.

A: They went, they arrested people, they interrogated people, they – yeah, th-th-they – after annexation, everything became visible. Th-They – they didn't – the terror – concealed terror is not a terror. I mean, they – and then the terror really started after the annexation. It really – what we suspected, what we were afraid, now, you know, came to fruition. Now you didn't have to be afraid, you knew. You knew. That's – that's how it is. That's how it is, that's how it will be. And it – it – it gets stronger and stronger, more and more people arrested, until the big deportations.

Q: Well, tell us about the big deportations. What happened then? When did it happen, and what happened?

A: Well, it was in – in – in naja – I don't remember exactly the date, but that's 1941, June 14 maybe? About that, 14 - 13. Yeah, one night, you know, coming – well, in

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my o-op-opinion. We were walking with my father through **Panevėžys**. There was – no, that was different, I'm sorry, that's – that's start of the war. Suddenly, you know, of – we – we got up one morning and saw that, you know, our friends are being – being taking, arrested and being taking to the railroad station. I was working in the middle of the city, and I saw, you know, a – a – a truck going there, you know, an open truck, and I saw, you know, the family we knew, who was my father's, really, superior for a time. We saw that family, the old – the old lady there, and their girl and him, you know, in that truck, and soldiers with the s-set bayonets around them, being taking to the railroad station. And – and a lot of people. Our teachers disappeared, you know. Our teacher o-of the Russian language was a Lithuanian diplomat, he was arrested, there was no Russian class there. He died from s-starvation in **Siberia**. And so, you know, anybody could, there was no reason, there – pretty soon there was no reason – we couldn't detect the reason who is safe. Yeah, well, the members of the communist party, and the – of the communist activists, those who really contributed, who we-were working on the deportation, maybe they were safe, but nobody else. There was no, you know, anybody could be arrested, anybody could be deported.

Q: Did you know at that point, when you saw the truck, the open truck, that this – this was a – a deportation that was a mass deportation, or did you see many trucks go

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to the train station? Wa – can you kind of draw us a picture? What was it that you saw, and what you understood.

A: Yeah, well, I didn't see too many because most of them went during the nighttime, and I don't know why this family was picked up – we-well, there were more people, not only this family in the truck.

Q: Yes.

A: But th-that was like after action actions, you know, something – people they might – might missed or something.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But pretty soon we knew, I mean th-the railroad station was full of people, you know, the trains were full, and they were pushing those people, w-we – we knew, you know.

Q: Did you go to the train station?

A: No, I didn't. I didn't. I-I didn't want to risk be – because I – we didn't know, w-we didn't know – now we know, you know, aba – apparently how that was done, but at that time there was no – no understanding what was going on and woo – who is in danger, who is not. My mother opened – and tr-ried to – to – to – to think what – what we should take to go into **Siberia**, you know, now. And – and that was open box, and she didn't put anything in th – she just – just was paralyzed, you know, and that's it, you know, we don't – we don't know. We don't know it – we were sho –

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we were shocked. We were shocked, we didn't expect anything like that. They were saying, oh, your prostitutes are taking to – to **Siberia**, they will learn how to work. Prostitutes, the – the kids, the families, you know.

Q: Does that Ukrainian **au pair** still living in the house?

A: Yeah, but – but they were very rarely at home. Th-The ka – this – the red army was on some kind of alert already, so they were mostly at their bases, wherever that was.

Q: And at that point, did you connect the dots and see what she was saying, or even then there was such confusion, that you had no idea that this could be **Siberia**, the **Siberia** she was telling you to prepare for.

A: Yeah, yeah, we connected that. We connected. And we – particular the Russian literature, the Soviet literature we had – we had to read, you know, some of the **Sholokhov's** novels, and there is about de-deportations. And couldn't understand, I mean, so-some – some silly thing, some unrealistic thing. I mean, they come, they arrest the farmers there, you know, they bring them to **Siberia**, but what for, I mean, what did they do, and the whole family? Why – why the whole family? If the farmer did something wrong, you know, hm. We di-didn't understand. It – it looks kind of silly to me, I – but then I remembered, then I remembered that – that – that day.

Q: Okay. So – and then what happened?

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A: Ye – oh – we didn't know what's going on to – to the extent that oh, some of the people we know, you know, when the – they came for them to be deported, the – the father of the family, the man, ran away. He saw, you know, somebody coming, he thought they're coming to arrest him, because there were so many arrests, you know? But n-not the families, there were people arrested, whoever was, you know, they wanted to arrest. So they ran away and ha – hid, and their family was taken and dep – brought to the railroad station. Now, the man realizing that, came out, went to the railroad station, and whatever happens, he wanted to be with his family. He didn't realize that families were broken up, that the men were sent to concentration camps, and the families were sent to the – to the Siberian farms and something like that. So you see, even at the moment, people were so – that confused, didn't know, you know, the method what was going on. So there was no sense for him because he was – he wasn't let to go with his family.

Q: But he was taken?

A: He was ta – oh, of course, yeah, he was taken, yeah. And very few survived there, i-in there, in particular the first deportation. But, as I say, we realized that the Jews are also being deported, yes, and quite – quite many of them.

Q: How did you realize this?

A: Well, we saw, I mean, people just disappearing all – all around you. Ma – my friend **Rubinsteinas**(ph), his family. Our – our classmate **Borokas**(ph), his family,

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they are deported. They were lucky. They were lucky, they didn't know. At that time we were – thought it means how – how bad, how cruel, but they had 50 - 50 chance of survival in **Siberia**. My friend **Rubinstein(ph)** survived, and **Borokas(ph)** survived. They – they would – I don't know whether **Borokas(ph)** was visiting **Lithuania**, you know, now, and **Rubinstein(ph)** I don't – he married local girl, stayed there in **Russia**. Whether he visited **Lithuania**, I don't know. And **[indecipherable]** but at that time it looked – the horror, the same horror as for the others. But many Jewish activists were acting in that deportation. So, again, you know, it should have been more. The – the people still didn't – didn't quite, you know – just because Jews are being deported, didn't quite, you know, justify the whole Jewish community because of that, because the activists still were there, you know. Not the only ones, but there were quite a few of them, quite many. Clear majority of the civilians taking care of that, except the Russian soldiers, of course. So –

Q: So you're saying a clear majority of those who participated in deportations happened to be Jewish?

A: I would say so, I would say so. From what I hear, you know, they say the Jews, the Jews, the Jews deported, you know, I don't know. I didn't take any samples or anything like that, but from what I heard, yeah, it seemed so. Well, majority was Russian soldiers.

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Q: Yes, yes.

A: They were in each – in each group was one or two. Well, two, at least two, sometimes more.

Q: What happened then, after this, after these deportations?

A: Well, they stopped for a – just few days.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: We – we have the feeling that it will resume, that – and – and that was right.

Later we find out th-that the – they just – they just – system, you know, the railroads, everything, they had to make a break, and then they would have resume. So we had the feeling that they – it will resume, but was just a days, and the Germans attacked.

Q: So the war started for **Lithuania** then?

A: The war started for **Lithuania** June a – a – deportations started in June 14th, I would say, so continued about three days more, maybe – no, it's three – well, 14, 15, 16, maybe 17, I don't know. And 19, 20, oh yeah, and 22, June 22, the Germans attacked.

Q: And that's when you last saw go – **Uditta(ph) Gormanas(ph)**?

A: Yeah, few – few – a – a day after that, a day after that –

Q: A day.

A: – I saw **Uditta(ph)**.

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Q: So where were you when you heard news of the German attack? Do you remember?

A: Oh, yeah, I remember. I was sleeping. I was sleeping. We – we graduated from our high school. There was supposed to be – no matter deportations, there was supposed to be a picnic in – in – in – in **Berchunai**(ph), which is a resort near **Panevėžys**. We had to go that – that day, that Sunday. And suddenly there was a thunder, a very strong thunder, and I thought, my goodness, th-there goes the picnic, you know, that is a thunderstorm. And then there was an explosion. I mean, I thought it's thunder, but somehow the sound came through the – through the ground, not through the air. Such a strong that our small house, you know, just – just –

Q: Shook?

A: – swayed.

Q: Okay.

A: I sh – no – stood up shock a-and went out outside to see what's going on. There was no storm, there were no clouds. The sky was clear, and pani – **Pajuoste** were – was the military base behind **Panevėžys**, there was a huge cloud going up of the explosion, apparently, huge cloud. And there were a lot of planes ou – in the sky, but they were high up. Now, what's going on here, you know, something exploded in – in – in – in **Pajuoste**, definitely. So – and then I saw, you know, it suddenly, I think five planes came through, pretty low. Yellow s – this – the – the – the – yellow

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signs and the black crosses, black – oh – oh, I knew the German military sign – i-
insignia. Black crosses, that was German military – military planes, black planes, so
that was clear. Five, in formation going there, you know, on – over **Panevėžys**. So
that – that was war.

Q: And [indecipherable]

A: Then my mother came out, you know, and we started dancing, they are not going
to defe – deport us to **Siberia**, see? War was salvation.

Q: For you.

A: For us, yeah, right. Yeah.

Q: When did you first see a German soldier?

A: There were a few days ca – went by, I came back from home, and we were – we
were – also dur – during the nighttime we went outside, there was a – a small
building, really without windows, so we thought rather a safe place, so we decided to
o-over – stay overnight there. And we heard, you know, we heard cars going on,
motorcycles, commands, but very difficult to say, commands in any language sounds
similar. And suddenly a motorcycle went through our street very quickly. Most
likely it was already the German, but we stayed inside until morning, and in the
morning somebody come running and said, Germans are in the town.

