United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Adam Szymel
January 25, 2015
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PREFACE

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ADAM SZYMEL
January 25, 2015

Question: This is a **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with Mr. **Adam Szymel**, on January 25th, 2015, in **Westchester Heights**?

Answer: We-Wester – no. **Western Springs**.

Q: **Western Springs**, excuse me. In **Western Springs**, **Illinois**. And first of all, Mr. **Szymel**, thank you very much for agreeing to meet with us today, to share your experiences, to talk about what you and your family lived through during the war. And I will start our interview by talking about events and life before the war, so that we can get a sense of what the world was, and what the world was for you, before it all changed. So, I start at the very beginning. My first question is, can you tell me what was your name at birth?

A: I was given the name of **Adam**, last name is **Szymel**, spelled **s-z-y-m-e-l**.

Q: And do you have a middle name?

A: I don't use it.

Q: Ah, okay. And what was the date of your birth?

A: January 21st, 1928.

Q: And where were you born?

A: I was born in a settlement, it was like a village, of **Berezowiec**.

Q: **Berezowiec**?

A: **Berezowiec**.

Q: And where – where is **Berezowiec** located geographically?

A: It's in the – 27 kilometers from **Nowogródek**, which was the ti – capital of the area.

Q: Okay, and in – geographically within **Poland**?

A: It – it's northeast – northeast part of **Poland**, only about 50 miles from Russian border.

Q: I see. Was it close to **Belarus** then?

A: Wh-What now is **Belarus**.

Q: I see. I see. So, was it also close to **Minsk**, or **Wilno**?

A: **Wilno** was north of us, **Minsk** was due east of **Nowogródek**.

Q: I see. And what ki – **Berezowiec –** did I say it right?

A: Yes.

Q: **Berezowiec**, how large a place was it?

A: There was a – the settlement was – consisted of the soldiers that were given land, which was taken over by the Polish government after the first World War, and it was given to the soldiers that fought for the pr – freedom of the **Poland**.

Q: **[phone ringing]** I see. Can we cut for a bit? **[break]** Okay, so we were talking about how your family came to be in **Berezowiec**?

A: **Berezowiec**.

Q: **Berezowiec**. Were – were they originally from this part of **Poland**?

A: No, my father came from the southern part of **Poland**, used to be called – the area was called **Małopolska**.

Q: **Małopolska**.

A: **Małopolska**. My mother was a l-local girl, my father was a single when he arrived in that area, and – and I guess eventually he met my mother and – and they got married and had four children.

Q: Okay. What was your father's name?

A: **Stanisław**.

Q: And your mother's?

A: **Helena**.

Q: **Helena**. And the names of your siblings?

A: My older sister was **Zofia**, then I came next. My younger sister was **Bogusława**.

Q: **Bogusława**.

A: And my brother, the last one of four was **Zbigniew**.

Q: **Zbigniew**. And tell me, what was the difference in ages? When was your oldest sister born, and when was your youngest?

A: We all are just about two and a half years apart.

Q: Okay.

A: All four of us.

Q: So that mean – meant that she was born in 1925?

A: That's right.

Q: And then your youngest brother was born in 1932.

A: Thirty-two, yes.

Q: Yeah, okay, okay. Tell me a little bit about your father and his background, his – his family. What kind of a family was he born into, and a little of his story.

A: My father was born in **Łańcut**, which is a old Polish town known for the – because the area was populated by very old Polish people, old. And the – there was a beautiful old castle, by Count **Potocki** –

Q: Oh.

A: – fa-family lived there. It's still there, the castle, it's still there, and y-ye – as a matter of fact, when I was in **Poland** in '77, I toured and I visited that castle. My father as a young man was studying to be veterinarian.

Q: Oh really?

A: Yes, but when the war, first World War started, he was taken by Austrian army, and drafted, and he spent a few years on different fronts. But when the Marshall **Pilsudski** form Polish legion, he joined. And from that par – time on, he fought in the Polish army. He's fought i – deep in **Russia**, which is now **Ukraine** and a –

Kiev. He was – he fought under the Marshall **Pilsudski** near **Wilno**. He was ru – wounded a few times. He finished war as a lieutenants in the Polish army, and for his – all the did – deeds, he was given a 424 hectares of the land to be his own.

Q: That's quite substantial.

A: That was a pretty good size farm.

Q: Yeah.

A: But my father wasn't really much of a –

Q: A farmer?

A: – a farmer, so eventually we moved to the – first to the small town, which was – name was **Koralice**(ph). It was five kilometers away from our farm, and then oy – we settled over there. That's where I started my first school – first year of school. My father was very active in the community – life of the community. As a matter of fact, was one time he was the mayor of that town. He was also a co-commander of the reserve – army reserve unit in the area. So like I said, he was very active in the community life of the – of our area.

Q: Now, in **Berezowiec**, so that meant he didn't sell the farm, but did he leased it out or something?

A: No, we – w-we – we – was one time my grandmother, my mother's mother lived on the farm. And later he leased it to the different people that took care of it.

Q: I see. I see, and so had he gone on to higher education when he wa – during – before the first World War?

A: Well, e – I guess this – that was the – he never finished the – he never had a degree e – as a veterinarian, but there was such a shortage of veterinarians that he was – he had a official certificate, that told him that he could practice as a veterinarian, and he did.

Q: And he did, even so.

A: He con – did complete his studies, but – and as a matter of fact, I remember him taking care of whatever the du-duties of veterinarians were.

Q: So he sounds like he was a very active person, to have all of these –

A: He – that he was, that he was, yes.

Q: Yeah. And was he able to choose where the land would be, or was it –

A: No, he was given – it was decided by – by authorities.

Q: I see. I see. And so his family was in a totally different part of **Poland**.

A: Ticote – totally different part of **Poland**. He had a brother that lived in **Lódz**, which is a western part of **Poland**. And of course he had his mother; my grandmother lived with us all the time.

Q: Mm-hm. And di – no other siblings?

A: No other siblings.

Q: Okay.

A: The only other people he had my great-aunts, my grandmother's sisters.

Q: I see.

A: And they lived in **Łańcut**.

Q: Okay. And tell us a little bit about your mother and her family.

A: My mother came from this small town of **Torzhetz**(ph), which was about 11 kilometers from our farm. And my mother's – my mother had a brother and two sisters, but during the first World War, they were evacuated from the – from the area of **Torzhetz**(ph) because there was a very serious fighting going on in the area, and they wound up in a southern part of **Russia** which is now **Ukraine**, and they were never f-for – never permitted to come back to **Poland**. So my grandmother and my mother were the only ones in **Poland**.

Q: Oh my.

A: And it – her sister and two – and her brother were left in, which was **Russia** then.

Q: Was there any communication between them afterwards?

A: Very seldom, very seldom. Sometime there was some letters, but very seldom. Russians were very strict about it.

Q: Mm-hm. Did your mother go to school?

A: My mother si – went to school as a little girl in – in **Torzhetz**(ph) and later in **Russia**.

Q: Oh really?

A: Yes, sh-she – she spoke flu-fluent Russian because of that.

Q: I see.

A: She finished what would be considered like a high school.

Q: That's pretty – you know, for that time, that – in those years, not many people who lived and farmed, you know, had –

A: Yes, yes.

Q: – had the degree of education that your parents did.

A: Yes, I was very lucky on that. And my parents were very strict when it came to our education. And lucky for us, we had all the means to continue our education.

Q: Explain that to me a little bit. From what I under – I've heard in other interviews, is that primary school, up until a certain grade, was it grade seven or grade eight, was public. That is, paid for by the state. Was that correct?

A: That's correct, yes.

Q: Okay. So you attended primary school in which place now, not –

A: **Nowogródek**.

Q: In **Nowogródek**.

A: I – I started **Koralice**(ph) first two s – two grades. And when we moved to **Nowogródek**, third grade. When the war, second war started, I was in the fifth grade, I just finished fifth grade.

Q: Okay. Was your parent – was your family religious?

A: Very much so, very much so, especially my grandmother. She was very religious. As a matter of fact, I used to assist her w-when they were – w-we were going to church, it was my duty to help her, because after all, she was the old lady already, and that was my duty. I – when I was six years old, I started serving mass. I knew Latin.

Q: Oh.

A: I knew Latin mass, and I continued to – until I was quite a bit bigger, older.

Q: So you were an altar boy.

A: I was an altar boy, yes.

Q: Okay. Did you go to mass weekly, or –

A: Weekly, weekly. And sometime during the May – man – month of May, which is month of saints, Mother **Mary**, mother of **Poland**, and we would go even in the evening during the week.

Q: I see. I see. How did – how did your parents values express themselves to the children?

A: Well, the – let me put it this way. On the – our main wall in our main room, there was a cross, and underneath it was a picture of Marshall **Pilsudski**, who my father served under, and that reflects our faith, and our –

Q: Patriotism.

A: – patriotism. That's a – that's – that's – describes it perfectly. My father took part in all kinds of national holidays. I remember him leading parades, riding on a beautiful horse. Boy, was I proud of him.

Q: Oh yeah.

A: He was leading his re-reserve unit, and I was – to me, whatever my father said, that was gospel.

Q: What kind of a person was he?

A: He – he was very wise. He was very smart when it came – as a matter of fact, later, when he was a businessman, he made some very, very smart moves, and we were, because of that, we were pretty well-to-do.

Q: Okay.

A: And then that helped us to be able to attend good school, to have all the necessary material for it. And we were very close, very close, loving family. My parents set example. They were picture of – of loving, caring couple, and the – and

to me, like I said, they were picture of how the family should lo – love and live together.

Q: That's quite a strong foundation.

A: Very much so. It had a big influence on my married life later. My ambition was to have a family unit like my parents had. That was my ambition.

Q: It's wonderful to have such a model.

A: It is.

Q: You know, because then you know that that's something that's realistic, that can happen.

A: Exactly, exactly.

Q: That can be. Were you close to any of your siblings?

A: Well, as the oldest boy, there was a – my father, as a matter of fact, last Christmas before the war, I still remember my father took me, put it on his knees, and maybe he had some premonition what was gonna happen. And he told me, **Adam**, in case there's a such a thing that I won't be able to take care of my family, you're the one that's gonna take over, and it will be your responsibility to take care of your mother, your grandmother and your si-sisters and brother. So remember, it is your responsibility.

Q: Oh my.

A: It – I never forget that. And I never did forget it in my whole life.

Q: Yeah. That is quite amazing.

A: Yes.

Q: It is quite amazing.

A: Maybe he had a premonition that something would happen.

Q: Tell me a little bit about **Berezowiec** as a community, and then you mentioned another place you moved to before **Nowogródek**, and I forgot the name of this place.

A: It was **Koralice**(ph).

Q: **Koralice**(ph).

A: It was a small town, about 6,000 population.

Q: Okay.

A: And that's where I started my first–

Q: School.

A: – school, my first – first grade.

Q: And was your father mayor of **Koralice**(ph), or mayor –

A: **Koralice**(ph).

Q: Okay.

A: **Koralice**(ph), yes.

Q: So, the family lived in **Koralice**(ph)?

A: That's right. We lived there for about, if I am mistaken, three or four years.

Q: Okay, and then you moved to **Nowogródek** from –

A: **Nowogródek**, yes.

Q: And how large was **Nowogródek**?

A: **Nowogródek** was about 20 some thousand people, but it was the capital of the area. It was called **Województwo**, which is like a – well, in a –

Q: A district, or a county?

A: A district, a district, yes, yes.

Q: Okay. And **Nowogródek**, being 20,000 people, what was your father's job there, or role there, what did he do?

A: My father open a butcher store, and also he two other – another part of business, he was doing wholesale supply to army and the government's insti – institutions. So –

Q: So he was able – he got some government contracts?

A: Yes, yes. He had – he was in touch with oh, quite a few of his friends and buddies e – from the war, officers also in the Polish army, which helped him to get some of the contir – contracts, of course.

Q: Yeah.

A: My mother was very helpful. She – she would take care of the – part of the store. She was very good at it, too.

Q: Oh really? Yeah.

A: Oh yes, excellent.

Q: Ye – ye – are you talking about the butcher shop, or the who –

A: Yes, the butcher store – shop, yes.

Q: So, in **Nowogródek**, he was not – he might have been involved in civic life, but in a private capacity.

A: That's right, exactly, exactly.

Q: Okay, okay. But in **Koralice**(ph), he had actually been a government official.

A: That's right, exactly.

Q: Okay. And I want to turn now to another question. In all three places, in **Berezowiec**, in **Koralice**(ph), in **Nowogródek**, can you tell me a little bit about the other people who lived there? Were they all Poles? Were there different nationalities? Give me a sense of the populations.

A: Well, e – the whole area was po-populated mainly by people of the Belarussian origin.