Q: Was this the day after you – the day after the war started, or a few days –

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A: Oh no, no, no, **Panevėžys** were not that fast, yeah. **Vilnius, Kaunas** [indecipherable], it's surprising **Vilnius** was taken first, when – before **Kaunas**, and Lithuanians rewa – you know, took over **Vilnius** even before Germans attacked. Then **Kaunas** the same thing. But **Panevėžys** was between the German armored attacks. It was not that important military center, so it came – I think it was 26th. **Warsaw** the 22, the re – Lithuanian insurrection started 23, and **Panevėžys** was taken, I think, 26.

Q: So if the insurrection started in – in – o-on June 23rd, and you know, it was Lithuanian, how did it express itself in **Panevėžys**, what happened there?

A: Nothing much, the – because nobody had weapons, organization was broken down by deportations. They was supposed to get weapons su – from somewhere, but the people who were supposed to get those weapons, some of them were deported, the other went into hiding. One went to **Kaunas**, participated the – in the revolt there. And –

Q: Were you supposed to be part of this, was this a resistance group –

A: Yes.

Q: – that you were taking par – uh-huh.

A: Yes, but – but nothing happened. We just didn't have anything, no – no weapons, no – well, organization was – we reestablished organization, but so what?

Q: Yeah.

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A: So we – we just –

Q: So was it a sind – was it a city without any rule, or any law, or any – any – how shall I say, any government at the time?

A: No, Soviets were there, so –

Q: The Soviets were still there? Until the 26th.

A: Until the 26th, yeah.

Q: So, it wasn't an empty city of – of soldiers, it was – the minute one left

[indecipherable]

A: Well, it is strange. There were moments when there were none.

Q: Okay.

A: The Russians were – retreated, you know, somewhere, you know, and there was none. And then the Russians again, came again.

Q: Okay.

A: There was a moment when there was a rumor that Germans are in the city, and the **NKVD** took off.

Q: You mean the en – the Soviet Secret Police?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

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A: Th-They took off and – and the rest of the Russians took off, and there was the city without an-any government. And then they realized that it's not true, so they came back.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: There was terror, you know, they were – they were murdering – murdering people at the factory, sugar factory, tens – tens of people, and there were those doctors, surgeons, three surgeons and the nurse which were very cruelly murdered. Well, the terror was – in – in – in **Panevėžys**.

Q: Did you know it at the time, or is this something you learned later?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: How did you learn about these murders?

A: Well, for – from – from the telling, you know, from –

Q: People.

A: – from – from the people, yes.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But that – that was factual information, as we found out. It wasn't a – a rumor. Yeah, so –

Q: Did you stay at home during these days that –

A: No, no, w-we decided t – we didn't find any we-weapons, we didn't do anything useful, so my friend and myself decided to go to a neighboring vil-village behind the

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city, and – to see may the – maybe there the **Šauliai** have hidden some weapons, maybe so. So we went there, didn't find anything. Yeah, ba – the Soviet m-mili – Soviet mi-military came upon, you know, and were ch – starting shooting at us, so we ran away and hid. And we sit – sit there for two or three days, and then I decided to come back to **Panevėžys**, and I came back and the city was kind of dead. In – in the early afternoon there were nobody watching the streets except the military patrol – patrols.

Q: And this was Soviet still military?

A: Soviet, Soviet, yeah, so – so when I – when I saw them or heard them, I just made a – a turnaround through other streets, you know, and came home, finally without – without meeting any of them directly, face to face. Meanwhile, the prison was evacuated and many of the people were being killed at the sugar factory. But if –

Q: Why were they being killed at the sugar – sugar factory is just a place where – where candy was manufactured, or sugar was –

A: No, sugar, sugar, sugar.

Q: – sugar was manufactured?

A: Well, it was just apparently convenient place, I don't know, they just dig the – the ditches and kill the people. They were mostly from – from other towns brought to **Panevėžys**.

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Q: So it was used as a quasi prison or a holding place and – and a – and then became an execution site?

A: Yes, I – I would say so, yes.

Q: I see.

A: But th-then the prison became empty and some of the prisoner – pr – people who worked in the prison **[indecipherable]** my mother. My father was digging di – digging anti – anti-aircraft, you know, well ditches, how do you call, you know?

Q: Trenches?

A: Trenches, yes. So he was not home, I was not home, my mother was home. So he – she – she thought that I might be arrested there, and they arrested. The **NKVD** arrested a lot of young people in the streets, including my friends.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So my fr – wh-wh-when my mother knew that, you know, the – was told that the **NKVD**, the Soviet secret police left the prison, she told other people in the neighborhood that, let's go there and – and let people out, you know, from the prison. So one of the neighbors brought a ladder, came over, you know, opened the – the gate, and went to the prison. Some of the prisoners were already breaking out from their cells, but it was very slow thing, so he showed where the keys are, and opened all the keys, and suddenly prison was empty. All this young people came out into the neighboring houses, and meanwhile **NKVD** came back. They – they had

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somebody guarding, and gave a signal that they are coming back, so everybody disappeared and they came back to the empty – empty prison. Well, was too late to do anything, it was hours before the Germans appeared. But still, you know, the – the – they – they knocked out a German – a – a Soviet tank somewhere you know, I don't know, he was late, some [indecipherable]. So that's – that's how – how it was.

Q: Now, in many places, pogroms started even before the Germans came.

A: Right, yes.

Q: Did that happen in **Panevėžys** as far as you know?

A: No, no.

Q: No.

A: No, I – it's a – my – what I know, what I have seen, is limited.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I realize that, you know, [indecipherable] from what I read, was completely different in **Kaunas**. The Germans came in right there and started anti-Jewish actions right there involving Lithuanians. In **Vilnius** also pretty soon like that. But **Panevėžys** the Germans didn't care about anything except their military tasks, whatever they had. And nobody attacked Jews until – until the funeral of the doctors and the other people who were killed by the Soviets.

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Q: Tell us about how they were killed, the doctors, and then what was this funeral, when was it, and why was this a catalyst?

A: Why the doctors were killed is – is – I – ou – nobody really understands.

Q: What were the circumstances of –

A: The doctors were operating on Soviet soldiers which were injured by the German bombing of **Pajuoste**. They were brought to the hospital and the doctors, the surgeons were working on them, operating, and the nurse also, she – she works with the doctors. Now, somebody said that somebody broken into the hospital looking for weapons, because the soldiers brought to the hospital, they thought maybe they could get weapons there. Which is nonsense, nobody brought them with the be – weapons. I mean, they were injured – injured soldiers, so they were brought to the hospital, the weapons stayed wherever they were serving. But I don't know how much is rumor, how much is right, but in any case, there were some communist youth guards in the hospital and they telephoned the security that somebody is trying to break into the hospital.

Q: That is the secret police, the Soviet –

A: Secret police, yeah. And then the secret police came, took the doctors, took the nurse and just – just killed them – not – not just shot, but really, you know, murder – murdered them to – to death, you know, by – by – by horrible, horrible torture.

How? It's – it's nonsense, I mean, the doctors, I d – I don't know why.

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Q: And you found out about thi –

A: I-It would – you see, the people – the people are most dangerous, and most cruel when they are very afraid. Russians were, at that time, they were afraid. They were su-suddenly confronted with the German action, which was very powerful, and they were afraid, they – they – they realized that all the surroundings are hostile to them, the Lithuanian surroundings, so they were terrified. And terrified people are dangerous people, because they are irrational then, and they just – so-so that – that's – that's my observation from that. So I – that's how I can explain that, because there is – does – doesn't make any sense, there were n-no weapons in the – in the hospital and no possibility of the weapons **[indecipherable]** real, you know. So so-somebo – somebody got scared, confused, you know.

Q: And so – and they did away with them.

A: Oh, of course, yeah, then the funeral, bu-but not only the doctors, but also the people, about I don't know, 20 - 30 people at the – at this sugar factory, various people who were arrested by securities earlier. There, you know, in command, was that Lithuanian communist who was living in our house. He was in command of that execution.

Q: Ahh. Ah.

A: And th-there – there was different, there they – they were executing because they thought, I mean, this is anti-Soviet people. Ma – so then th – not – not in such a fear

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and as – as in the case of the doctors. Now, nobody until now, I never heard that anybody would men – mention that any Jew was involved in that. We don't know Russian security personnel, maybe there were, maybe there were not, but nobody established that any Jew ba – that Lithuanian was is – in command, you know, at the sugar factory that wo –

Q: So, another betrayal of a – of the worst kind, is a – it is a Lithuanian who is a communist –

A: Right.

Q: – who is killing his own people?

A: That's right.

Q: Okay.

A: That's right. Yeah, so – so there was no – no reason for any anti-Jewish action, but there was. After the funeral, I went [indecipherable] they said they are beating Jews. Well, I went to see wha – where, you know, and really we saw it, you know, the people were just standing and watching. And three, maybe four, most likely three burly men were hitting, you know, at the small houses there – there were Jewish s-stores, you know, several Jewish stores at that place. They were just breaking the windows, the doors, you know, beating it up. And the people were just standing and watching what's going on. Nobody said, you know, anything to them, to those three peop-people there. Obviously they were a – a – there were Jews there, you know,

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living in there. And suddenly a man came out with a bl-bloody face, apparently a Jew. And when the people saw the blood, you know, all this group of people who were standing yo – just stepped back, you know, maybe three steps back and dispersed right there. They were calling, you know, to join the people, but nobody joined them.

Q: The three burly men were calling to –

A: Yeah.

Q: – have people join them.

A: Yeah, but we – nobody joined, but no-nobody even objected to anything.

Q: Okay, so nobody condemned, either.

A: No. Well, I think it was implied, condemnation. It was implied. People – people, but –

Q: But they didn't say anything.

A: They didn't say – they say – didn't say anything, yeah. And they just dispersed, and – obviously they were sent from somewhere, you know. Obviously some – some [indecipherable] tha-that was not s – anything spontaneous. But –

Q: Is that the first vi – anti-Jewish violence that you saw –

A: Yes.

Q: – in **Panevėžys**?

A: Yes.

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Q: Yes?

A: Yes.

Q: And do you think there was a connection between the funeral of these – you know, these people who were victims of the **NKVD** and that Lithuanian communist and whatever you know, units or rule that he had? Do y – do you think it was just coincidence that it happened this way?

A: No, not a coincidence, but a – somebody wanted to establish a relationship, which wasn't there.

Q: I see.

A: Since nobody appro – nobody co – even – even from the **[indecipherable]** nobody accused that Jews were involved. In other places there were such a – such accusations, I read, but not in **Panevėžys**. Until now, nobody mentions that any Jew was involved in those actions, doctors or sugar fac – factory, no. So apparently somebody want to make a connection, sent those three men there, you know, maybe paid them, and tried to –

Q: And do you think a connection was made?

A: – in-insight them. I don't know. Not as – as far as me is concerned, but I don't know about the other people. I don't think so. I don't think that even after that, nobody – nobody talked ab-about the Jews in connection with that – with those br –

Q: Incidents.

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A: – those incidents, yeah. So –

Q: What happened – okay, so there's a – there's this period of four days between the Soviet retreat, come back, retreat, come back, and the German final establishment in the town.

A: Okay.

Q: And you – you – you first saw the planes and so on. When it finally was established, that is, there was no return of any Soviet forces, is that when the funeral took place? Was it at that point –

A: Oh no, several days after that.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Several days after that, I don't know how many – you know, two or – two – at least two, maybe three days after that, because the Germans had time to bring foreign journalists from **Berlin** by plane, they brought to **Panevėžys** to show the journalists what the Russians have done.

Q: Ah, a propaganda move.

A: Yeah.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So, a-and the journalists, even American journalists were there because **America** was not in war at that time yet with **Germany**. American and Swiss, Swedish. And I know about that story because there was one Lithuanian from **Klaipėdos, Klaipėda**

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area. He was very much anti-German, his whole life anti-German, but he knew languages, and he – he was a refugee when the Germans took over **Klaipėda**, he lived in **Panevėžys**. But he was kind of drafted, or asked as a translator for the journalists. Journalists knew German, but not the real Lithuanian kn-knew German good enough.

Q: Right.

A: And he knew. So, the Germans brought them to those doctors and others and showed the places, and then later there was kind of like, I don't know, like place for – for them to wait until the plane was ready to take them back. And this Lithuanian translator whom I – who – was also our family friend, so he was telling us that one of the American journalists took him away and said, look, you know, this, all those killed people, that's – that's what the Germans did, didn't they? He said no, no, no, that – that was Soviets. Oh, he says, that's – that's clear, that's clear, thank you. And then he wanted to – to – to talk with him and the American wouldn't talk with him at all. So the German propaganda didn't take, I mean, the – the – that – at least this journalist was convinced that was a German –

Q: Action.

A: – action. And this, from – from **Klaipėda**, who all his life was fighting against the Germans, and e-even until – he always was, even after that inc – incident, but – but he was upset about the – th-the western prejudices.

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Q: And he – th – it sounds like the western journalist, the American journalist, was looking upon him, the translator as being in the service of the Germans, because it served the German propaganda **privasses**.

A: Right, right. Well, apparently he was convinced that the Russians don't do such things, **nome** – and the Germans do. Which is true as – as far as the Germans are concerned, just the first – just the first part not – not true.

Q: Yeah, yeah. So let's go forward.

A: Right.

Q: And the funeral happens, you see the – this beating up of – of Jews and their houses by these three men. And then what happens within **Panevėžys**? How do things develop further?

A: Well, horribly, because there were a lot of killing. Revenge killing.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: People, you know, ju-just under suspicion that somebody was in the communist youth organization or something, were taken out and shot, without any i-inquiry, without any court, without any pro-procedure, just like that, you know, and a lot of innocent people were just killed, like this – in **Panevėžys** and in surrounding villages, like that. It was terrible. Some of them were Jewish, I don't know how many of those, but definitely just some – some Jews were killed. Some Lithuanians, some Russians, whatever.

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Q: Do y – was this done – was this done without German involvement? Was this sort of like a **[indecipherable]**

A: I would say without.

Q: Without.

A: Ja – that was just Lithuanian project.

Q: Okay.

A: Not – not a project, there was a staff, you know, just when the Germans marched – marched in, I saw the Germans right there, you know, at my gymnasium, and the girls were, you know, greeting them with flowers and – and milk and water and **[indecipherable]** you know **[indecipherable]** and one of our classmates who ran away to **Germany** was – I didn't see him, but he went by, you know, he was drafted by Germans as translator, going through **Lithuania**. So we – Lithuanian flags everywhere. The only German flag under their military establishment, and even that flag was a war flag, not the regular German flag.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So, according to that, that's kind of correct, I mean, that's the army. They don't claim that – that city or that part. So – and there was a staff, Lithuanian staff is – they said, I went there, you know, and so – volunteered for in – ins – in service there. They gave me a – a rifle, the automatic Russian – automatic rifle, ammunition, and a – a – how do you call it, armband.

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Q: Mm-hm. What color is it?

A: It – it identify – pardon me?

Q: What color was it?

A: It was red.

Q: It was red?

A: What was surprising, but there were signs, you know, ah-ah-ah-ah – was ga – was a red – up in the red material or something. In **Panevėžys** it was red, but it was – it had insignias, it – different insignia. And that's it, we went into th – into the service there.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Apparently some from our service were killing people, apparently. I don't know, after that, whe-when they were killing, apparently they felt like big heroes, you know. Like –

Q: Killing anti-com – killing communists, killing Jews?

A: Yeah, killing communists.

Q: Killing communists.

A: Communists. J-Jews weren't – at that point wer – I don't think – I am not sure, but I don't think they were killed just because they were Jews. They suspected they are communists, that's – something like that. Anyway, not the families –

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Q: And were these people who – who were, you know, when you volunteered, and others, were they all about your age, about 18 - 19 at the time, or –

A: They were sa – yes, well, the lower, ba – ba – could be – could be higher than that, too. In their 20s something, up to 26 - 27 maybe. Something like that. So, pretty soon, you know, the people in – in **Panevėžys** were very concerned about that, that innocent people are being killed, so they had contacted the leadership of that staff, and you know, said – and then, you know, the – the staff – staff was responsible, they get weapons. Th-Th-They have those armbands. So after that they stopped this thing.

Q: What did they a – what had been your duties? You weren't involved in that, but what had they asked you to do?

A: Well, my first duty, or first thing, we – they – they send me to **Pajuoste** together with others in – in – in a truck, to pick up the ammunition. There was a lot of ammunition, loose ammunition in **Pajuoste**. So, we went there and took the – those heavy boxes of ammunition in the truck, and brought to the staff.

Q: And is that when you had last seen **Uditta(ph)** **Gormanas(ph)**, at that point, or at –

A: No, no, that before, that's –

Q: That was already before.

A: Th-That was before.

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Q: Okay.

A: And – okay, then – then we se – wait, we went back, second time. Second time when we back, Germans – German soldiers were there, they just looked. Wh-What are you doing, you know, here? We s – we said we have, you know, the instructions from our staff to take ammunition. Out. Out of here, no ammunition, nothing. Well, out, okay. So we went back to staff, said to them, and Germans didn't let us pick up any more. Okay. So then tol – they told me to take a group of my friends and go and see the – there is a report that some communists, or maybe even Russian soldiers, straggling soldiers are in a big building, **Meistas**(ph) factory, or a – a b – a building, that they might be hiding there.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Check that. Okay, I go with my f – my – my men in there, you know, to check that, and well, the building is high, hm. There are very few windows, only very high up. Well, we started approaching the building, everybody just coming together, I said no, I mean, if they was going to shoot, you know, they got us all, so just spread, just spread. And we approaching the building and then the German comes in, the German sergeant and asks, who is in charge of this thing? They – so – so me, you know? He co – approached me and said, hey, what's going on, what – what war are you fighting here? Well, what war? Well, I patiently explained to him that I have instructions, something **[indecipherable]** report there about something like that. Out.

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I – I am taking over this duty, I will take care of that. So, we wanted to stay and take a look, you know, how –

Q: How he takes care of it.

A: – how he takes care of it. No, he didn't let us, you know. He just chased us away. Well, going to staff, reporting another, you know, no – no success there. Okay, so another reports. Some communists may be in some other building. Okay, we go to another building. Well, it's a small, small house, small wooden – not a shack really, a house, but it's a small one – one – one store building. Well, the report is that the communists are th – a-are there, you know, or – or the activists there. Looking, no nothing – nothing happening in there. So he said well, somebody, a volunteer is going inside to see what's going on. No volunteers. No volunteers, well, what do we do? You – you can't wait until the night, so I'm suppose – then I'm going there. Okay, go inside, kick in the door, you know, the door not locked, opens. I thought maybe somebody will throw grenade or – or – or shoot, but there was nobody inside, empty. But there was something, the [indecipherable] was not quite, some – somebody – there was food, there were things, somebody left it in very big haste.