Q: Okay.

A: They spoke language which is very similar to Russian, so later when – when we were in **Russia**, I had the very easy time learning Russian, because I was already exposed to Belarussian language, which is, like I said, is very similar.

Q: Yeah.

A: There were a lot of Jews in our area, lot of Jews. Most of the businesses, stores, were owned by Jews in the area.

Q: In **Nowogródek**?

A: In **Nowogródek**, in **Koralice**(ph).

Q: And **Berezowiec**?

A: **Berezowiec**, no.

Q: Okay.

A: **Berezowiec** was strictly Polish, and ex-army people. Soldiers.

Q: So tell me, how large, population-wise, was **Berezowiec**?

A: Population, I would say it had about eight farms.

Q: Oh, so small.

A: It was small yes.

Q: Small. Small. It was small.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: So you – about eight families that lived **Berezowiec**.

Q: Yeah. So it sounds like it was a new village.

A: Exactly, exactly.

Q: Did it have a church?

A: No, as a matter of fact, we did not have a church, we had to travel to **Koralice**(ph) –

Q: I see.

A: – five kilometers to – to go to church.

Q: Okay. Were there – were there Ukrainians, or –

A: No, no, there were no Ukrainians. Belarussians were the only ones.

Q: No Lithuanians?

A: No – well, there were few in **Nowogródek**, there were some Lithuanians. And, as a matter of fact, there were some Muslim **Tatars**. There were – they had their own mosque, and there's even a street named **Tatar Street**. They – most of the people, or they grew vegetables and supply vegetables to the whole town.

Q: Oh really?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: They were known for being fantastic –

Q: Vegetable growers.

A: – vegetable growers, yes.

Q: Wow. Was the land good in this part of **Poland**?

A: Very good, very good land. And **Nowogródek** was the very old town, and center of it had the ruins of the old castle, which was a castle built by the Lithuanian princesses in the f – 12 - 14 century, because that part was part of **Lithuania**, which at that time was a huge country, which was in s – with the ties to **Poland**, as the one big country. We were **C**rown(ph), and **Lithuania** was **Porgoyn**(ph), or **C**hase(ph). Was called **C**hase(ph).

Q: **C**hase(ph)?

A: **C**hase(ph). **Porgoyn**(ph).

Q: **Porgoyn**(ph), okay.

A: In – in the **[indecipherable]** of the countries, we had a – **Poland** had a crown, and **Lithuania** on a beautiful horse, a knight on the blu – beautiful horse.

Q: Oh, yeah.

A: That's – that's – that was the – for – for what I remember, the – the –

Q: The symbols.

A: The symbol of the – our joint country.

Q: Yeah.

A: And we were biggest country in the whole **Europe** at that time, when it comes to the territory.

Q: So you're talking about three, 400 years ago, something like that? Or more than that?

A: No, this was in the – up to th – about 17th century.

Q: Okay.

A: And then it fell apart.

Q: Mm-hm. So these are things that you were studying, and learned in school?

A: Exactly. And to me, like I said to you before, Lithuanians to me were also – always our brothers, our close brothers. And I hope one day it's gonna be the same again.

Q: Thank you for that. The – the – I wanted to find out more then, about the languages that you stu – did you study other languages in school?

A: Yes. At that time it was very popular to li – to learn German.

Q: Okay.

A: By the way, my father spoke fluent German.

Q: Well yes, because of the –

A: Because th – he was in the Austrian army, and also the higher education in **Poland** at that time was influenced by German language.

Q: Did – so your mother spoke Russian.

A: My mother spoke Russian and Polish.

Q: And Polish, and your father spoke German and Polish.

A: And Polish, li-little – litter ger – little Russian, just very little.

Q: Okay. Was he able to understand Yiddish then, from the other shopkeepers?

A: Oh, of course, yes, of course, of course, because Yiddish is just a version of German.

Q: Okay. And did you – did he have any interactions with some of the Jewish businessmen and shopkeepers?

A: Some – some – some business, they done some trading, let's put it this way, some trading. But Jewish had a very, very big influence on the trade in whole **Poland**, the very big influence. So, there was no way of doing any business with them.

Q: Okay. So, okay. And in the local area then, when he had his wholesale company, and the butcher shop and so on, would these have been the enterprises through which he would have had these contacts?

A: Of course, yes, of course, yes.

Q: Okay. Did – when you went to school, what was the population like in the classrooms?

A: Well, we were in the classroom, there were anywhere up to 30 to 35 students.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: We were lucky, we had excellent teachers. We had excellent teachers that really knew their trade. And it was jes – lest – rest of it, it was up to us to learn. And the discipline was very strict, very strict. I know if I got punished for the teacher for don't doing something right, or doing something wrong, my father would punish me a –

Q: Again?

A: – again, for – for doing just that. So I – normally I didn't complain about mistreatment by the teacher, you know, because I didn't want to be –

Q: You didn't want to get –

A: – punished second time –

Q: Yeah.

A: – yeah, yes. But lucky for us, most – my sisters, my brother, we were all doing real well in school, thanks God.

Q: Do you have any – any particular memories of, you know, some parts of your childhood that stand out, either from family life, or school life, or –

A: I have two examples. First one, I was in the first grade, and we were at the recess, and we were playing, and in the yard, and i-it was right in front of the – the

headmaster's office. I don't know what's cause it was – the cause of it, but I tried to show my – my classmates how well I could throw a rocks. And I did throw it at the tree. I wanted to hit the stem – trunk of this – of the pine tree. I missed, but I didn't miss the window that was behind it to my – to my headmaster's office. Now, he was a friend of my father's.

Q: Oh, that's too bad.

A: And as a matter of fact, when the recess was over, we were in the class, the headmaster came to the – our class, and he's asking, who was the one that broke his window, and everybody pointed – pointed to me, all the kids pointed to me. But I wouldn't admit it. I would not admit it. It wasn't me, it wasn't me, I was crying, and I was in the first grade.

Q: Yeah, you –

A: I was crying, but I wouldn't admit it. Lucky for me, the – the headmaster didn't tell my father about it. Otherwise I would have been –

Q: In big trouble.

A: – in trouble too.

Q: Yeah.

A: There was another instance where it was pretty scary, when the yard of the house where we lived in **Nowogródek** was a well, the one that you crank and l-lower the

bucket into the well, and then crank it up. Well, it just happened that th-there was a – I don't know how, but few buckets got lost, they det-detached from the chain and – and fell into the –

Q: Into the well.

A: – well. We had a young man working for my parents, he was about 16 years old, and he talked me into lowering down into the well.

Q: Yourself?

A: To – to – to – to withdraw those buckets. So what he talked – I was out – I was about 10 years old then. I climbed into the bucket and he lowered me to the well. About halfway there, the crank loosened up. The crank that the chain was –

Q: Right.

A: – wound on, and I slid, I fell down all the way into the well. Lucky that there were some –

Q: Buckets.

A: – buckets, because I was standing on them, and I was about waist deep in water.

Q: Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness.

A: It – h-he tried to secure the drum on the – on the crank, and he would pull me up few feet, and I'd drop again. It took about half an hour, and finally the neighbor happened to come and – to come by, and both of them pulled me out of the well.

And I – I remember perfectly, looking up and seeing just a little – little opening, skylight from – from the bottom of the well. Wound up with a wet pants, some few scratches on my knees and my elbows. But except being scared, there was no –

Q: Did you bring the buckets up?

A: No, no, the buckets left **[indecipherable]**

Q: It must have looked like a very deep well.

A: It was, and it was very scary.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah. That was one of the – the exciting things that happened in my childhood.

Q: That's what happens when there's – you know, those are the things you remember when –

A: Oh, exa – exactly.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: When – now I'd like to get another thing a little bit clear in my mind. When you're talking about pulling up water from the well, this is when you lived in **Nowogródek**, yes?

A: **Nowogródek**, yes.

Q: So the family had moved from –

A: **Koralice**(ph).

Q: **Koralice**(ph) to **Nowogródek**.

A: **Nowogródek**.

Q: And no longer had any residence in **Koralice**(ph)?

A: No.

Q: All right. The ha – where you lived in **Nowogródek**, did you own the house?

A: The who – the who – the one that was – had the well, we didn't, but we did a year – we moved, only about a couple of streets away to our own big house, with the big lot, big area, we had fruit trees on it.

Q: Oh wow.

A: And oh, it was wonderful house.

Q: Mm-hm. Was it – describe it to me a little bit. How was it built, how is –

A: Well, it wa – that time most of the houses in **Poland** were b-built from the logs, trimmed, nicely trimmed, painted and we had how many rooms? We have five rooms, which was a big kitchen and my father designed it himself. Big kitchen. My mother had a old i – the luxuries of the time, that she can imagine in the kitchen. And the heat was supplied by the wood – wood burnki – wood burning fireplaces. There were two of them in the house. And the yard was like I said, there was a

orchard, there was fruit trees, and then we had the huge barn, which – where our horses there – we didn't have a cars.

Q: Well, that's one of my questions, I'll ask about it.

A: No cars, we had a horse-drawn carriages. And we always had a couple dogs wu – they – that's where – yard dogs. And we always had a little young lady that worked –

Q: Helped your mother?

A: That helped my mother, and usually we – were two men that worked with my father.

Q: Mm-hm. Okay. So it – it does sound like a rather well-to-do set up.

A: Well, yes, we were – like I said before, we were pretty well-to-do for the time.

Q: When you talked about the appliances, or the – the kitchen being, you know, as modern as whatever the times offered, did that include electricity?

A: The – no, it was wood bur – wood burning stove.

Q: Okay.

A: But – but it was – you even had a si – area where you could bake – bake bread. And there was a kettle built in next to the fireplace, where there was always a hot water with a faucet that you could do – you – for washing dishes **[indecipherable]**

Q: So you had running water?

A: No, those – we had to bring the water from the well.

Q: Ah, okay, and this one you didn't climb in.

A: No, I did not. I learned my lesson.

Q: Well, this – again, this is one of the questions that I – I usually ask to get a sense of development in a place. Were there many automobiles in **Nowogródek**?

A: Very few, very few. We had the bicycles.

Q: Okay.

A: We had bicycles, yes. And our house was located across the street from our sports – **Nowogródek** sports stadium. So I could sit in the attic, open the window and watch –

Q: The games?

A: – all the activities that were being run on the – on the sports stadium.

Q: Talk about location, location, location.

A: And that's where I learned how to play soccer, which turned out it was very useful for me in the future.

Q: Okay. Okay. It sounds really idyllic, you know.

A: Well, it was a good life. Real, real happy childhood life.

Q: Were – did anybody have a radio?

A: Oh yes. We had radios.

Q: Okay, you had radios.

A: Very simple, very simple radio.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Yes.

Q: And wh – how did most people get their information for – about the wider world?

A: Newspapers.

Q: Newspapers.

A: Newspapers were the – the most popular, local and national newspapers. We used to get both, local and the national.

Q: So which – what were their names, the newspapers?

A: "**Kurier Krakowski**," that was inter – that was national. I remember because there were some funny stories in there.

Q: For children?

A: For children, yes.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And local, I don't rem – **Nowogródek Kurier**. **Kurier Dovagrutski**(ph).

Q: Mm-hm. So most people would get – if there was information, it came in through the newspaper.

A: That's right. Of course, radio too.

Q: With 20,000 people, what – how did the town live economically, what was its main – I say motor, driving force?

A: Well, I don't really – I don't really – I know there was a huge slaughterhouse, which employed quite a few people. And wer – of course, center of the c – the city was all stores, all different kinds of stores, and schools. There were three schools, grade schools. Two high schools. There was a – like I mentioned the – the ruins of the castle, and there was also an area where was w-w-w – greatest Polish poet, **Adam Mickiewicz**, who – who was born and th – and raised in **Nowogródek**.

Q: Really?

A: **Adam Mickiewicz**.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And there was a area where we had a – like a build up corp – we call it **kopiec**, whi-which was **Adam Mickiewicz kopiec**. We –

Q: So what was that, like a mound, or –

A: A mound, yes.

Q: Of stone?

A: No, it was a walk that you could walk all the way to the top of it.

Q: Oh.

A: Mound.

Q: Okay.

A: **Adam Mickiewicz** mound.

Q: Oh wow. I didn't realize that that's where he was born and raised.

A: Yes.

Q: I see.

A: And he lived up there, yes.

Q: I see.

A: And here – there was a museum, **Adam Mickiewicz** museum, too. I used to go by it when I was going to school, right – ri – and of course, I had to visit it, too.

Q: So, tell me too, a little bit about his – historical things. **Berezowiec** was a new village, a new settlement –

A: **[indecipherable]** yes.

Q: – because it was land that was granted to soldiers who had fought for Polish independence.

A: Yes.

Q: What about a ke – I mean, I remember **Berezowiec**, I remember **Nowogródek**. The second –

A: **Koralice**(ph).

Q: **Koralice**(ph). **Koralice**(ph). Had – had **Koralice**(ph) been a Polish village, or a Belarussian –

A: Mixed, it was mixed Belarussian and Polish. It was mic – about half and half I would say.

Q: Okay. And the same for **Nowogródek**.

A: Pract – except there was a – a lot of Jews.

Q: A lot of Jewish people too.

A: Jewish – Jewish people in **Nowogródek**.

Q: Okay. So, but these are people who are not new. They had been there for generations.

A: For gener – yes, yes, they were generations.

Q: Okay. Was this part of **Poland** that I have heard called the **kressi**(ph)?

A: Exactly.

Q: Okay.

A: **Kressi**(ph) were the eastern borders – borderlands, you could call it, the eastern borderland of **Poland**.

Q: Okay. And does **kressi**(ph) mean border?

A: Sort of – yes, very loose description of a border. Borderland.

Q: Borderland. And were the towns and the places on the borderlands much more mixed, as far as the different ethnicities?

A: Exactly.

Q: Okay.

A: Exactly. On the south of the borderland were the main town of **Lwów**. It – that area was populated by the Ukrainians and Poles

Q: Okay.

A: Usually the villages were Ukrainians, towns were Poles

Q: I see. And that had been for generations.

A: For generations, yes.

Q: Okay. Did you ever travel west to visit your father's relatives, who were still in the western part?

A: No, not – not really. My sister, my older sister, she already did some traveling, but I was a little too small for it.

Q: And in general, did ever – anybody ever travel, let's say, to **Warsaw**, or to other large towns, or did you pretty much stay in the same area?

A: We – my father, he used to travel a lot. And first of all, they had conventions of the – the soldiers' conventions, spre – specially from the legion of – Marshall **Pilsudski's** legion. So he used to – every year he used to have a convention that he

used to travel. Sometime he would take my mother, then my grandmother was in charge of our brood. So my father did – I was my – like I said, my older sister did travel some se – west – western part of **Poland**, but I did not. I – maybe 50 – hundred kilometers from **Nowogródek**, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: That was about it. I never even got to **Wilno**.

Q: So – I lost my train of thought for a second. It'll come back.

A: You're doing a good job.

Q: Oh, thank you. So are you, so are you.

A: Thank you.

Q: In – in **Nowogródek**, did the larger questions of, you know, the politics of the times, did they – did people talk about these things, like what was going on nationally, what was going on in **Germany**, what was going on in **Russia**, things like that?

A: Very much so. Very, very much so. Especially **Germany**.

Q: Okay.

A: Especially **Germany**. Russians – with **Russia** we did have some, because there were some people that's – woulds tried to escape from **Russia** and then eventually wind up in our town. So we knew very much so what was happening in there.

Q: Oh really?

A: Oh yes, we – we – we were pretty well informed on that.

Q: Tell me again how far from the border –

A: It was 50 – 50 miles. Wer – about 70 some kilometers.

Q: So that's pretty close.

A: That's pretty close, yes.

Q: And what were some of the things that you were hearing about from **Germany**, that people talked about, and then we'll talk about the people who escaped from **Russia**.

A: Well, **Germany** at that time already, were – of course there were pretty strong nations, pretty stor – strong country. And they were already trying to get some of the territory that belong and was given to **Poland** in peace talks after first World War, which separated **Germany** from east **Prussia**, they – but also gave **Poland** access to **Baltic Sea** –

Q: So t

A: – which was a very important terri – territory to **Poland**, but Germans wanted that part for them, so they have – so they'll be connected to east **Prussia**. And **Germany** was threatening **Poland** with the aggression and – and I remember hearing about – about it in my parents' discussions, my parents' friends'

discussions, that the ri – the Germans were threatening all the time to – marching to that part of **Poland**.

Q: So this would be territory that was along the **Baltic Sea**, the coastline?

A: I-It was – it was – if you know the area, it **[indecipherable] Gdansk**.

Q: **Gdansk**?

A: And **Gdynia**.

Q: **Gdynia**.

A: Gre **– Gdansk** was the free town, which meant that it was – that didn't belong to any nation, no – not Polish, not German, it was a free town. That's one –

Q: That's a very unusual construct.

A: It was –

Q: Excuse me, can we stop for a second? Would you like some water.

A: I would love **– [break]**

Q: So, we're talking about the territory that – that **Germany** wanted, and the, I guess, administrative status of the free city of **Gdansk**, which is called **Danzig**, I believe, in German.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. So they wanted the city, and –

A: They – they wanted the city, and the rest of the east **Prussia**.

Q: Okay.

A: Which was a – quite a big – big territory, which was ruled by Germans, and they wanted to connect it to the main German territory, and this piece of land separated – separated east **Prussia** from main **Germany**, but it gave **Poland** access to the **Baltic Sea**, which is very important for the modern nation to be able to exist from the country to the rest of the world.

Q: To have a coastline, yes.

A: That's right. Well, the – the trades – the – the shipping is very important for the well-being of the nation.

Q: Mm-hm. And as a result of World War One's outcome, it had been land that was then –

A: That was th – assigned to **Poland**.

Q: Okay.

A: And we call it **po morze**, which means, close to the sea.

Q: So this – these types of events, they were taking place, what time was it, the mid-1930s, the early 30s, the late thir –

A: This was the la-late 30s.

Q: The late 30s.

A: That's right.

Q: And – and the conversation between your parents and amongst other people often was about these questions.

A: Exactly, exactly.

Q: Okay. What did people say about **Hitler**, for example, and the Nazi party? Was that a separate conversation, or intertwined?

A: As a matter of fact, we were very well aware what he was doing, and as a matter of fact, lot of people were predicting da – what would happen in the future, that there has to be a – the wa – second World War with the **Germany** being the aggressor.

Q: So people were talking that **Germany** will start a war?

A: Exactly.

Q: Wa – how – how much information, and how much focus was there, in the circles that your parents moved, and so on, about **Germany's** policies to Jews in **Germany**?

A: That we were not really aware of.

Q: Okay.

A: We were not aware of what was happening there. As a matter of fact, I think no – not many people in the world knew about it. **Germany** were pretty quiet, pretty quiet and – about what they were doing to Jews at that time.

Q: Did news of **Kristallnacht** reach **Poland**?

A: I couldn't really tell you, I fir – I – I know what it is.

Q: Yes.

A: And I know when it happened, but I only know it from the future.

Q: Okay.

A: But not from the – my childhood.

Q: Okay, okay. Because I wonder how the Jewish population in **Nowogródek** was responding and talking about this. You might not know about that if you weren't in – you know, didn't have that many contacts.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah. All right, let's turn now eastwards. You say that, you know, being so close to the Soviet border, there were people who would try to escape, and sometimes succeeded. What was the kind of news that they brought with them, about what was going on in the **Soviet Union**?

A: Well, I – I have a very well – very good information when it comes to that, because as a matter of fact, one of the men that worked for my parents escaped fr- from communist **Russia** through the borders and he worked for us.

Q: What was his name? Do you –

A: **Alexand** – no, **Antek**(ph).

Q: **Antek**(ph).

A: Which was **Anthony**.

Q: **Anthony**.

A: **Anthony**. I don't remember his last name, but I remember he – he was a terrific guy. He spent a lot of time playing with my brother and myself. He lived in our house and he worked for my parents. Very good man. He had experienced some tortures even, in – in **Russia**. He was accused of being a spy, and I don't remember now how it happened that he escape, but he did escape from **Russia** and –

Q: Did you – did he ever say where – where he was from, was he born there, or something?

A: No, or if he did, I don't remember.

Q: Okay.

A: But I remember him as a very good, very, very honest, hard-working man.

Q: Okay. And what other kind of news did you hear about what was going on in the **Soviet Union**?

A: Not really much more, because they were very, very – not publicizing at that time, what was happening, and there was no contacts with any of the people. There were no contacts at all. As a matter of fact, my mother and my grandmother had very little contact with their own family in – in – in **Russia**.

Q: Did people know about the famine that was in the **Ukraine**?

A: Where – at that time, I did not. Of course, I knew later, but at that time I didn't know about it. Don't –

Q: This – yeah. One of the reasons I ask this is that – is just it's, in today's world, when we're talking in 2015, it sounds almost inconceivable, that with our means of information and communication, that we wouldn't know what's going on in a country that's next to our own, because you find out so quickly.

A: Well, Russians, who had a clamp on everything, on – on – on whatever was happening, the government had a clamp on it. The propaganda came right from the main – from **Moscow**. There people are not allowed to listen to radio. Of – what they were reading in the papers was written by the government. There was no free speech, there was no free publicity of any that kind. So there was very little knowledge of what was happening coming out, out of **Russia**.

Q: Yeah. Were there different political parties in **Nowogródek**?

A: Oh yes, of course. That's – Poles are known for it. There is – as a matter of fact, I remember saying that it-it – that if they – you have three Poles together, you have at least three different parties, political parties.

Q: Yeah.

A: Poles are known for that. Everybody is – has his own opinion.

Q: Did your parents have a particular bent, or a particular political point of view within Polish politics?

A: I guess so. Well, to m – to us, whatever Marshall **Pilsudski** said, that was a – that was it.

Q: Okay.

A: It was a ru-ru-rule that has to be good, because he was a great man.

Q: So he was the authority.

A: He was the authority and to, he was – he died in ’35, and we cried. I remember we cried when he died.

Q: When you said your father served in his legion –

A: Yes.

Q: Is that correct? How did he – I want to get a sense of, was he close to him personally?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No, he was – he was just his leader.

Q: Okay.

A: He was his leader.

Q: Okay. So –

A: He – he – at – at one time, he was practically a dictator. That's how strong a rule he had over **Poland**. But he was one of the good e – good dictators, which done very – done a lot of good things for **Poland** at that time.

Q: In the late 30s, of course, as you say, there was talk of war. Do you remember what the summer of 1939 was like, what you were doing?

A: Well, yes, the international situation was very on the edge, very s – on the edge, as you – Germans were pressing more and more for that territory, and threatening, and **Poland** had a problem, because for practically 150 years, **Poland** as a nation, as a country in **Europe** did not exist. It was not on the map of **Europe**. It was divided into three parts. Parts of **Russia**, parts of **Germany**, parts of **Austria**. Those countries tr – took advantage of **Poland's** production, they – they milked **Poland** to death, taking advantage of everything. So, from 1920 to 1939, it wasn't even 20 years that **Poland** was a free country, taking care of its own. So we didn't – we were not prepared for any kind of war. We were – **Poland** was building schools, road, bridges, railroads. We were not prepared for the war, and it – but war was on the – on the horizon.

Q: That summer, did you – were you at home, were you on – in vacation, where – what were you doing right before the war started?

A: Well, w-wer – we – it was just over the summer holidays. S-Sc-School was started over in 1939, w-we just started to school when the war started.

Q: Were you in school when it started?

A: Well –

Q: Do you remember where you were?

A: – no, we were – we were at home. As a matter of fact, wa – was – what I remember distinctly, we had two beautiful German Shepherd dogs. They were young dogs, they're guard dogs. And from the early morning, they were howling. They were howling, and we didn't know what happened until we heard on the radio that **Germany** attacked **Poland**. And that wa – so, very early in the morning on the 19 –

Q: September first, yeah.

A: Th-Th – oh – that was September, right?

Q: Mm-hm, September first.

A: First, that **Germany** attacked **Poland**. Within the next day, my father got his orders to report to the town of **Zhest**(ph), where there was a big **Polish** army unit.

Q: And where is **Zhest**(ph)?

A: **Zhest**(ph) was the ep – west of – west of **Nowogródek**. It divides – it's right on the river, and it's – it was like a fortress in the years past, and there was a thi –

that's where my father was assigned to. He was reporting – had to report to his unit over there. I remember he li – leaving the town. We cried. I remember he went to his bedroom, and on the wall there was a picture of Holy **Mary**, and he cried.

Q: He cried.

A: Because he had to leave his family. And I hold his – I was holding his hand, and I wa – cried with him. And he – we took him to the bus, he took a bus to **Zhest**(ph).

Q: Hm. It's interesting. What do you think the dogs were howling at?

A: I don't know how, they had a feeling that some – some – something was happening. And I – it was scary. It was really scary.

Q: What happened after that?

A: Well, lotta – lotta young people were drafted right away. They had to report to his – to their military units. And within a few days, there was a – there were a couple instances where German planes flew over **Nowogródek**, but they – they didn't drop a single bomb.

Q: So, did you continue going to school?