Q: Hurried manner, yeah.

A: Yeah, definitely there was something, but at that time there were nothing, empty. Okay, I'll come back, report that, nothing there. So they send me, alone now, report that a – a Jewish communist killed himself, shot himself. Go there and see what's –

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what – about that report. Okay, I go there, in the center of the city, and go, a famil – an old people, fam – family living there, a very nice, old man and old woman living in a small apartment, very nice, very tidy. Very scared people. I asked about that, yes, there is somebody died, you know, in – in – in the – in a shed outside. Outs – so I went into the shed, yes, there is a man, you know, who apparently killed himself, because his pistol was right there, you know, and a lot of money, Russian, Soviet money. And a s – a small piece of paper, you know, with scribbled writing, but not Lithuanian, apparently Yiddish. So I looked at, he – he was dead, definitely. I took the pistol, and the money.

Q: Was he shot in the head? Did he shoot himself –

A: In the head. Yeah, he shot himself in the head.

Q: Was this the first time you saw a corpse? Because up until here, we haven't talked about you – you've talked about things you heard.

A: Yeah.

Q: But not necessarily what you yourself saw.

A: No, I – the only corpses I have seen before, and a f – few of them were during the funerals, during the wake. But also very few of them. But –

Q: So this one is the first sort of war – result of – casualty of war.

A: Right.

Q: Casualty of – of –

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A: Right.

Q: – these events.

A: Right. But at that time, you know, there was so many dangers we went through, that it didn't affect me very much. I took it as a fact, was just the man killed himself.

I – I have a task here now, to –

Q: What did he look like? Do you remember?

A: Y-Young man, not gray, dark hair. I would say in – in his 30s, maybe. Okay, so I take his weapon, his – his pistol, his – his – my – the money, and the – the s – the note and went back to the old Jewish couple, and asked them to translate for me this – this note. They did, I scribbled out the translation, and he said that, you know, I am – he is – he always was a communist, believed in communism and now he's dying for the communist [indecipherable] and something like long live **Stalin**, or something like that. Okay, I wrote it down, and thanked the – the people, and said, you know, report to your community to f – to get the funeral of him, bury him. The people were so co – you know, they were also so scared, you know, saying

[indecipherable]

Q: [indecipherable] yeah.

A: Yeah, what will happen with us, what will happen with us? I said, well nothing, old people, you know, what could happen to them? But – nothing, you know, don't – don't worry, you know. Oh – and the Germans are marching, you know, through the

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windows you can see artillery going, you know, all – all the German – German thing. Well, what the – I – I really believed – I really believed that they are in no danger whatsoever, just like **Uditta**(ph). Was – I believed it was in no danger, I believed that these old people are in no danger whatsoever. So –

Q: Do you think there was a connection between – **[technical direction]** Okay. It's okay.

End of Tape Four

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Beginning Tape Five

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Algimantas Gureckas**, on October 14th, 2010. So, Mr. **Gureckas**, you were with this old – this old couple who were very frightened, old Jewish couple.

A: Right.

Q: And you had just found the corpse of a young man in their shed. Do you think there was a connection between this young man and them?

A: I think so. I think h-he might have been th-their son, or – or a close relative, but I – I didn't enquire that, and I thought, you know –

Q: Mm-hm.

A: – I – I – I – I ch – I shouldn't. I mean, we were – we just – just – maybe not, I don't know.

Q: So that was your fourth – that was your fourth –

A: Task.

Q: – task. And you returned to your headquarters?

A: My headquarters, gave the pistol, the am-ammunition, gave the money, gave the note and the translation, and that was a day's work done. So went back home with my friends, and my father met us with the – a toast for a free and independent **Lithuania**, which we thought it's being established now, because all the city was

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just in Lithuanian national colors, and the flags, except for one building where the German commandant was – took over the place. So – so that – at that place – what we thought is going – going to happen, there will be, well maybe not quite independent, but something like **Hungary**, or – or **Slovakia**, something like that, you know, that we will – will be independent country together with – with **Germany**, you know, allied willingly or not. And then the other day, I went to the police, I don't know why, do-don't remember exactly, went to the police, and – but I remember the view, which was very shocking to me. There was an old man, apparently a Jew, an old man, you know, and he was standing like in the corner, and on his forehead was written in, I would say maybe it looked like wet ashes, you know, make something like that and then smear on that, and it was called **žydas**.

Q: In Lithuanian.

A: In Lithuanian.

Q: So that means Jew.

A: Jew.

Q: And he was inside the police station?

A: And he was inside the police station, was standing in the corner, the people were going around their business there, you know, nobody was paying any attention to him as far as I could see. I don't know, I – I just left that police and j-just stays in my

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memory, you know, bec-because it was such a shocking, shocking view for me, for me.

Q: Was he – do – was he – you say he was an old man, do you remember what he looked like? Was he small, was he large?

A: No, he was small, he was bald, yeah. That – that – that was very shocking to me, that's why I remember it. Well, I went back home, then didn't have any di – nothing when I went to staff, they had nothing for me for awhile. We met some Germans, we drank with them. My school German became conversational, but my – when we are – get drunk, you don't have inhibitions, so it's mech – much earlier – easier to learn. The Germans were very friendly, the soldiers. They were – they were soldiers, that's all they c-cared, you know, they wer – they were fighting their – the war, and no politics, nothing her-here. They were friendly people. Now, another day I went, and they had another task to me. And the Russians – the railroad was a regular western European railroad in **Lithuania**, the width. The Russian railroads had different width. So when the Russians took over, they made a more wide, you know, on the –

Q: Mm-hm, a wider [indecipherable]

A: – the Russian – a Russian standard. Now, the Germans wanted us to bring it back to the west European, German, or previous Lithuanian standard. So I had to – to – to go to the prison. There was prisoners of war, Russians, Soviets, you know, Ukrainians, whatever. I had to take 120 - 150 of them and bring to the railroad, and

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let them work on the railroad bringing the – the – the rail width to the regular side.

And, to watch what – with my friends also, to watch them, you know, working there.

So that's what we did.

Q: So you guarded them, in other words.

A: We guarded them, yeah.

Q: Yes.

A: And they were – they were working there. It was easy – well, of course, not very easy, easy because th-there were, you know, before, that width, so it was just re-return to the old place. And it was narrower, so it's no problem, n-no – no – no need to extend anything or something. But, you know, the rails are heavy, you have to – to lift them and bring it, and so – so it was w-work, you know [indecipherable] many of them. Now, I was the control. The Ukrainians were very happy people there. They were, you know, full of fun, you know, they – they had all kinds of funny stories, and I s-started, you know, to talk with them.

Q: In Russian?

A: In Russian, yeah. They said, you know, all – they were all happy. They knew the war was over, will be over in months, they go back to free **Ukraine**, everything will be just fine. And I saw that I lost, I mean, you know, a war discipline, they – they are not working, they are just entertaining me. So, I had problem, you know, until I [indecipherable] on them to work. The Russians were very up – not very, but they

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are upset, sad, you know. They were working, but obviously they – they – they were not happy, not like Ukrainians, it's – it's a very big difference between. There were other nationalities. There was one of them, they knew no Russian.

Q: But it was a Soviet soldier?

A: It was a Soviet soldier, he was from **Kaukas**(ph) or somewhere, th-the Russians told me, he is from **Kaukas**(ph), so he doesn't know any Russian. Yeah, so I don't know who he was, but di – you showed to him, he-he did, you know, whatever. They never – I wa – I never asked them, but they never complained, th-they – I never asked how they are fed or something like that, but apparently there were no problem, because nobody complained to me that they didn't have hot food or anything.

Q: How did they look?

A: They look alright to me. There is just a few days –

Q: Okay.

A: – they became p-prisoners of war. They were under Lithuanians, not under the German rule. The Germans some – somehow, you know, they are supposed to be under the Germans, you know, but they were under the Lithuanians. So they working several days, we were working at that's – that's rail – rail somehow is re-established the – the discipline with – with a difficulty with my Ukrainian friends. And finally, it was going fr – really fast, you know, the – the work was done, some distance from **Panevėžys**, and that was done, you know, my task was finished, I – back to the staff,

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gave back the rifle, the ammunition, the armband, was done. Went home. My participation in the second World War was complete, without the –

Q: At that point.

A: Yeah, without point. Let me tell you, at that point – without – without – without any shot being fired from my gun, I – I didn't – didn't have any – no need, no opportunity. I wasn't in any fi-fighting in the action, nothing. So I came back home and just was waiting until the Lithuanian army will be reestablished, we will be mobilized and we'll be sent to fight the – the Soviets together with the Germans, just like Finns, like Hungarians, Italians, Bulgarians are doing. So that was the big illusion, you know, and no – no Germans didn't – didn't want any – any of our services, and – of **Lithuania's** service. Now, as far as the Jews are concerned, until that, you know, nothing happened except for those p-previ – early executions. The early executions, of some of the com – my communist friends, you know, that – who were in the communist youth organization, fled together with the Soviet army when the Germans approached **Panevėžys**.