A: Yes, we continued going to school. Within about 10 days, my father came back. Let's face it, my father was in his lates – late 40s. There were, in the unit that my father was assigned to, there were a lot of young officers that were very well

prepared. My father was an old man already, considered in those times. So he was put on a standby and came home, in the uniform, and –

Q: That must have been a relief.

A: Well, for us it was a – oh God, it was a real wonderful surprise. But it didn't last long because on the 17th of September, Russians march into **Poland**. Of course, we didn't know at that time that they – what they had the agreement with **Germany**, that as soon as **Germany** attacks **Poland** from the west, Russians will attack **Poland** from the east. Our forces were fighting as hard as they could to keep ra – Germans from marching far into **Poland**, but eventually they did get all the way to **Warsaw**, to capital. But in the meantime, Russians took over the whole eastern part of **Poland**.

Q: So, if they attacked, or marched in on September 17th, they must have reached **Nowogródek** within an hour.

A: They were second day. They were second day they were in pol – in **Nowogródek**. We couldn't – we couldn't understand some Belarussians and Jews were greeting them. They were greeting Russian soldiers marching into **Nowogródek**, and they were – the orang – Russian army was pitiful.

Q: What do you mean – what do – why do you say that?

A: Neglected – neglected only – the ones on the horses, the horses were – some of them were like skeletons. People were dirty in the – I could – it's hard to explain. We had to c-compare what we were comparing to our soldiers that were really, you know, sharp looking. This was misery. But they were in power, so what can we do? And within a – one day of getting into **Nowogródek**, the terror s-started. Russians, with the help of the local communists were arresting policemen, government people, any military, teachers, priests, they were arresting. Pretty soon the local jail was full of our local best – our local people. Of course –

Q: Did you know anybody –

A: Pardon?

Q: Do you – do you know – did you pers –

A: Most of – most of our friends' fathers were in there. And of course, the second say, my father was arrested. And the I – they arrested him in town, but in the afternoon he came home. They – they questioned him and released him, and I remember hearing my parents whispering, talking. My mother insisted that he leaves **Nowogródek** and goes over to the German side, to the town where he is from, where his family was, and my father didn't want to go because he wa – didn't want to leave the family alone. Well, he – he – they didn't have to make a decision, because that night we were already in bed, some of us, some of them were going to

bed. There was a – rifle butts against the doors, banging on the doors. Local Jews – Jew, with a red band just **[indecipherable]** that he was a – one of the commissars that became communist commissar, led three or four, I don't remember now, Russian soldiers with the rifles with bayonets. They took my father, they put the br – put him **[indecipherable]** and marched him, and that was the last time we seen him.

Q: Really?

A: We haven't seen him since. For – for quite a while, it got to be known that if the jail would allow us to be – to give some food parcel or clothes parcel to the people in jail, that meant that the person was still in jail. After about two or three weeks, they stopped taking parcels. That was indication that my father was not in local jail any more. Where, or how, we don't know. We could never, during the war, after the war, we could never find out what happened to him.

Q: Did you know –

A: And du – du – his main sin was that he was active in a community life, that he fought at least Russians in 1920. Russians and Germans practiced the same thing. If you eliminate leaders of the community, it's going to be that much easier to run the community. Well, that was my father's problem. He was active of the – in his community life, so they had to get rid of him.

Q: Well, when they came into the house, did they give a reason?

A: No, no.

Q: No.

A: They searched, of course, they searched the house, and – and –

Q: You say there was a local Jewish person who –

A: There was a local Jewish person that –

Q: Did you know him, did you recognize him?

A: I – I didn't know him personally, my sister insists that she knew who he was.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And – and – but it turn out there were a lot of Jews in **Poland** that were communists, and there were some – there were some **[indecipherable]** people that were communists. And they, of course, right away worked for Russians, worked for communists.

Q: Were there – was there a Polish communist party?

A: There – not legal.

Q: Okay.

A: Before the war, all the communist party in **Poland** was not legal.

Q: Were there any – any Poles who were members of this illegal party?

A: Of course, of course, of course.

Q: Okay. What a terror for your family.

A: Oh God, it was terrible. On top of it, within a couple weeks of arresting my father, Russians authorities came, lived on the edge of the town – and like I said, we had a big house, we had a big barn, they wanted our property, because they wanted to – for Russian people to take to live in there. My mother insisted that we will move if they give us a house to move in. And that's why we did – we were not very surprised when on the 10th of February, 1940, again a Russian officer with a – some soldiers, at night – they always done all those arresting and deporting at night. They – it was the middle of the winter, cold, about a foot or so of snow. They marched to our house and told us to get ready, pick – get ready, pick up whatever you can carry, because you're getting deported.

Q: Was this the same house, or had you moved?

A: No, it's the same house. But we were – we were thought that we were being deported from our house to the other house. We were – we went – we didn't know we were being deported to **Russia**, to **Siberia**. So it was quite a shock.

Q: Oh my. Let's talk a little bit about the months in between. Did you ever go to the prison where your father was, to bring food?

A: My mother used to.

Q: Okay.

A: My mother used to, at least few times a week. Sh –

Q: Had you ever been to this place?

A: Jail?

Q: Yeah.

A: No.

Q: So you didn't know what it looked like?

A: No, no, I didn't. I went by it.

Q: Okay.

A: You know, from the street, I seen the entrance to it, was big –

Q: Was it – was it a city jail, or something?

A: It was a city jail, yes.

Q: And how long was it that your father was held there, you think?

A: Well, we're – as a matter of fact, we were pretty sure that, although they were not taking parcels to him, that he was still there, because there was my sister's friend, my gir – her girlfriend, when she wasn't a – she wasn't deported, so she was there, and she, after the war, she told us that she saw my father about a month – month or so after we were deported, he was being led to the railroad by – with a group of other prisoners, and she knew my father well. And, as a matter of fact, supposedly my father asked her, cause when he spotted her, where are we? What

happened to his family. And of course she said that she told him that we were already deported to **Russia**. And that's what happened. After the war she told us. That's when she told us.

Q: Let's – let's talk about this a little bit more. You say you never found out what happened to your father. That is, in – where – what his destiny was, where he was taken, or anything. Is that – that so?

A: That's correct, yes. We tried, through Red Cross, we – all kinds of institutions that had lists of – of our people that were murdered, in **Katyn** forest, in other areas. We – n-none of those lists have my father's name.

Q: So this –

A: But then, of course, they were – lot of our people, lot of men and women were murdered in the small towns and buried right there, close to it. And some cemeteries were never found out, never opened, never found out where, who was.

Q: Yeah. And did you ever go back to **Nowogródek** after the war?

A: I did not. My brother and my sister did. As a matter of fact, they went to there, to our house, our –

Q: Yeah.

A: – original house. And people were afraid. They thought that they were coming to take over, because there were people living there.

Q: Yeah. What years did they go, or what year did they go there?

A: Oh, this must be about – at least 10 years ago.

Q: So would be like 2005?

A: Yeah, something like that, yeah.

Q: Yeah, so would have been, oh man, 65 years after –

A: Yes, yes.

Q: – afterwards.

A: Yes.

Q: And in 2005 if they were there, then it was **Belarus**.

A: **Belarus**, yes. They flew from **Warsaw** to **Linz**, and then they took a – I think a car, and drove to **Nowogródek**.

Q: And was it feasible, or was it already, you know, no ho – no hope that there might be some information in the municipal records about your father?

A: Nothing, nothing, nothing could be found.

Q: They looked? Or they tried?

A: They – they s – they tried, yes. Nothing could be found of what happened to my father, which is so painful that we still don't know what happened to him.

Q: About – did – was there ever any story about, or any research done on any of the prisoners, or of the – the fact that they were held in this city jail for – you know, the

ja – as you said, the jails filled up so quickly after the Soviets marched in, and what happened to most of the people there.

A: Well, si – you see, the Russians, probably some of the lists of people that they were arrested, and some of the people that they murdered, it j – it just happens that Belarussians do also have lists of people that they arrested. They were arrested in that territory.

Q: Right.

A: And th-they were – for some stupid reason, they will not release that list. So there is possibility that my father could be on that list, but th-th – the – the existing government of **Belarus** will not – not release that list.

Q: Won't – so that's – that's – yeah, I understand. I understand. Before we go to that night where you thought you were being taken to your second home in – or another house, and it turned out not to be the case, tell me a little bit about those months in between, about October, November, December. How did life progress? What was going on with your mother, your – your businesses?

Q: Well, well, the business they took over right away. Within a week they took over the business, and my mother worked for them. She had to work for them, and so it wasn't our business any more. As far as the life, right away there were shortages of just about everything. Even the – such a thing as salt, y-you had to queue – line up

for hours sometime to get some salt. Sugar was hardly ever in the stores. Meat. The only thing that we could get pretty easy was bread, but otherwise, there were shortages of everything.

Q: How do you explain that?

A: Well, Russians were exporting – taking everything into **Russia**. There were trains being loaded and taken into the deep **Russia**.

Q: And of course, supply lines were – were cut.

A: Acor – of course. So – and of course the – the life was miserable. Everybody – the fear – this is the way they run the country, fear. One person against the other. And they, right away that – did that fear took over the whole town. People were afraid, they were li – would – before they would say anything, they would look around if there was anybody listening. Because all you had to do was say something about that you were not pleased what was happening, you can wind up in jail right away.

Q: Did this extend to school, as well?

A: Well, of course, the teachers were our old teachers, but at least once a week we would have to have special classes, where they would try to convince us of what a wonderful country, what a free country **Russia** is, how – how advanced, how – of course, we knew better, even though we were children.

Q: So, what – what happened to that gentleman, you said his name was **Alex**, or **Alexi**, who was working with you – working for your father?

A: Well, he – he left us. As soon as Russians came in, he left. He ma – he was there maybe a couple days and he left. I don't know what – what happened. Maybe he was afraid that they would put him in jail, too, because he escaped from there. But h-he left and ru – I don't recall ever seeing him, or hearing of him again.

Q: Okay. Now I'd like to – I'd like to broach a subject that is a – a painful one, and a very sensitive one, but you – you mentioned that it was a local Jewish communist who came in when – when they arrested your father, and took him away. How – how did people – did people say, uh-huh, the Jews have betrayed us? Was that a sentiment?

A: Exactly. That was the feeling. That was – there were – I wouldn't say they were all – all of them were communists, but there was quite a few of them, and the ones that did it, right away took – took over some th – important position in local government. They – they – quite a few of them.

Q: And –

A: But not all of them.

Q: Were there any people who, let's say were Jewish and well-to-do, who were also arrested?

A: Not – no – not that I know of.

Q: I see.

A: At that time, I di – did not – not that – not that I know of. Could be – could be –

Q: Or deported, for example?

A: Not at that time. Later on I was told that they were, later on, just before **Germany** attacked **Russia**, there were some Russians – some jer – Jews were arrested and deported into the deep **Russia**.

Q: Before the war, how were relations – I mean, many Jewish people say that Poles are very anti-Semitic, or that anti-Semitism was rampant in **Poland**.

A: Well, a lot of it is true, a lot of it is true. But, at the same time, if you know the real life in all the European countries, **Poland** was pretty free **[indecipherable]** as far as the religion is concerned.

Q: Okay.

A: So, whoever – whatever religion you were, you were free to practice it. Before, in the first – 30s, where Nazis took over **Germany**, they deported a lot of Jews to **Poland**, or a lot of Jews came into **Poland** for escape from **Germany** to **Poland**, and they were doing pretty good. But you have to realize that most of the industry, most of the business in **Poland** was in Jews' hands. Jew – Jews had a saying that was very popular, you have the streets, but we have the buildings on them. Which

meant that they – they were in control of quite a bit of industry, quite a bit of – bit of business. Now, there – they were known for being bankers, for – for doing lot of trading and that. And sorry to say, but our average people don't like rich, rich people. And they were – they represented the rich people. So lot of common people were, of course, hateful of them. Wa – but we didn't have any – with Russians were doing those pogroms and that, we de – we didn't have anything like that. But fact was, we didn't like them, yes.

Q: Were there any Jewish kids in your classes at school?

A: Of course, of course. But there were some good Jews, and I have an example. I was going to tell you that later. I will tell you later.

Q: Okay, okay. I know that this is a very –

A: Touchy **[indecipherable]** subject.

Q: – touchy – touchy sensi – it's very sensitive subject, but in – particularly in the areas of the **kressi**(ph), where there were so many different occupations and occupations by – by different forces, armies and – and so on. It was one of the reasons why I was asking you too, wha-what was the make-up of the towns, and the people, and so on.

A: Well, yes, like the – in **Nowogródek** there was a – quite a good sized population of Jews, but then there was also Belarussian and the Poles. It was pretty – I would say it was evenly divided.

Q: Okay. Well, we'll break for lunch right now.

A: Oh.

Q: And come back and talk later –

A: Good.

Q: – for – and take the story forward when –

A: Good.

Q: – after you're arrested. Thank you.

A: Good, good. I'll be here.

End of File One

Interview with Adam Szymel
January 25, 2015

Beginning File Two

Q: Okay, so Mr. **Szymel**, we s – what we see here is a photograph. Tell me who is in the photograph?

A: They're my family. My father, my mother, my grandmother, my older sister and me when I was one year old, practically one year old.

Q: So that means it was taken in 1928.

A: '29.

Q: Oh, 1929.

A: Yes.

Q: And how is it that you came to have this photograph?

A: My parents send it to our relatives in **Poland** at that time, and when we were visiting them after the war, we found it and they made a copy of it, and they – here it is. To me, it's a relic. It's – it's something that I cherish, because that's the only picture of our childhood with our – babyhood, not just childhood.

Q: Is it the only photo you have of your father?

A: No, I have some others.

Q: You have some others.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Thank you. Thank you very much, we can put it to the side now. Okay, before the break, we kind of stopped at the point where in February 10th, 1940, soldiers came to your home again and in the middle of the night, knocked on the door and told you you are going to have to leave. Can you remember how long you had to put your things together?

A: They gave us about a half an hour, they told us that we have half an hour to pack whatever we can carry. And of course, I was – we were being deported from our house. And – now this is the middle of the severe Polish kind of winter, about 25 degrees below zero, but at least a foot of snow on the ground. And middle of the night, we – my grandmother and my brother and my sister, were put on this sled, horse-drawn sled and my mother, my older sister and me, we walked. We walked, and we were taken to the government building, not far from railroad station, and the building was pretty soon being filled up with a family li – just like ours. All the people from **Nowogródek**, most of them women and children, because most of the men were either in jail, or – or gone somewhere. So, this is – this is the first day, first night of our experience, when they were being de – we were being deported to **Russia**.

Q: What did you manage to take with you?

A: Well, most of we – what we tried, was we took clothing, some clothes, because of the fact that it was so cold, winter, and with that, there was hardly anything we could carry. There were a few things that were put on the sled, but otherwise we had to carry everything. So most of it we – we took with us was clothes.

Q: Okay. I-In that government building, you said there were families like your own. Did you recognize any of them?

A: Of course, most of them were friends of our parents, and of us children. And so we knew just about – at least 90 percent of people, they were either acquaintances, or friends of ours.

Q: Then what happened?

A: The next morning – the next morning they packed us – they told us we have to march to the railroad station. When we got there, there was a whole line of freight cars that were prepared for transporting mass people. The way it was built, on each end of the – the freight car, there were shelves, two shelves on each end, where they packed us, about 40 people to each car, which meant that we were to lay down like sardines, you know, one – you know, next to each other, on the mi – in the middle of the – th-the wa – the wagon, there was a coal – there was a cast iron stove, to provide heat. And then on the side there was a hole in the floor of the car, as a – to serve as a toilet.

Q: And that was it.

A: And that was it.

Q: Were there – was there anybody who didn't have – who didn't fit on those two platforms, who was in the middle of the car?

A: No, they were – they were – they were just managed.

Q: Okay.

A: We just managed to be either sitting down, or laying down on those platforms. On this – on the top sides on each side there were small windows, with the crates – with the crates so, you know, nobody could get out.

Q: With grates, mm-hm.

A: And the – of course, the whole train was surrounded by Russian soldiers with rifles, so there was no way to get in or get on of the train. We were totally captive.

Q: Did anybody at any point official, tell you why you had been arrested, or where you were going?

A: Not – not at all, not at all. Nothing, nothing there – there – they wouldn't ask us, they wouldn't tell us, they were just giving us orders, do this, do that.

Q: And the orders were, I take it, in Russian, yes?

A: Of course, ti – only Russian.

Q: Could – could you understand what they were saying?

A: Well, most of it, but if not, my mother would translate it to us.

Q: I see.

A: There were a lot of people that did not understand Russian, but like I say, lucky there were a few people that would translate it.

Q: Okay.

A: There were no Polish, or Jewish, or Belarussian civilians involved in this. This was strictly Russian soldiers that were guards.

Q: Okay.

A: And tha – and that was it.

Q: Okay. Did that little – what place did you have? Di – were you in a bottom platform, or a top platform?

A: No, we were on the very top, on the – on the – on the second level.

Q: And were you able to see out a window, or –

A: Yes, we – we would – we would, you know, if we – if you were next to the side of the – the wagon, or the car, then you could lock out – look out.

Q: And was the win – did the window have glass, or not?

A: Yes –

Q: It did.

A: – it had glass. It was so cold, and with some of the moisture in the air from breathing, all the metal parts eventually were covered with a – ice.

Q: Really?

A: So that's how cold it was.

Q: So that stove didn't do much good.

A: Well, if you were next to it, yes. So we – we had everything that we brought with us, we – were dressed in it. Later, when the doors were closed completely, it wi – it did warm up to the extent that we could take some of the clothes off.

Q: Did you have any food with you?

A: We brought si – very little, very little, but we did bring some.

Q: Were you fed on the train?

A: On the train, once a day, sometime even twice they would bring a bucket of hot water, and a bucket of what they called soup – that's what they called it, it was a – loo-looked like a dishwasher water, and a loaf – couple loaves of bread for the 40 people. That was it.

Q: Oh my. And – and then, when did the train start moving?

A: Very next day. Very next day you started moving through the – we-went through the – **Baranowice**, which was a big railroad center first. It was close to Russian

border. And then next day we crossed the – the border between **Russia** and **Poland**, all border.

Q: How did you know when you got to the border that you were crossing it?

A: Well, we would – we would read the signs. We could read the signs only – also, we would see the miserable view of people. People were dressed in a shabby clothes, in a padded – women and men in the same, with the padded pants and coats, miserable looking people, moving around like robots. And we – you could tell that it was not **Poland** any more.

Q: Did – did you have a sense of what your final destination would be?

A: Well, by that time they did ha – it did come – I don't know how it – it was told us that – we were told we're being deported to **Siberia**, but where **Siberia**, we didn't have the slightest idea.

Q: Mm-hm. Did people get sick on the train journey?

A: Well, not so much physically, but emotionally. There was a lot of crying. There was lot of – most of it was, I would say crying and sobbing from all the mothers that were there with all the small children. It was – the feeling was terrible, terrible.

Q: Did you know the other people who were in your wagon?

A: Ninety percent of them we knew.

Q: Okay, so in this wagon you weren't – you weren't with strangers, you were –

A: No, no, they were – they were – they were – most of them were at least acquaintances. Not friends, but acquaintances.

Q: Yeah. What kind – was there any conversation going on?

A: Oh, all the time, all the time. Comparing notes, com – talking about parts of – people of the families that were not with us, like, you know **[indecipherable]** my father, that were arrested, and some other men that were arrested. There were – there was a lot of talk about it, between the women, especially.

Q: Were there any men on the – on the – in your wagon?

A: There might have been, out of 40, there must have been about two men, maybe. Most of them were older men.

Q: Mm-hm. So that does present a very sad picture.

A: Very sad, very sad.

Q: Did – did – so, but did everybody make it, that is, to the final destination?

A: Well, everybody made it. Our – we were gone from **Poland**, we were moving straight east for about a week.

Q: Okay.

A: You have to realize that we were not a priority, so the train sometime would stop for the longest time on the sidings, and then we'd continue going. And eventually

we arrived in **Moscow**. The reason we knew, because we could see the signs, **Moscow** on the – on – in the station.

Q: Did you see anything of the city?

A: No, absolutely not.

Q: Through the – through the wi – little window? No?

A: No, absolutely nothing. Especially it was winter, everything was covered in snow, and f-from that time on, from **Moscow** our destination changed. We were moving straight north.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: Before we were going east, now we were going straight north.

Q: And how could you tell?

A: Well, we could tell by sun, by – most of it sun, you know, that's we – we changed the direction. And of course the – the – the countryside that we would see through those windows was changing gradually too. There were more snow, more – it was getting colder, and there were more and more forests. And we traveled another two – after **Moscow**, we traveled another two weeks, directly north.

Q: Oh wow. So, it took a long time actually.

A: Totally it took us three weeks on the train. By the time we got to our destination, which we didn't know it was our destination, but the – the name of the town was

Vowogda(ph), which was a big railroad center. And up there we were told to get out of the train, and they put us on a slow horse-drawn sleds. And again, the grown-ups and older children had to walk. Only the smaller and old were riding i-in the sled. And for three days we traveled to our final destination, staying at night, staying at the local schools. And few of them, we could see there was somebody spending nights up there before, most likely people just like us, the deportees, that they were spending nights up there. And thi –

Q: How wa – how was your mother holding out in all of this?

A: My mother was a trooper. She was so strong. She was so – how shall I put it? She – she could practically do miracles. She would, if she had the chance, she would warm up some water for us so we could drink s – warm water. She would divide pieces of bread into few pieces so every few hours we would have a few bites of bread. She was unbelievably strong.

Q: Did – did – did she cry during the trip?

A: Not that I seen here. She was – she wa – she wouldn't allow herself to see us that she cried.

Q: Yeah.

A: She had to keep up the morale, so I never, never seen her cry.

Q: So – and your brothers and – and your brother and sisters?

A: Well, we're –

Q: All four of you were deported, yes?

A: All four of us, oh my – my sister was – by this time she was practically 15. I was already 12, younger sister was 10, and the brother was eight.

Q: So your family was a little bit older, in the sense that there were no infants.

A: No, there were no infants, but on the – in the train, in the car, there were some small babies, yes.

Q: Yeah. And were you amongst those who had to walk beside the –

A: Yes, yes –

Q: – the sleigh?

A: – yes. Each – every time, I was already 12 years old, so I was considered that I could si – take it, take care of it.

Q: And, were you thinking of what your father had said before?

A: Well, not at that time, but after that, when I grew up, many a times it came to my mind what – what he meant.

Q: Because at that time it sounds like your mother was taking the burdens on her shoulders.

A: She – totally, totally. She was in charge. She was in charge.

Q: When you – when did you – where did you end up being your – what ended up being your final destination?

A: Well, on the third day we arrived what – which was a logging camp. There were about five bar – wooden, log barra – barracks, designed for the people that would work f-falling timber – logging. And –

Q: What was the name of this place?

A: The – the name was **Rzhavka**(ph), which took the name from the small river that flow through it. The ri – the name of the river was **Rzhavka**(ph), which means rusty. And the – the reason it was rusty – called rusty, because the water in it was colored of –

Q: Of rust?

A: – rust, yes. From the vegetation that it flowed, the – most of the area were marshes, and the – our camp was on the lower hill, among marshes, right in the middle of virgin forests.

Q: That sounds very pretty, actually.

A: It – it wasn – part of it was beautiful, not just pretty, it was beautiful. The nature can be that way, but it – they – also can be cruel, because of the cold, because of the terrain and whatever.

Q: So your – the – the – settlement that you go to is **Rzhavka**(ph), yeah?

A: Yes.

Q: And they – it's made of – it's comprised of five log cabins?

A: That's right.

Q: So it's a rather small place –

A: It's not a cabin, it's a big building.

Q: Oh, big buildings, okay.

A: Big building, well, I would say the length of my – this, my house, and there be anywhere 30 to 40 people in each building.

Q: So it was like a barracks?

A: It was a barrack, yes. And in – each side had a couple windows in it, and a big stove, and brick stove for heat, and for you – there was some cooking you could cook up there, but it was a big stove.

Q: So di – were – was everybody responsible for their own food, their own cooking at this place?

A: Well, there was – we didn't have t – anything to cook, first of all.

Q: Yeah.

A: So we were rely – we had to rely on what was in the camp. There was a bakery, and there was a, what they called restaurant, where, if you had money, and you had a coupon, you could buy some soup, and of course, you could buy your allowance

of bread. Everybody, every person, child and old people were assigned 200 grams of bread, black bread, which amounted sometime to a couple of slices. We were assigned that much a day, and we could buy it. That – no more, no less, but that was what we could buy.

Q: So, in other words, you weren't given food.

A: No, we had to buy it.

Q: And in the beginning, how did you buy it, if you had no money?

A: Well, we had some money with us.

Q: I see.

A: We brought some money because at that time in – in **Nowogródek**, the – the currency already was Russian dru – ruble.

Q: Okay, let me go back for that, I didn't think of this before. Your family had been well-to-do, and when the Soviets took over, then they nationalized and took away your businesses. But wer – were you given any compensation?

A: No, no, I don't know, but my mother would get paid –

Q: I see.