Q: So you had communi – you had friends who had been part of the
[indecipherable]

A: Yeah, they were from my class, well, what can you do? So, yeah, th-the two of them were killed, you know, there in action, you know, against the German. They tried to attack a German tank, and they were killed. But the others retreated together

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with the – some communists with the si – this communist who lived in our house and who was participating in executions at the –

Q: Sugar shack.

A: – sugar factory. And th-those come – those communist youth people, they – they got rifles, they were – had weapons, and they were f-fleeing together with the red army, retreating. The Germans, well, you need map really. The Germans went one way from **K-Kaunas** to **Dofilis(ph)** in **Latvia**, **Pskov** in Russia, directly towards **Saint Peterburg; Leningrad**, at that time.

Q: Mm-hm, exactly.

A: But one f – another was big – big move from **Pilzzeit(ph)** to **Tauragė, Šiauliai**, **[indecipherable] Riga**, and farther away into **Estonia**. And **Panevėžys** is in between. So they were fleeing toward north, not toward the east. Of course, toward the east the Germans were already advancing there. They fled to – reached **Latvia**, **Jēkabpils**, which is on the **Daugava** river. And so that on the other side of **Daugava** are – the German tanks are going. Apparently – the communists apparently, for instance, this communist who lived in our house, de – he survived. He – he e – he escaped.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: He escaped, because he later was parachuted into **Lithuania**, caught by the Germans and – and hanged by the Germans. And so he – he escaped, but then of

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course was thrown back as a paratrooper. But my f – but the young friends from the communist youth thought it's – it's hopeless. They said that they threw their rifles into the **Daugava** river, and walked back to **Panevėžys**. Well, it took couple of weeks, I guess, until they arrived back. Nobody was interested, nobody bothered them, nobody enquired about them, nothing. If they wouldn't have fled, they would have shot. They would have killed.

Q: They would have been killed.

A: The first – first day, yeah. Such people like them, they were killed first day, no questions asked. What a difference two weeks made. Nobody was interested, nobody even asked them where they were.

Q: Or who they were.

A: Or who they were, yeah. They lived just normal life. One of them's living in **Klaipėda** now, raising his family, that's – he was Russian, yeah, ethnic Russian. Yeah, so.

Q: So, you – you fired not a single shot from your rifle?

A: Not a single shot.

Q: But you said that some who did join this national guard, the **Šauliai**, you had heard that they had been implicated in murders –

A: Right.

Q: – and in massacres.

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A: Right.

Q: What is it that you heard, and did you know of these people personally?

A: Well, there's the problem. I think when they were killing the people, they thought they doing some kind of a **heraic** – heroic work. But they very quickly found out that everybody looks very, you know, against – ev-everybody's we – very much against that, and they condemned such a t – such a action. So they didn't brag about that any more, and so I just heard the rumors, yeah, from my class, about one, yes, but it's a rumor, he never talked about anything like that, so I – I don't know. I can't accuse him, because this is terrible accusation, and well, he is killed. H-He is killed by the – by the s – by the Soviets, but – on second occupation, he – they found his remains in ter – what does – near **Vilnius** there, the burial place. But – but I don't know. Just a rumor about him.

Q: But when we're talking about massacres, are we talking about massacres of Jews, or are we talking about revenge shooting of communists, some of whom might be Jewish, some of whom would not be?

A: I imagine that it's – it's killing of the communists.

Q: I see.

A: Yeah. Jews and not Jews. Definitely not Jews, because we know, I mean, who are killed. As far as Jews are concerned, we didn't have that many people so we identify, you know, how many and where. I sa – would suspect that the Jews had the worst

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chance to survive in the – than the Lithuanian communists. Well, Lithuania – be – if they decided to kill, I mean, there was no chance any more. You know, they decide, this is a communist, let's shoot him. And they shot – shot him. But I think they had stupid errors, you know, of killing people who were not communists, could happen for the Jews much easier, because –

Q: Of the suspicion?

A: Sus-Suspicion and not knowing the community that well. In Lithuanian case pretty much well – was known who was, you know, was – involved that much. So I suspect that maybe more Jews. But anyway, they were not killed, there were not mass executions like later. There were not executions of children, women. Well, women, unless they themselves were implicated, but – but not like, you know, the whole families or something like that. Just – just thought he's a communist, a Jew a communist, we'll kill him, kill him. That's my impression. I – I wasn't close to those things, I saw – well, it's difficult to say, but it was definitely not – not a mass extermination of the Jews –

Q: Okay.

A: – at that point, yet.

Q: At what point did that start? Let's go – let's go to this point [indecipherable]

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A: Oh yeah, well, that's another story. Since – you know, it became a pr – as far as I was concerned, became a quiet time, you know, no – no – no service in the – in the mi – of military or police or anything like that, I through with that.

Q: You're finished with high school.

A: You're finished with high school. So my friend from my – from my s – class, asked me to come to the village to be a guest in his sister's – sister's ba – wedding. And so we went, I went with – to my – near – near **Biržai**, his – his village, and there was a very si – big wedding, you know, a lot of **Biržai** beer, which is very good, very, you know, homemade. Fine, so we celebrated there. Now, after that, he decided to show me the **Biržai** and the – and the area around, area where he was born and grown and he wanted to show me. Well we went to **Biržai**, went, met the girls there, was nice. And the last day before I-I came home, we were walking through his village. There were no buildings around, there were fields and roads, and there came a man on a bicycle. And this man came to a – both of us and said, do you know? **Biržai** Jews are – have been killed. We were shocked, I mean, wha-what – what do you mean? He didn't say hello or anything like that, that was the first words he said, do you know?

Q: A total stranger, yes.

A: Total stranger. Do you know the **Biržai** Jews were killed? No. We were – we were shocked. And he started telling, he – he just had to tell that the German

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commandant, the German military said – the Jews were in the ghetto already. He said that they found, the Germans found that the Jews had hidden weapons, and because of that, you know, he t – took all the Jews, and brought to someplace, you know, outside the city, and they just killed all the Jews. All, he said. Children, babies. The German officer was walking around and shooting babies in the mothers' hands. Whether he participated or not, I don't know, but he was shocked. At least he was apparently guarding, or so. He was – he – eyewitness. No question about that.

Q: What would have made you think that he might have participated in it, or in – been involved in some way?

A: I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't know. I –

Q: But he was an eyewitness, at any rate.

A: He – well, yeah, he was telling with details everything what was going on. He was telling about the doctor who was not brought to the – he was so m – valued that they didn't bring him to the – the ghetto, he still stayed at his home and his office. And the Germans came to pick him up and bring with the other Jews, and he said no, he is not going anywhere. And the – well, the German officer pulled out the pistol and just shot him right there in his office. And thi-this is – they said, I mean, they just put him in – in the truck and brought to the execution place and threw in with

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the others. And he – he described the execution in great detail. He said, the ra – re – Germans were killing, Lithuanians were killing also there, the – those Jews, you know, and he – he told him particularly he – the ch – the killing of the babies for him you – was – was – was the thing, I mean, he just couldn't – he said, after that, I mean, he – he just resigned from – from the service, and he doesn't want even to see.

Q: Was he a policeman?

A: Well, like auxiliary policeman at that time, not a regular in uniform or anything like that, no. Tho-Those are – were not involved in – in – in usually in – in Jews' execution. But that was – we were shocked also, hearing that. And we thought that's – it's a unique thing, as I read in **Napoleon's** biography right before going there, you know. Th – having time I just picked up a book and read **Napoleon's** biography. And there is an incident where **Napoleon** killed the prisoners of war in – in **Akrah**(ph), in – in – today **Israel**, at that time Turkish **Palestine**. And even, I thought, I mean, even – even **Napoleon**, whe – really a reasonable military leader, he did things, and I thought well, **Biržai** will be also in history like **Jaffa**, you know, some cruelty which happens during the war, you know, without any reason, something – well, what do you mean, I mean Jews were hiding weapons. Maybe they were hiding weapons, but somebody prepared even the ditches for the – for the – for th – for them to be killed, you know, before that. So s – must be just – just a pretense. So, we – we thought that something what's ha – what's happened in

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Biržai, the – we – I went back to **Panevėžys**, you know, and then I found out no, this thing is going all around. And then we found out not only in **Lithuania** but in **Latvia** also. Hm. Now – then we [indecipherable] we saw, in our gymnasium, in ou-our high school came a German detachment, not the regular military, I don't know, the uniforms were somewhat different, they have digging equipment a lot, and there was – they will kill **Panevėžys** Jews also, the rumor was there. And of course we believed because we knew what happened in **Biržai**. It was terrible. By the way, I bir – didn't mention how the ge – ghetto was established, fairly early, but not the first day, not e – not even the first week. The Germans had all kinds of announcements, and telling what to do, return the weapons, this, that, you know, all kinds of things, and u-underneath it was – my friends said, you know, if – if it's not written [indecipherable], we'll – we'll executed – them – it's –

Q: We'll be shot.

A: – yeah, we'll shot. Not – not worth even reading, but if it says we'll shot, at least I read it. But there was another announcement with – not in German format, establishing a ghetto in **Panevėžys**, and requiring to wear this yellow star. Not to walk on the sidewalks, all this thing. I cannot remember, I'm sorry I can't remember who signed that, whether it was a Lithuanian mayor, or was a German officer, I cannot remember who – who is – un-under whose authority was written – although I

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know that in some cases Germans printed, a mayor who didn't sign.

[indecipherable]

Q: It doesn't matter.

A: But doesn't matter, but I don't know in **Panevėžys**, under whose authority it was announced. And the ghetto was established. At the beginning, the idea of ghetto didn't seem such terrible, because we thought about medieval ghettos. Jews living separately, but well, we imagined, you know, we knew that there were ghettos in **Poland** already. We – we imagined that there – I mean, the Jews are – had in there, their establishments, professionals, you can go there, buy things with th – from the Jews. You can go to the doctor, Jewish doctor, you can go to the lawyer. And then **[indecipherable]** they live just separately. So, not that bad. But when the ghetto was established, it wasn't the medieval ghetto, it was – everybody was crowded in, in the small place, tak – they didn't work in their professions, they had to work outside, you know, s-simple some – digging or something.

Q: Did you see people being moved into the ghetto?

A: No, I didn't see that. I saw people that were working on – on the street with the yellow –

Q: Star.

A: – with the yellow star. And that also was – made a negative impression on the co – the Lithuanian people in **Panevėžys**. Tha-That's – that's too cruel, that's too cruel.

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Maybe the Jews did wrong things, maybe they deserved some kind of punishment, but this – this was too much. And there was a organization, I know, because my mother knows her – he – she wasn't part of the organization, but her good friend, this doctor I talked, Dr. **Bridges**, who talked with the Jewish doctors about, you know, the action of the young Jews during Soviet occupation, his wife, and other, mostly from Catholic organizations, made a – a circle to help the Jews in the ghetto. First of all, there was not enough food for them. There was some food, but not enough. So first – that's first thing what they get for, you know, to – to bring food to the ghetto. Ghetto was guarded by Lithuanian auxiliaries.

Q: So the same sort of auxiliaries as this man who was on a bicycle from **Biržai**?

A: Exactly. Exactly the same. But they – they didn't care. They – they – they could – you could bring bread and soda, they didn't want, you know, to – to bribe – they were supposed not to let to [indecipherable] they just didn't care. And they said, well, we – we – we buy them, you know, some vodka, you know for this service, but – they didn't ask for that, but it's – so – but there were quite many Jews, and I don't know, I – I – I just doubt very much that everybody got enough food from – by this smuggling, but – but some, you know, apparently held, because it was a rather – a rather many – many women were involved in that, so I suppose there was – it was – it was senseless. I mean, well – it was something which was a bit – effective to some – some degree. And then, you know, came that – that day of

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execution. And the rumor went around that tomorrow the Jews will be killed. First of all, I heard about that from those – these auxiliaries. Some of those auxiliaries came to my friends and said, we are not going to kill anybody. We are not killers, we are not going to kill anybody. If they force me for such – into some executions, we are going to – to flee from the service. And they asked my friends, you know, whether we could arrange for them to hide until they could go out of the city toward their villages, and hide there, but right now where – when they have – when they escape from this. So apparently – by the way, here the Bishop of **Panevėžys** comes in. He also heard those rumors and in one Sunday – I wasn't in – in the church – in the church, it's – I regret at the time, not a direct witness, but the whole city was talking about that, that the bishop said – talked about that you shall not kill, and he really condemned those who'd kill innocent people, and excommunicated them in advance. Those who kill innocent people, or you have killed innocent people he excommunicated and – and condemned them, not by name, because some of them that just didn't do that yet. But, as a – as a category of people, of – of killers. And –

Q: And he was talking about the massacre of the Jews, the ongoing massacre of the Jews?

A: Yes, and other innocent people, but –

Q: Okay.

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A: – but he was talking about the Jews. No – nobody had any doubt, including the Germans, because the Germans reacted. They arrested the bishop, put in – in – in the house arrest, and said that he is removed from his – from his duties, and he has to leave **Panevėžys** altogether. Okay, so he left **Panevėžys** altogether. He had the villa in **Berciunai**, a few kilometers from **Panevėžys**, and – a small resort, and he went to his vil – to this villa. But he didn't resign from a bishop's duties, he – from the villa he just did his old work as a bishop. And Lithuanian administration covered it up, you know. So he – he was there, you know, and I know –

Q: What was his name?

A: **Casimiras Paltarokas**.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: **Casimiras Paltarokas**. And so –

Q: So did these – did these auxiliaries who came and asked to be hidden until they could return to their villages, did that succeed? Were they able to run away?

A: No. I asked after this – this thing, you know, my friends wer – did they? No, they said, they didn't need to. There was no – no need. There were enough, those who went willingly, and those who refused were left alone, but all of them resigned from the service then, because we have – they didn't want to be associated even with this – the killers, the people. So th – at least in **Panevėžys** there was no – no – well,

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pressure maybe, but not – not really something, you know, forcing to participate in – in – in executions.

Q: So, in other words, those Lithuanians who did participate –

A: Did willingly.

Q: – did it willingly.

A: Apparently yeah, that's – that's the conclusion.

Q: And when di – do you remember what month the executions started, when the **Panevėžys** Jews were liquidated?

A: I di – I don't remember now. I have on my – on my memoirs –

Q: Was it – or was it in the summer, was it in the early fall?

A: Oh summer, summer. Late summer, I would say. Maybe late August.

Q: Mm-hm. So two or three –

A: Yeah, late August, I would say.

Q: So we're saying June, two or –

A: No, maybe September already. Well, but not – not – not later than that. Late –

Q: So two or three months after the Germans have invaded?

A: Less, because half a month June, and July – yeah, two, two months.

Q: Two months?

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A: About two months, yes. Apparently ki – i-in other places of **Lithuania** what I read, you know, there were executions of various kinds much earlier. But **Panevėžys** was a quiet place, and – until the Germans took over, and –

Q: Did you see – after those rumors, wasn't it true that actually the next day that happened, or the few days afterwards it happened – I mean, in other words, were the rumors fulfilled?

A: Which way?

Q: I mean, there – sometimes one can hear that there are rumors and it doesn't happen that week, it happens the week after.

A: No, no, it happened that, because it – there were – they brought – they were telling a story, they brought Russian prisoners of war to dig the ditches for that. And when they gave the dimensions of the ditches, the Russians threw – threw off their – their shovels and they refused. Because they were Soviet, people they knew, that's – that's for their – for execution. And they assumed for them.

Q: Oh.

A: And the Germans finally tell them that that's for Jews, not for you. They didn't believe it. They didn't believe it. They had to take their equipment, whatever, dig the ditches themselves, or hired sa – I don't know, but the Russians wouldn't do that.

Q: Interesting.

A: They were Soviet people, they know what it means to dig a ditch.

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Q: Yeah, you know –

A: They – yeah, well it's – it's na – it's – it's – it's terrible, it's terrible. The day when the executions started was somehow very strange, you know. Nobody was talking, people just didn't talk. People – people stopped talking, you know, it was kind of – myself, I went, you know, to s – visit my friend, who lived near the – the street where the road was leading toward **Pajuoste** where the executions were taking place. And the trucks full of – of Jews, I suppose, full of people were just going that direction.

Q: Did you see this?

A: Yes. And to his – with my class friend, we just looked, and didn't say anything. Didn't say anything because what – what can you say? What can you say?

Q: So it's like the whole city knows.

A: Yes.

Q: The whole city knows.

A: Oh yeah, the whole city knew, definitely. And the reaction was horrified, horrified. I don't know what – whether all of them, of course, maybe o-ob – obviously, there should have been people who approved. Af-After all, there were people who participated. But generally, you know, when you go to the city and see the people, you – you can see that everybody's kind of like paralyzed from horror, what's going on. You ga – the – the – any revenge, anything about the Jews was

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forgotten by that time, long ago. When the Jews were brought into the ghetto, you know, the Lithuanians, th-that – that was the end. The Lithuanians didn't – didn't approve of that; a ghetto as it was established there, didn't approve of that, and so – but yeah, that's – that is a terrible, a terrible thing. Yeah, we – we went then, after the execution, oh several, several weeks after the execution, and we went to a farm where one of our friends had the girlfriend i-in that farm. The farm was nearest farm to the execution place. And we wanted to find out. We – we knew, I mean, it – it was a horrible thing happened of a gur – tremendous significance. Wanted to find out wa-wa – wh-what – what it was. And they said well, the girl couldn't tell us anything because when the executioner comes, the fa – th-the – the parents, they say, hid her. Told her to go upstairs, you know, and the – and to hide, and because those – the killers were going around the co – the house drinking water, vodka, everything. But we didn't really, in such a detail as this from **Biržai** told, there was nothing – nothing – nothing. The same thing, the same Germans and Lithuanians. German officer also killing, you know, babies. Apparently still there's some resistance of the executioners to kill babies, so the officer had to take them up on himself. I'm just – I suppose, that – that's my deduction. The story was told that, you know, one Lithuanian officer was married to a j – Jewish girl, and when the Jews were brought to the ghetto, he went together with her. Lived together with her, and when they

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brought to the execution, he went together with her. And he was told, you know, to go out – go away, you know. He refused, he went with his wife and was killed there.

Q: So you got as close as to the farm next to the execution site?

A: Right, yeah, wa – the group of us.

Q: The group of us. But you didn't go to the execution site?

A: Nah, no.

Q: No.