A: – for her work.

Q: And so that's where she had the rubles from.

A: Well, we also had – it turned out my mother has quite a bit of money. We, among other things we had a beautiful horse. And the young man that worked for us, and he still lived with us when Russians came in, told my mother that he heard, among men, that they were goin – the Russians were going to take our horse away. But he suggested that he – he even had the person that was willing to buy our horse, somebody connected to the Russians, that he would buy our horse. And my mother sold that horse, and she got quite a bit of money for it.

Q: And she took that one you left.

A: And sh – and it turned out, that was the money that saved us in **Russia**.

Q: That's an interesting point. I wanted to – to get a sense of when you had –

A: Yes, we –

Q: – when you took clothes and no food, then you were in a – in –

A: – yeah, I – I – w-we never seen the money, my mother never showed it to us. But I know that for a fact, that she sold the horse, and I didn't know how much she got. Of course, I got to know it later, when we were outside **Russia**.

Q: Mm-hm. So when you first got there, she had a way of being able to buy food for you.

A: Well, it was – you know, whatever was assigned to us. And of course, she got – she was one of the first that she got a job. Her job was to bring water from the river,

that was farther on, not wer – next to our camp, there was a area about a couple kilometers from there, where there was a spring. And she would bring clear water. Sh – what she would have to do is fill the wooden barrels, which were on this wood – on this horse-drawn sled. She would have to go to the – chop the ice, fill ti – with the bucket, walk up and fill up the barrels, and then take it to the bakery, take the water there. Again, dip the water out of the barrels and take it to the barrels inside the bakery. She would do that all day long. It wou – believe me, I helped her sometime, it was a back blake – breaking job. And especially, she used to wear a sack in front of her as a apron. From splashing water and freezing, she sounded like she was a – she was armor, th-the – the ice so –

Q: It would freeze, huh?

A: – freeze, it would freeze. She – but she never gave up, she worked, because she had six mouths to feed.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Your grandmother too.

A: Well, that's right. Well, all of us, were si-six of us.

Q: Yeah.

A: So, she worked very hard.

Q: Was your sister put to work?

A: When my sister turned 16, I believe – anybody over the age of 16 had to work. And lucky for – for her, she got a job in the local nursery, so she took care of little children. At least she didn't have to work in – because the – all the other – and the other industry was logging.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And eventually my mother worked there too. What the de – women would do, when the men felled the trees, the women would chop the branches, and clear the snow so the – the horse-drawn drivers would haul the logs up to main drag, and then big, huge sleds, pulled by the tractors, would dr-draw – would draw those logs to the river, which again in the spring would be floated to the destination whate – whatever it was.

Q: I want to go back to one point, just to make it clear, and it's about the food. That is, you were able to buy food for yourselves if you had the money, but not as much as you wanted to.

A: Only one bre – specially the bread, that was assigned to you.

Q: So in other words, it was rationed, but it wasn't handed out.

A: Exactly.

Q: It was rationed in the sense that you could only get a certain portion.

A: That's right.

Q: And you had to pay for it.

A: That's right.

Q: Okay. And that was with all food?

A: Exactly.

Q: Okay.

A: The – the only thing is, all the time we were there, we never had any – even the smallest amount of sugar. The – n-no butter, no meat. I nev –

Q: So what did you have, what did you eat?

A: Bread.

Q: Okay.

A: Moi – mainly bread. Sometime later, in – when we were already a couple years in **Russia**, in there – well, maybe a year, they allowed f – us to receive parcels from **Poland**. And sometime – my grandmother, sometime some friends – as a matter of fact, we received a package of food from one of the Jews of **Nowogródek** that owed my father some money. And he – he looked into it and found our address where we were at, and send us lifesaving food that we're – I'm still grateful for it. So, like I said before, there were Jews, and there were Jews.

Q: Yeah.

A: Just like there are Poles and there are Poles.

Q: Thank you for that. Thank you for sharing that. Oh, do you remember what it was that was in that package?

A: I think it – most of it was pork belly, which is, to us, was – God, it was –

Q: There's a lot you can do with pork belly.

A: Exactly. Especially when you're starving, a little bit of fat –

Q: That's right.

A: – is – it's a treasure.

Q: Yeah. So, did anyone get sick here?

A: Lot of people. Within a, I would say six months of being in that camp, we started losing some infants, some babies. There was no – women didn't have enough milk to feed the babies, there was no milk to be had. The babies were starving, they were dying. Pretty soon, about a kilometer behind our camp, on a little hill, started appear wood crosses. And after children, little children, the older people started dying. Within a year, we must have lost oh, at least 50 people, older people. Our camp consisted of people from two different parts of **Poland**. Half of us were from **Nowogródek**, and half were from the southern part of where – what was – what is now **Ukraine**, close to the **Lwów**. So there were people from two – two different parts of **Poland**.

Q: In – how large was the camp, population-wise.

A: It was about, I would say, close to 500 people.

Q: Oh, that's a lot.

A: Quite a few. There were, as far as Russians, there was one man, commander – commandant, we called him commandant. And there was one **KGB** man, and one bakers with his family. And there was one Russian i-in th – a woman, which wer – she was in charge of the restaurant.

Q: That's an important position.

A: Very important. The rest of it was Polish people.

Q: And – how – what was their manner towards you, how did they behave towards you?

A: Well, of course, the – the commandant wasn't bad man, but the – but the **KGB**, he was typical communist. To him, the only thing that mattered was his party, his nation, and he tried to convince us that we should be grateful that we wound up in **Russia**. Within about six months, they opened a school, wi-with one teacher, Russian, of course. And everybody, all the children, until 16 years, they had to go to school. And of course, we didn't mind subjects like math and arc – physics, chemistry, or whatever. But of course they also tried to convince us again of the advantages of communist system, which didn't work with us at all.

Q: So how did it – did children just stay silent when this sort of –

A: Well, we – we learn how to go along with them.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Just to get a ga – got along them. They – I – I was already twel – like I said, I was 12 years old, and what happened to me once, sometime we would sit on the bench, couple of our boys, and we sing our Polish national songs. And they through – we were trying to get our teacher mad. And one day he called me in and he told me if I keep it up, nothing may happen to me, but my mother wi – may wind up in – in jail. So of course, we stopped doing that, too.

Q: What kind of interaction was there with the **KGB** men? Like what – what was his – what was his function? How did he – how did he – what was his role in your life? Did he come and just talk to people, or did he –

A: Well, he wanted – he wanted to make sure we were afraid of him.

Q: So how did he ensure that?

A: Well, his manner, first of all, his manner. He would march into to the room, told the kids, sit down. You know, his voice, his manner, and h-he would really rough kind of a talk, let us know that he was in a cha – in charge, he was the boss.

Q: Was there informing going on?

A: Very – if there was, it must have been very little, because we were – pe-people were very, very well in touch with another. If there was, I never heard of any.

Q: Okay. So it wasn't the same sort of situation as even back home, where people started being afraid of what they would say in – in public.

A: No, in the camp – in the camp, wa-wa-wa – it was w-w-wa – solidarity was a main thing.

Q: And, where did these officials live? How did they live?

A: They had their own quarters. There was special barrack. In this special barrack they – the baker has his couple rooms in there, next to the bakery, and so the – the woman that's in charge of restaurant, and the **KGB** and – and the commander was – they had th-their own – their own building.

Q: And you said the commandant was not such a bad guy.

A: No, he – he – he was authority, but he didn't over – didn't abuse it.

Q: Okay.

A: He – maybe he felt sorry for us, of anything.

Q: Okay. And so it was mostly what he didn't do, rather than what he did.

A: Exactly, exactly.

Q: Mm-hm. So, you – it took half a year for you to be in school after you arrived, so what did you do in that half year?

A: Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Absolutely nothing. In the winter, there wasn't much you could do really, because eventually there were either four or five feet of

snow sometime. And in the – you were sometimes so cold that you couldn't even breathe in the cold air, because it was – when you – if you didn't have anything in front of your mouth, you could feel like knives, okay, cutting into your lungs. So you always had to have something in you – in front of your face.

Q: And your mother would work in this sort of situation?

A: Yes, she did. Unless it got to be about – below 40 degrees, then nobody worked. But if it was warmer than that, then everybody had to go work, and men w-worked falling trees, and women doing the rest of it.

Q: Here's a part I don't understand. I understand that she goes to a spring to get water in the summertime, to haul it back up, but in the winter there's all this snow outside.

A: Well, di – di – you had to shovel – you have to shovel the snow wherever you could. Sometime it was like a tunnel between the – on the each side there be about five feet of snow, and you just go. And the roads, with the passing of the sleds, eventually, you know, it was a track that you could go by.

Q: Okay.

A: And of course, the snow lasted about Ma-May – May sometime, middle of May, before the snows would start to melt.

Q: That's a long time.

A: That's a long time. By June, it wer – snow was gone and then summer right away would start.

Q: Would it be hot in summer?

A: Well, I wouldn't say hot, but it was nice and warm, and it's – the beauty of nature up there at that time, everything explodes. Everything grows so fast, I never seen anything grow that fast in that humid, warm air. And as a matter of fact, if it wasn't for nature, I don't know if we would have survived. As soon as it got warm, some – a different kind of mushrooms would appear in the forest. And children – and I was among them, we would spend at least half a day, every other day, picking mushrooms. And later on, all kinds of berries: blackberries, raspberry – wild raspberries. And like I said before, if it wasn't for nature, I don't know if we would have survived. The problem was, we could not preserve any of it for wintertime, so we had to consume it right there. Sometime we would bring a bucketful of mushrooms, cook it and eat it for next couple meals. And that was my job, picking mushrooms, picking berries.

Q: Had you done that at home?

A: Mushrooms, yes, and berries of course, too. But I do – I done it for different reasons.

Q: For pleasure.

A: For pleasure. Here, it was to survive.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And that was the summertime.

A: Summer –

Q: So the – so there was no – like a fence around this settlement. You were allowed to go into –

A: We were allowed, but there were hundreds and hundreds of kilometers of nothing but virgin forest. And we were not in touch with any – eight kilometer from our camp was the – what Russians call was **baza**, which is like a center, gog – government's center, where they control all the activities in the neighborhood, for – where were – they just decided where the logging would be. It was all run by – by Russians, of course. And about 20 some kilometers farther, there were a couple of Russian villages, which at time, we were given permission – we were given the pass, that we could go to those villages and trade, barter for some of the clothes that we brought with us from **Poland** for some food.

Q: And did you?

A: Oh yes, I would go with my mother and carry a sack, maybe oh, 20 – 20 some pounds of flour, or some – some wa – whatever else we could. That helped, of course, sur – to survive.

Q: But other than that, you didn't have any contact with any local people.

A: The – the only other person that I remember, there was a young woman. She was about 18 years old. She was a mail girl, she used to bring our mail from the **baza** to our camp, and she would carry that, pass it on to every barrack. And she was a – a think when we got there, she was a hundred percent communist. She would t – always tell how much she hated us, and for all different reasons that she would give. But be – by the time we were leaving camp, she was our best friend. She would come and pray with us, as a matter of fact.

Q: How did that happen?

A: I don't know how it happened, but she finally came to conclusion that we were the ones who were suffering, and we were the ones that were penalized for no reason at all.

Q: And that was without you telling her so?

A: Well, she became a – one of the friends.

Q: Okay.

A: And I – I – it was like a miracle. She ta – changed her feelings completely. Her name was **Lisa**.

Q: **Lisa**.

A: **Lisa**.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And we – just happened that in our camp was a nun. She was a sister of my father's friend. And Russians didn't know she was a nun. If she – if they did, most likely she would wind up in jail somewhere. But she would have classes, religion classes with us. Boys would stand guard around the barracks, in all corners, and she would talk to children, small children, about religion, about **Christ** and that. And why we were watching, making sure that nobody would spot us.

Q: And nobody did?

A: And nobody did. As a matter of fact, she was saved. She wa – she was – she went back to **Poland**, and she even – she was in charge of monastery later, in one of the Polish towns, and she visited my grandmother when my – my grandmother went back to **Poland** from **India**.

Q: Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness.

A: Yes. We called her sister wi – not so much sister, as **ciocia**, which means aunt.

Q: What was her name?

A: Sh – God. Last name was **Petrowski**(ph).

Q: **Petrowski**(ph).

A: **Petrowski**(ph), but i – I don't remember her – her monastery's name. I don't remember that.

Q: It's okay. So summertime was a reprieve from the cold.

A: Oh God, it was. But you have to realize, our clothes, my first year, were in shreds. I – my older sister and I had one pair of shoes –

Q: Between you.