A: No. Then they said, you know, at the end of the ex-execution it looked like they became insane. They were drinking vodka, complaining that th-they – they cannot get drunk, you know, no matter how much vodka they drink. And at the end, you know, it was starting g-getting at dusk, you know. And some of them started going – the – the Jews had to disrobe, they will start going through their – within they had hidden some – some valuables there, some gold or whatever, some started going through those – their – their – their clothes. And one of them, of the executioners, one of them said that you're not supposed to that, you know, that's – that's supposed to leave, you know, for the – for the – for the – the Germans, you know, to take care of it. So what they did, they just shot him and threw him together with the Jews in the – in the – in the – in th – in the ditch. Now, this is true – true story, because about year, or – or couple of years ago, my friend came to me and said, you know – wanted to check with me his translation of a request of a mother of those – that who

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was killed there. He was asked – she was – wanted to translate into German, was asking the German authority to let dig up the grave, find the remains of her son and remove it and bring it to – to its – a regular cemetery. So, I saw that – that letter, which my friend has translated, we looked at the translation. So I – I doubt very much a German would have approved that, I don't know what happened with that story, but apparently that story is right.

Q: So that means the one who was there, who was saying you can't go through the clothes –

A: Right.

Q: – this was his mother.

A: That's right.

Q: I see.

A: That's right.

Q: How many Jews were there in **Panevėžys**? Do you know, approximately? Are we talking 10,000, are we talking –

A: No, about s-s 7,000 - 8,000, something less than 10,000 I would say.

Q: And in **Biržai**, did you have an idea?

A: Less. Considerably less, but I know, because the city is much smaller.

Q: Smaller.

A: But I – I – I don't know, I don't know.

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Q: After this, did you hear of other such massacres throughout the countryside?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah? What did you hear after the **Panevėžys** massacre? How did – how did the next several days play out? When did people start talking again?

A: Pretty soon, I suppose, but they were still ob-obsessed by that, and were – really came back to that theme. I was working at that time. I took a wa – a – a jo – a job in the municipality of **Panevėžys**. We see Germans introduce the food – food cards.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: We were supposed to get that much food, you know, for – and the – this – everybody had to get those cards. Now, it's tremendous operation, you know, every people have to get those cards in **Panevėžys**. Tremendous lines and – and lots of time. So they hired people, I was one of them, and many of my friends, to bring those to the people. We got those food cards, we had lists of people who live and how many, and we were bringing those cards to the people themselves, so they wouldn't waste time getting those cards. So it was very interesting because I knew pa – pa – got to know **Panevėžys** as never before. You know, all kinds of people from all professions, all – all social levels, you know, all nationalities, except the Jews. Except the Jews. Yeah. And so I brought those cards. Most of the people, you know, just signed for it, a-and I go to the next house and so on. But some of the people were talkative. And – and some – and all – not always, but many of the

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people were bringing up this – the execution of the Jews, and all negative. I suppose that those who were for it, wouldn't start the discussion at all. I just met one who – who was that, you know.

Q: In the bringing of these cards around you mean, or in general you just met one person?

A: He – he – he – he – let me see, did I bring a – a cards? Exactly thinking, I think I was bringing the cards, but he was outside, or he was visiting that fa-family, and I didn't give him the cards, just the regular – the residents. And I don't know, he was officer in Lithuanian army or – or what, I don't remember his – his profession, but he said that his – he was one of those, when the deportations started who – who ran away to hide because he thought th-they are coming for him. And his family was deported. He – hi-his wife and two daughters. And he was convinced that the Jews were in that group, and he said he is going to – to participate in killing of the Jews. But I doubt very much, because he was telling when the Jews in **Panevėžys** were already killed, so he had to go to **Vilnius** or **Kaunas**, you know, where the executioners were still working. I doubt very much whether he did that, but I don't know, I don't know.

Q: But his sentiment was there. In other words, he had that –

A: Right.

Q: – he had that sentiment.

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A: Right. But that was the only one, and I sup-suppose there were more than that, but I – but I – I – I would imagine that they wouldn't start that type of conversation.

Q: And yet, with the people that – who you did have start such conversations, they were still in some shock?

A: Yes, yes, yes. And th-that's why they brought up the subject, they just – just couldn't – couldn't hold, they just wanted to – to – to speak about it.

Q: So all this happened in the first several months after the German invasion?

A: Right.

Q: And after the German occupation, and we have another three years, or another two and a half years of – of German occupation, Nazi occupation of **Lithuania**.

Anything in those next couple of years occur that was also related to the Holocaust, to the Jewish community, that you came across in your life at that time, or was it pretty much over by the fall of 1941?

A: In **Panevėžys** was over, because no Jews were left, unless somebody hid some of the Jews, which happened, as we found out later. At that time nobody w-was bragging about it. So – but I went to **Vilnius**, to study in **Vilnius** and there were ghetto.

Q: Oh yeah, there was a ghetto there.

A: Ghetto there, really two of them at the beginning. And yeah, but it was so isolated, and was at – the wall, they were really under the wall there, s-so they were

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so isolated that we didn't know what's going on in there. We knew that it – we saw some of the Jews being driven to some kind of work. We knew they were, some of them, working in the factories, one factory came up in flames because it seems [indecipherable] there sabotage, because they were working for the German army, for the – getting the cur – th-the furs, you know, for the winter.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah, so **Kailis** factory. So, but we d – we knew that executions were going on in **Paneriai**. From time to time they were taking out there and – and being killed. We knew that some of the Jews escaped. Escaped – not only those which were hidden, but escaped into the forests in vil – in **Vilnius** area and in **Kaunas** area, I don't know in other ci-cities. And there joined the Soviet guerillas, Soviet partisans, which the movement, at that time, you know, th-the – the Soviet planes were parachuting some of leaders and weapons. And th-there was that movement of the Soviet partisans, es-escaped prisoners of war, Russian prisoners of war escaped. Some of the Lithuanian communists wer – survived, and the Jews who escaped from the ghettos. Now, at that time there was Lithuanian resistance movement against the Germans, there was underground press going out, letters, and even at that time I noticed one thing. That our press, underground press was reporting what the ger – Germans were doing with the Jews. If they killed, you know, thousand or s – or – or – or – or so Jews in **Kaunas**, there was a – a – a – a notice, a report. There were reports about Jewish

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guerillas, the Soviet guerillas, but there was no judgment. And even speaking with the people, they didn't, most of the pe – they didn't speak about those things, but if there was – they spoke about the Jewish guerillas, I – I didn't meet anybody who would condemn them. At that time it was clear that they were fighting, that was the only chance to fight for their life. So, ba – what – what – nobody see how – how you can condemn them. They were on the other side, they were enemies. Our Lithuanian s-security forces, auxiliaries were fighting against go – Soviet guerillas, also against the Jewish Soviet guerillas, but not because they're Jew, because they were fighting against the Soviets. Well, that was, the war was going on, Lithuanians were fighting Polish guerillas also. But there were no – there was not – not that, as a div – during the first occupation, where there was that resentment. There was no resentment. They were on the other side, they were like – like enemy, which you do not condemn, you know, he – I fight for one cause, he is fighting for another.

Q: What were you studying in **Vilnius**?

A: Law.

Q: Law.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And did the name **Jakub Gens** mean anything to you then, did you know of him?

A: No.

Q: No.

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A: No, no.

Q: Did you know of the Lithuanian security chiefs at the time in **Vilnius, Lileikis, Gimzauskas**, did those names mean anything to you then?

A: No, but my – one of my friends, who studied together with us in my class, he was working in Lithuanian security under the Germans, and – and a-as an officer. He was studying and working in the city already. But his job was in particular, against the Polish underground. He was well – and he was killed by the Polish underground when he was trying to arrest somebody or something like that.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So I knew him very well.

Q: Mm-hm. And did he have anything to say about the workings there, or was he pretty quiet about it?

A: He was kind of quiet, yeah, generally he was a quiet man. But no-nothing – but as far as I know he had nothing to do with the Jews, but I can't be sure. I can't be sure, but really against the Poles, and still continued that hostility. Doesn't matter, you know, because the German occupation, but Lithuanians were still fighting the Jew – the Jew – the Polish, and the Polish Lithuanian, fighting Lithuanians.

Q: Yeah, the –

A: E-E-Even at that time.

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Q: If there – is there anything else that you would like to add to events that touched – that again, you heard of, or were inv – or were involved in, in a sense of – of being in a certain place when something happens, about the Jews during the German occupation?

A: About the Jews during the German occupation?

Q: Yeah. Since you were in **Panevėžys** and you were in **Vilnius** –

A: Yeah.

Q: – is there any other memory, any other event or instance in those two and a half, three years?

A: No, not really, except that, you know, in **Vilnius** I-I was a student, and between the students and – and some wa – in the higher class, were definitely condemn – with old – the opinion was condemning those who had participated in executions, and even at that time were participating, because more or less, killing of the Jews in **Paneriai** – **Austai(ph)** **Paneriai** took place all the time, sometimes less, sometimes more and the killers were working all the time. Of course, killers were killing not only the Jews, they were killing also the Poles, and well, Lithuanians, Germans killed themselves. But th-they killed them also.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, the **Lahavichos(ph)** – it was territorial defense organization, which General **Lahavichos(ph)** organized with the agreement with Germans, but later, you

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know, fell out. Germans arrested him and disarmed that defense force and killed, you know, hundreds of – of his soldiers. And then the, you know, Lithuanians from the east **Prussia**, not from **Klaipėdos**, but even farther, **Tilžė** and all that, they f – they were, you know, fled from Nazis to **Lithuania** in **Vilnius**, they arrested and executed them in **Austai(ph) Paneriai** also.

Q: And the reason was because of activities, or because of –

A: Oh, activities, they were pu-publishing in Lithuanian newspaper, Lithuanian books. Well, of course, that was all over, because they had to flee from the Nazis and they came to **Lithuania**. And – but the tils – **Tilžės** – **Tilžės** – **Tilszin(ph)** Gestapo still had, you know, get in – in th – in their – in – in their plans, and as far – as soon as Germans occupied **Lithuania** into **Vilnius** and they came from **Tilžė**, they just took them out and executed the whole two families there. So –

Q: How – I s – I have a sense that we're gon – coming close to the end of our story.

A: Right.

Q: How did things end with you in **Lithuania**? What happened with your family? What happened in 1944 as the war was turning? Bring us up to date as how you came to live in the **United States**.

A: Well, I – I don't know whether I should go through – through small detail, but after university was closed – the Germans closed the university. Well, first of all, the Germans, after **Stalingrad**, which was in –

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Q: 1943.

A: – 1943, which was another turning point, I was very much aware, and most of the people were aware that this a turning point. After **Stalingrad** we thought maybe, you know, there might be somebody if – if the Germans throw the **Hitler** away, or something may – some – but most likely Germans have lost the war. So, Germans also realized that they are in bad shape now. So they decided oh, Lithuanians wanted to fight against the Soviets, okay, so let's call Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians, they established **Waffen SS** legions for those countries and drafted the young men into those **Waffen SS** legion. Estonian [**indecipherable**] legion, and Latvian, two divisions. Estonian, one division, Latvian, two divisions. And Lithuanian, Lithuanians just boycotted. Nobody really, excepts few invalids reported to the induction center. Well, they became so angry, they closed the universities, because they realized that the students were behind it, and they arrested the – you know, s – I don't know, about 50, maybe less people very known in **Lithuania**. P-Priests, professors, even their administrators who worked on that dam, high administrators and brought them to the concentration camp in **Stutthof**, near **Danzig**. And all the other oppressions, you know, your – even – even – even farmers and so al-al-also. So, once that started – well, I d – I don't want to go into lo – long details, but I – I wa – I became sick with a pneumonia and was in the hospital and I was discharged for pneumonia. And the Germans took a list of discharged people and drafted us.

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And I saw that's – it's really a sad situation. So I thought that the only thing I have, if I don't want, you know, that my family will suffer [indecipherable] for that, I – I would rather collec – select, you know, where do I am going under the Germans.

And I selected so-called **Reichsarbeitsdienst**. A **Reichs** labor service, which all the Germans had to – to go through before going into the military service, but also the girls had to go through that. So I w – I volunteered for that, not wanting to go anywhere else. My resistance leader approved of that.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: He himself was part German, and apparently thought that that's – that's advantageous to – to – to – to be on that side [indecipherable]

Q: So you were an anti-German resistance –

A: I was.

Q: – as an anti-Nazi resistance [indecipherable]

A: Right, right, yes. So my leader acce – a-approved of that, and I went into the **arbeitsdienst**. I served for, not the full term. I don't know why, they let us go earlier. And we came to **Lithuania**. We knew that, you know, the German –

Q: Were you – excuse me, I'm sorry to interrupt. You weren't in **Lithuania** at that point?

A: No, we went to **Germany**.

Q: I see.

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A: We – we work in **Peenemünde**, we were in several places, but I
[indecipherable] in **Peenemünde** where the German rockets were being built, you
know [indecipherable] and – and the other. And Mr. **Brown** was there, you know, I
– we saw him.

Q: You did? You saw him?

A: Y-Yeah, well, just fleeing, you know, he was walking through there. So, was –
was – German were very correct about that. Apparently they wanted to create some
friendly people for them, you know. Was – was no-not bad at all. And the Germans
wo – took – but we were working together with the Germans, mixed together with
the Germans, and they were young boys, but friendly. So, was not a bad experience.
Wa – one – bu-but then we were released from that service earlier, before our term
was over, because there was supposed to be Lithuanian army, you know, armed
forces be – being established, and the general said that he needs some experienced
soldiers who could be un – you know, non-commissioned off – officers, something
like that.

Q: Which general, what was his name?

A: **Lahavichos**(ph).

Q: **Lahavichos**(ph) okay, him, okay, mm-hm.

A: Yeah, and – an-and so I – I went back, you know, was discharged and s – joined
Lahavichos(ph) army. But that was a short thing, you know, couple months until

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Germans, you know, came in conflict with **Lahavichos(ph)** for many aspects. They di – didn't hold with their agreements. **Lahavichos(ph)** was a very strong, a very s-stubborn and proud man. We loved him, all the soldiers loved him, he was a real leader. So the Germans arrested him, his staff, as I said, and disbanded this – this unit and executed some of them. We were let go earlier, so I lived in my aunt's house in – in the village. And then the Russians approached **Lithuania**, pretty soon they took **Vilnius**, was a-approaching **Kaunas** and I decided, you know, that I – I'm not going to wait for them. Some who mo – my friends ask me to, you know, join them as guerrilla fighters against the Soviets. I didn't believe in that, I thought maybe two, three months, not more, you know. I didn't believe that the west will fight for **Lithuania**. I decided I go west, and try, you know, to – to meet it, the western English, or Americans in **Germany**, because this was obvious **Germany** lost the war, that was clear.

Q: Did your parents go with you?

A: No. My mother wanted to go with me, well there was confusion, a lot of confusion. And my pa – father wanted, you know, he was too late. **Panevėžys** was taking without any – any ba-battle. Germans just demolished electrical plant and retreated without any ac – without any resistance. So my father stayed in **Lithuania**. My mother eventually went to **Germany** also, but separately form – from myself. I

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went to **Germany**, also, we met at the end of war. I met my mother in **Munich**, and well, I must tell y – if I tell the full story, so I went to the east **Prussia**.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: We were sent to work together with the farmers, to – to help the farmers.

Apparently, also, before the evacuation, it was clear that the Russians will go in – inside. So we were working at the farm, and then suddenly was told everybody has to go to dig ditches against the tanks, to make obstacles to the Soviet tanks coming in. And a lot of Lithuanians, Poles, everything, you know, were brought together, and who were just digging those anti-tank ditches. Which didn't help any, apparently, later. We were in – in the – in the rather famous – we later fa – became famous in the – or infamous really. A village nomar -- **Nemmersdorf** –

Q: Oh yeah.

A: Well, yeah, what – Soviets e-e-executed a lot of Germans. All of them, really, who were left there, so – who were digging those – those anti-tank ditches. Now, one afternoon, you know, after – after lunch, we were – a break, you know, were eating our lunch and suddenly we noticed that **SS** troopers have surrounded us all around. And they took out their automatic weapons and one of them came forward. And in very good Lithuanian language, very good, with no accent, nothing, said that we Lithuanians are all communists, we should be shot right away. We didn't fight to defend our own country, and we deserve to die row – right here and now. But, the

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fuehrer is so great in – in his – you know, that he decided to let us – to – I mean, to w-wer – to fight f – for the **Germany** in this way, you know, of our – our shame, that we didn't defend our country, that we are basically communists at heart, who let us, you know, wer – you know – well, anyway, to – to – to – to – to – to parole us from this.

Q: Expiate – expiate your sin –

A: Right.

Q: – in other words.

A: Expiate my sin. So, and this – so. we will be drafted now in the German army as auxiliaries in the **Luftwaffe**. And wh-who doesn't, you know, doesn't appreciate fuehrer's great move, you know, well, we will know about that, how to handle it. Okay, so – so we became German soldiers. Soldiers, no, auxiliaries. No rank, nothing like that. They [**indecipherable**] gave us uniforms, but without any rank indications, any insignia, and we were aus – auxiliaries. We were supposed to do work, we were digging trenches against the sw – Swedes in **Stralsund** in **Germany**. **Stralsund** because the Germans at that time thought that **Sweden's** will – going to join the allies and attack them in the north. So we were digging those trenches after that, you know, the Swedes didn't attack, so they brought us as other tasks. But they were manual tasks, and electrical work, you know, something like that. I don't know whether to tell the story, I – I – I – because – are we running out of time?

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Q: Yeah, we've only got about a minute left on this tape, actually. Okay.

A: Yeah, well – well, anyways, well after the war, I met my – my mother. I didn't go into the prisoner of war, I just deserted from the Germans. I didn't feel that I owe them anything. And we lived in **Germany**, I studied in the University of **Tübingen**, studied law again. And then, you know, my uncle, my mother's brother brought us to the **United States**, so –

Q: And your profession after the war, can you tell us?

A: After the war, I had various jobs, the bo – the first – the first job I had was a manual job, polishing – buffing the metal.

Q: Okay.

A: Brushing – buffing the lipstick casings. So th-that was work. It was di-dirty work. Then I worked in textile, and after I st-studied here and completed my studies in University of **Connecticut**, I – and then in **New York** University Business School, then I worked for the government. I worked in the postal service as an economist, making analyses of new equipment, of new buildings, economic analyses in that field, and worked until I retired. And after that, a short time, I worked in Lithuanian mission at the United Nations, when **Lithuania** became independent. They didn't have any diplomats, and Mr. **Simutas**(ph), who was appointed ambassador at the United Nations, asked me to join his staff.

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Q: I'd like to thank you for participating today. And this concludes the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with **Algimantas Gureckas**, October 14th, 2010. Thank you.

A: Thank you.

End of Tape Five

Conclusion of Interview