A: – between us. W-Walking in the woods barefoot, is sometime even dangerous. My – my whole everything, pants, jacket, everything was in shreds. We happened to receive a parcel from **Poland**. I don't remember who it was from, but whoever sent it, wrapped it in a piece of cloth. My grandmother says, **Adam**, I'm going to make you a pair of pants from it. And she did. She sewed it by hand, can you imagine that? And she made me a pair of pants. There was one problem with it.

Q: What was that?

A: On my seat, there was a permanent marker's address. I – I had la – I had to su-sur-survive lot of ho – laughs –

Q: Teasing.

A: – lot of kidding from the other kids, because I had a address right on my –

Q: On your seat.

A: – my butt.

Q: Oh man, I just had another question about this, and – let me think. Clothes – hygiene.

A: Oh God, it was – there's such a thing as Russian bath, where they not only bathe, it's a steam room, and next to it is the place where they put all their clothes that they take off, and it's so pr – it's so hot up there, that it's supposed to kill all the lice –

Q: Did it?

A: – because, let's face it, in the conditions that we were in, no soap, no soap, you just wash with water. The pi – oh – only laundry you could do was in the water without any soap, and lack of clothes breeds all kinds of filth, lice among them. So my mother had a routine. Every couple days we had to strip, and we would look through our clothes, killing all whatever was moving.

Q: Oh my. Oh my.

A: It's terri – yo-you don't – people that didn't go through it, don't realize what a hell it is.

Q: Not to be able to do something as simple as have some soap, and wash.

A: Exactly, exactly.

Q: And – but i – was this called a **banya**(ph)? These – these –

A: **Banya**(ph), yes, yes.

Q: Mm-hm, so it's something like a sauna.

A: Ec – exactly, exactly. And the Russians are very proud of it. To them, it's a part of civilization. And they were saying that, what kind of civilized **Poland** it was that they did eve – da – didn't even have the lice – lice killing equipment.

Q: Well, yeah.

A: So we're not civilized to them.

Q: No lice, no equipment.

A: No equipment.

Q: I talked about – so we talked about hyg – what about, in the forest, were there ever any little animals?

A: This was a part of it that still, you know, I still – when I remember it, comes to my mind. Normally you would expect to have some wolves, bears. There were none. There were totally none. The – the smallest – the animals that I seen were weasels. And of course, you couldn't even come close to, they were so fast. The only other thing th – as a kid, I would try to do some fishing, and sometime with the success, which meant that we had a feast.

Q: That evening, yeah.

A: That evening, I would catch a catfish about this size, and God, that was a feast.

Q: That's like about 18 inches, 20 inch long catfish.

A: Yes, it was, yeah.

Q: Yeah, even two feet.

A: And I caught it few times.

Q: And how – without a fishing rod?

A: Well, we would – we would take a sack **[indecipherable]** sack, put it on the sticks, make it like a netting of it, and w-w – drag it around bushes or whatever in the water, and try to chase it. And sometime we were lucky enough that the fish would j – flow into it.

Q: Into the sack, okay.

A: Into the sack, yes.

Q: Were there ever official meetings that were held for the entire settlement, that you had to go to, or anything?

A: No, no, never – never had one.

Q: Okay.

A: But the – the – the only time would be individual barracks –

Q: Okay.

A: – that will be a – you know, the – the – especially the **KGB** man.

Q: So he would come in and hold a meeting for the whole barracks?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And what would he usually talk about?

A: Well, about the success and – and li – of **Soviet Union**, of communism, of the future is only with them, and all that kind of stuff.

Q: Was there a radio in the camp?

A: No.

Q: Were there newspapers that were ever delivered?

A: No, we-we – yes, but very few, because Russians would use the newspaper to st – to roll their cigarettes with.

Q: Oh really.

A: Yeah, that's what they used.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So, but sometime we would get maybe, you know, week old newspaper, or some –

Q: How often would there be visits to the settlement from the outside? Like the post girl, would she come once a week, or –

A: She would co – she would be about couple times a week, yes.

Q: Couple of ti – was this about the only communication that there would be with somebody?

A: Well, except the – some of the people worked in the – that **baza** place, they would be in touch with some Russians up there, but otherwise, there were very few Russians that would come to the camp.

Q: So it – it really gets – it sounds like you were very remote, and quite isolated.

A: Totally – totally remote. Totally remote. And even to – the only place we could go without permission, which were – without the pass, was to the **baza**. And farther on, to the villages, we would have to have a stri – slip of paper, pass, that we could go, and th-the signing when we have to leave, and when we have to come back. And Russian people – excuse me, the older people, when they made sure that nobody is listening, they would made the sign of cross, and tell us how they believe in God, and how they feel sorry for us. But the young people, they were telling us that w-we deserve wherever we get in.

Q: Really?

A: The communists was – they were through and through communists.

Q: Isn't that interesting, that an older generation saw through that, wasn't convinced of it.

A: Absolutely. And ee – the – some of them even had the holy pictures hidden somewhere. And when – again, when nobody was looking, they would show it to us.

Q: This would be when you would be going to trade, or something like that?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Would you like some water?

A: Maybe a little while.

Q: Let's – let's cut then, yeah. **[break]**. Okay, so tell me, is there anything else that I haven't asked about, about life in the settlement, life in the camp, that you think is important for people to know about?

A: Well, yo – in this situation **[indecipherable]** that it's really gets to you, the helplessness, and the – it gets to not just grown-ups, but also to children, that we are dependent on that one guy up there in th – that **KGB** man, whoever, that we don't count, whatever we think, whatever we feel doesn't count, it's – we are helpless, totally helpless and hopeless. And eventually brings in depression, and sometime, you know, it affects people different way. Some bec – become where they pick fights, aggressive. Some were totally cut off from the rest of the population.

Q: They retreat in themselves.

A: They **[indecipherable]** themselves. And it's a very sad situation, very sad. And the hunger is a terp – terrible feeling. It's – it gets to you to the extent that you think of eating, you dream of eating, your ho – your whole concentration is on getting

some food. And believe me, in all – most of that time we were there, that's what our main interest, and ma – our – our main effort was, to get some to eat.

Q: So people changed?

A: Oh, totally, totally, totally, totally. And the family becomes unit, and if you work together, you survive. If you don't, you don't have much choice but give up. A lot of people did give up, and pretty soon, there were the – the crosses on that hill multiply again.

Q: So were there people who were deported without their families, for example.

A: There were a few, yes, there were a few people.

Q: And th – so if you were alone, you had far less chance.

A: Exactly. Because family held together, helped to stay – you know, had your mind set out to s – on survival.

Q: So you went through the winter of 1940, the summer of 1940 and the winter of 1941. And, was that second winter pretty similar to the first?

A: Well, winter itself was similar, but as far as we were concerned, we were in much worse shape, physically.

Q: Okay, ec – describe it.

A: Mainly –

Q: Yeah.

A: – mainly physically. We were – we were starving, you know, eating just bread, and very little of it, doesn't bi-build up any strength, any – you – you are hungry most of the time.

Q: So you were weaker with –

A: You were weaker – weaker physically, and sometime, like I said before, people got to the point where they were giving up.

Q: So did they commit suicide?

A: No.

Q: They just died.

A: They didn't have to, they didn't have to, they just laid down and died. And it happened, a lot of people happened, and – to a lot of people.

Q: Were there any other transports that came after you?

A: No, no. No more people. We're di – we're – a – eventually, we know now that there were other transports, but at that time, at our place, we didn't have a idea.

Q: Okay, you would have been the only ones.

A: We were – we were getting some mail from **Poland**, but whenever people tried to tell us something, it was cut out by censorship. We would get the letters with the parts of it cut out.

Q: I see.

A: Yes.

Q: I see. So the second winter was a lot harder than the first one?

A: Positively, positively, positively. Our clothes were already in shreds, and we were very, very bad shape physically. Wit – what's happened, second summer, the authorities told us that we can try to have a gardens.

Q: Oh, you were allowed to have ga –

A: We were allowed to – to have a gardens. So we – they divided some of the open area in the camp into plots, and it – we drew lots, and it just happened that we – our part – our lot was very far in the – practically in the woods. What turned out that nobody drew a lot which was right in front of our barrack. So my mother went to the – the ca – ca – our commander, and ask him if she could cha – trade the – the – and she did. So we had a – about, I would say 50 by 50 feet plot of land that we could – we could –

Q: Plant.

A: – plant. It just happened, this is a story in itself. Second summer, my mother and I, we went to the village, which is located about 28 kilometers, to trade, I think it was my father's jacket or something, for some 60 or 80 pounds of potatoes. The problem was that we'd had no means of bringing those potatoes to the camp. So we told the Russians people to keep it for us, and we will come back for it in the winter.

It just again happened that my mother was sick. She lifted something heavy while she was working in the woods, and hurt her back, she couldn't get up. She was in bed. And th – we were really starving. We had a family get together, and decided that we have t – my brother, who was that time just eight years old – no, I'm sorry, he was practically nine already. No, he was eight years old. And I was practically 13 – no, I was 13 years old. So, that were two of us, right in the middle of winter, we have to go and get those potatoes. Twenty-eight kilometers in the winter, 30 below zero.

Q: Oh my gosh.

A: I, previous summer, I work – I made a sled, I built a s – myself a sled. We were gonna use that sled to bring those potatoes. So, my mother gave me and my brother slice of bread. That had to last us two days. And early in the morning we marched with dragging that sled. We went to, a 13 and a eight, practically nine year old boys, 28 kilometers to bring the 60 or 80 pounds of potatoes.

Q: Potatoes. And you did?

A: We walked all day. When I close my eyes now, I still see when we got out of the woods, there was a small hill, and on top of the hill there were some hats – hats, with the chimneys, and the smoke coming from the chi – it looked like picture from heaven, after walking all day. I found the hats, with my – where the potatoes were.

We got in hat – the room was full of people. Turned out there were people that were going, men mostly, that were going to go to our camp with horses and – to help working in the woods, in the logging. I still remember the smell of the sweat, bodies, and the cigars, or smo – I mean, s – pipes and smoking. We slept all on the grou – on the floor. Woke up in next morning about five, six o'clock in the morning. I went outside. Turned out during the night, about 12 inches of snow fell.

Q: Oh my goodness. You were saved. You were saved, cause it could have fallen on you.

A: But this was – going through the virgin forest was just a, you know, path cut out through the – through the woods. I had the idea. I started going to every man, asking if they will allow us to tie our sled to their horse – horse drawn sled, you know, to help us.

Q: Right.

A: None of them would allow it.

Q: Really?

A: Finally, there was a woman with a young girl, most likely my age. And I ask her. First she refuse, and then she change her mind. She says, all right, you can do it on one condition, that you lead my horse. Of course, I agreed to it. So we put our bag of potatoes on the sled, covered it with the blanket and some straw. My son – my

brother would sit on it, and the – the sled was full of about five feet high with hay for the horses that would be fed on the – in our camp. And the two women climbed on the top of that sled hay, and I would lead it. We were about the last ones of the whole caravan of those sleds. E-Everything was fine, until we got to about the middle of the distance to our camp. There was a steep hill, downwards went the road, and on the bottom there was a stream, which of course was frozen solid now. And there the pass – the road turned left. Well, we were coming down th-the sleds that went ahead of us, cleaned the road pretty well, so when we were coming, it was pretty slick going. I kept holding the horse as much as I could, but the – gradually horse start to galloping, faster and faster. Finally I couldn't keep up with him, so I let go. The sled with the – went all the way down to the hill, and made the turn. As it made the turn to the left, it slid sideways, hit the embankment of snow, and the two women were catapult out of the top of the sled, into the big pile of snow. All I could see is two pair of legs sticking out. Of course, my brother turn over too.

Q: What happened to the potatoes?

A: Well, they were – they were turned over too, into the snow. It took us about half an hour to straighten out the sled, and put back the potatoes on – on the sled **[indecipherable]** with my little sled, my brother on it. By the end of the day, we were at our camp.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: Next day I was walking, and I seen that woman splitting logs for her fireplace. She wasn't much good at it, but I was. For next hour or so I split all the wood that she had. That was my thank you to her for being so good and help us, because I don't know how we would have made it back that night, to the camp. So she was good to me, and I repaid it by –

Q: Splitting her logs.

A: – splitting her woods for her.

Q: Amazing.

A: Amazing.

Q: Amazing.

A: And when I think about it now, my brother wasn't even nine years old.

Q: And the potatoes, did they help?

A: Oh, God. Wa – there were – there were – that – I don't remember how long ago we went to sleep with our bellies full. The potatoes tasted better than any before and any time after, when they did. And for next month or so, and when – when we got the plot of land, when my mother would peel the potatoes, her – she – when there was a eye, with the possibility of growing, she would make a big, deep cut and save

it. So we planted those pieces, and next year we had a – some – our own fresh potatoes growing.

Q: Wow.

A: Yes.

Q: Wow.

A: That was part of the good story.

Q: It is. It is, but what a difficult – what a difficult thing to do. And for little boys, I mean, as you were starting to tell this, I was thinking, my goodness, those potatoes will freeze on that – on that journey.

A: Well, it was like I said, we covered with – with the straw, with the blanket, and my brother was sitting on –

Q: Sitting on top of it, like a chicken on some eggs.

A: Exactly, yes.

Q: So, by this time, let's say, the second winter goes by, and that's the winter of 1941, and then the summer is when you plant, or –

A: Yeah.

Q: – yes, you plant those –

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Now, in June 1941 is when **Germany** attacked the **Soviet Union**.

A: Yes.

Q: Did your lives change after that?

A: Well, the irony of it, that we, that year we got what Russians call the amnesty. To have – to have amnesty, you have to commit something, right?

Q: Right.

A: Well, I don't know what we committed.

Q: But you got amnesty anyway.

A: But we got amnesty anyway. And who do we thank for that?

Q: Who?

A: **Hitler**. So, is it the irony that we have **Hitler** to thank for our freedom. Now, the way it worked, Russians at that time, when **Germany** attacked **Russia**, were in such a bad shape, within a few months, **Germany** was right into the Russian territory. They went through the eastern **Poland**, into German authority. Russians were looking for help, for allies. At that time, **Russia** held about a quarter of a million Polish soldiers in it – prison of war camps. Russians wanted to use those men to defend **Russia**. They tr – to – got in touch with Polish government in exile in ri – in **London**, to form Polish army in **Russia**. They agreed – Polish government agreed on one condition. That they will release rest of the people, too. That included us. So that's what the amnesty was about. And we were officially told by – by officials.

Q: By the commandant, or –

A: By the commandant.

Q: Not the **KGB** man.

A: No, no, commandant, that we are free people. We were given passes, legi – le – legitimacy.

Q: Legitimization.

A: That's right. That we could travel in **Russia**, that we can get supply of bread whenever w – it was available. But we were – main thing, we were free to leave the camp.

Q: And when did this – when did this come? When did this happen?

A: This was fall of '41.

Q: So, it was several months after **Germany** attacked.

A: That's right.

Q: So in the fall of '41, when you finally have some potatoes of your own.

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

Q: Your ha – you're told that you are free to go.

A: We were free to go, but go fra – where?

Q: Yeah.

A: We were told that there's a Polish army being organized in the southern **Russia**, in the – in the **Kazakhstan**, in the **Uzbekistan**. We were told that there's – that's where the Polish army is being organized. But how do we get there? This is 3,000 kilometers from where we are. Now, it was due south wi – by this time the German armies were already approaching **Moscow**, so there was no way we could go straight south. A lot of people were hesitating, didn't want to leave the camp because after all, there was some security here, and if we leave camp, who – then what? My mother was a different – of different opinion. She says she won't stay here any more, we have to leave. And sure enough, we – my sister went to a – the village, which was about 20 some mi – kilometers to, from – from our camp, and next thing we know, she came back couple days later with the horse-drawn sled, with the farmer, and that we can leave the camp –

Q: With him?

A: – and he will take us to the – that village, and from there there was only few kilometers to the railroad station – railroad that was being built. It – it wasn't built yet, they were just building the railroad. So we packed whatever we still had, things, and traveled over for a day and a half, we traveled to that village.

Q: So you left fairly soon afterwards?

A: We – we left, it was – was winter of '42.

Q: Two.

A: I think it was January – January something, beginning of January, I think we left the camp. We got to that town, that village, and it turned out it was about 10 kilometers to the railroad sta – railroad. Not station, but railroad. Again, my mother bribed some of the people over there with some tobacco. And they told us that we can load in, into the – get into one of the freight cars that was bringing supplies, railroad supplies, and we traveled about three days. They closed the doors completely because they didn't want anybody know what we – we were in the car. It was freezing. We had to walk most of the time to – to – not to freeze.

Q: To keep warm.

A: To keep warm. Finally we got to the town that we were originally dropped off –

Q: Oh, where you had walked –

A: – where we were brought.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: We got – turns out there were thousand people just like us out there, from different camps all over ye – **Russia**, that part of **Russia**. And within a few days the conditions were terrible, unbelievably terrible.

Q: Were you all at the railroad station?

A: The railroad station. Finally is – we – somehow we found out that there was a train preparing to go south, which had some of those cars prepared for traveling, for deporting **[indecipherable]** people. So we got on the train.

Q: And was it also like freight trains, or was –

A: It wa – well, there were some empty cars, but just about everybody that was on that station, got on that train. Of course Polish people. Three months we traveled on that train.

Q: Oh my gosh.

A: Three months we traveled on that train. We lost more people on that train than in the camp.

Q: Oh my gosh.

A: The worst – the worst was when somebody got lost from the train, we never – we never found them. It just happened that my mother got lost. What would happen, we would get to the station, and people, some people from each car would run to the center of the town to see if they could buy, steal or whatever some food. And sometime when they were there, the train would go – would start going, and leave them behind. And like I said, most of the time, when train would leave those people, we never seen them again.

Q: So what happened with your mother?

A: My mother was one of the people that went to get some food. In the meantime, they took our train and just moved it to different siding. When my mother came back to the original spot, who – the – whoever was in charge told her that our train left. She jumped on the next train and traveled for about three days, without sign of our train. So she decided that she must have missed it, and she started coming back. And would you know, she found us. Not only did she found us, but she brought about two loaves of bread with her.

Q: What a miracle.

A: Was a miracle. We were desperate. We were four children, and their grandma.

Q: Oh my.

A: Four children and their grandma.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: My dear, we were creatures from hell. Dirty. All through those three months, we never change clothes, we never washed. There was enough water for drinking, never mind washing or – or – our clothes or washing yourself. Can you imagine the stink? Forty people in the car. We were in one of the towns, I don't remember the name now, big town. And all of a sudden, all through the train went the news that on a different siding, there's a train just like ours, and in that train, there's a priest that's gonna say a mass. Believe me, everybody, whoever could stand on their feet,

we run to that siding, and sure enough, there was in one of the cars, the gate – door was open, there was a table, and a young priest was saying a mass. He was in a shreds of clothes just like we were. Dirty, filthy, but you could tell he was a God's man. We were kneeling on the snow, we were praying. We were singing Polish songs. At the end of it we usually sing a song which says, God, let us – give us – give us a chance to get to freedom, get to pola – get back to **Poland**, to our cri – our country.

Q: I can't imagine what that scene must have been like.

A: It gaved us spirit. It gave us a reason to live again. Believe me, it was one of the miracles that makes human do things that sometime you don't think you can do it. Well, our luck was with us anyway. We got through **Kazakhstan** – just one – I wrote it in my life story. When we were going through **Kazakhstan**, the – the scenery was totally flat steppe.

Q: The steppes.

A: Steppes, yes. And I was looking through that small window, and what do I see? Right along the railroad tracks, on the snow, there's a fox, a red fox. Was running parallel to a train, but at least he knew – you could tell he knew exactly where he was going, and we didn't have the slightest idea where we were going.

Q: Oh my. Yeah.

A: It's stuck in my mind now. Anyway, finally we got to the end – to bekist – paki – not **Pakistan**, it was **Bekistan**(ph). And there they told us to unload at one of the stations, I don't remember now which one.

Q: Was it **Tashkent**?

A: No, no, it wasn't **Tashkent**. But not far from it. And we – there were – they put is in the **kolkhoz**. You know what **kolkhoz** is?

Q: Explain, please.

A: **Kolkhoz** is a government farm.

Q: Okay.

A: Where people don't own anything, they just work for a government farm. A farm was – they were raising cotton. This is main there, that's what they grow in that part of **Uzbekistan**. Well, they assign us to the Uzbek family. They gave us a little room with a dirt floor, and my mother and my young – my older sister worked in the fields, and I worked in the smith shop.

Q: Was this Polish authorities, or Russian authorities?

A: Russian authorities. But turned out that there were already some Polish authorities in the area, too. Finally we contacted them. And they kept us – kept telling us to sit tight, they'll notify us where and when we have to go. We spend, I don't know, about four months up there, and working pretty hard. Finally, my

mother again, she has enough. With the last thing that she still had – there were two more Polish families in the area. They bribed drivers that were going – what we heard was town about hundred kilometers from where we were at, where there was already Polish army post. So, one day we loaded up on the – on the truck, open truck, and for next 24 hours – it took them 24 hours to drive us that hundred kilometers. Every 20 some kilometers, they had to change the tires on the truck.

Q: Really? It was that bad.

A: That good. Finally, at night, we arrived on that station, where we're su – we were told that there's a Polish outpost. Sure enough, we unloaded at night, and we were sit – by this time it was nice and warm up there. This is south of **Russia**. So, I think it was some time in March or April already, and we were sitting against the wall on the – on the station. It started getting light, and we could hear men's walk is with the military boots on the – on the platform. My mother jumped up and there was a – one sergeant and two soldiers coming towards us. My mother looked at him and run to him and started hugging him. He was a policeman from the **Vorudek**(ph).

Q: No kidding.

A: He was – the man was a – the sergeant was a policeman from the **Vorudek**(ph), that knew my parents very well.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: From that time on our lives changed. Turned out that a quartermaster of the 22nd regiment, that was stationed in the place – place was called **Karmana**. And he was a buddy of my father's. Quartermaster. He made my mother seamstress, she – she put – he put her to work. My older sister wer – couldn't go anywhere, because she suffered – she infect – got infected with typhoid. But my younger sister was – joined the girls – yo-young girls' camp. My brother and I, we went to the boys' camp. And also turned out – turned out that one day, while I was in the camp, I was told that I have to report to the colonel that was in charge of 22nd regiment. I got scared. I didn't do anything wrong, I – I saluted everybody, and here I am told to report –

Q: Report.

A: – to the colonel, of – of all the people. Turned out he knew my father when they were young officers in the 1920. When he seen my name, he wanted to know if we know what happened to father. So that's what he wanted me to report to him. But like I said, from that time on, our lives changed. Mother was secure, thi – we were secured.

Q: Did you get more food?

A: Oh God. First time I was taken to the military mess, they get me vast pool of rice and r – and raisins. I ate about quarter of it and I couldn't eat no more. I could not. I sat there and I cried because I can't – couldn't swallow any more.

Q: You were full?

A: I guess my stomach shrunk so that it – there was no room for it already. But eventually, that went by. On the middle of August, 1942, we were put on the train from the **Karmana**, from the camp, and taken to the port on the **Caspian Sea**.

Q: What was the name of the port?

A: **Krasnovodsk**.

Q: **Krasnovodsk**, okay.

A: **Krasnovodsk**. We were put on the Russian ship. They – we were loaded, standing room only, practically.

Q: Like sardines, huh?

A: Like sardines. My brother was on that ship, too. He was very sick. He wa – he had dysentery, which sometime it can kill you.

Q: Yeah.

A: But he survived.

Q: So it was your m – you, your mother, your sisters.

A: Well, n – on the camp, there was j – on that ship there was just two of us. My mother stayed behind with my grandmother and two sisters. They left about two weeks later. We arrived in **[indecipherable]** at that time was **Persia**, now it's **Iran**. Port of **Baklevy**(ph).

Q: **Baklevy**(ph), mm-hm.

A: **Baklevy**(ph), we arrived there. Finally, we were free. We could really say we were free.

Q: What if – what kind of a feeling was it?

A: It's like a – when the weight is dropped off your shoulders. That you could speak freely without, you know, looking if someone is watching you. That you're your own master, you're – you're – you're free. I was 14 years old. My – at that time, I was still in **Russia**, I was assigned to the military band, and I was learning how to play clarinet and violin. Clarinet, I was doing fine. Violin, I wasn't. But our main job was drumming. When the orchestra was marching, we were, the eight of us, lined up in the front, drummers. And also, whenever we had to – other parades, we would take part of it. With that orchestra, I got out – I got out of **Russia**, and I got to – we got – from **Persia** we got to Camp **Khanaqin** in **Iraq**.

Q: So you were – your brother was with you the whole time?

A: He wasn't with me, but in – with the s – in the same regiment that we were attached to. So I seen him when got to **Iraq**, and later we missed – we lost contact for a while. And then in January 1943, we got orders to leave **Iraq** and go to **Palestine**, to join Polish military schools. There were so many of young boys that was rescued from **Russia**, from all different camps. They formed schools, from grade school that my – my brother was at – finally went through. I went through a high school already, to the Polish cadet school, which was preparing young men to be officers in the Polish army.

Q: And you were how old at this po –

A: I was 14 years old.

Q: Wow.

A: I – when I – when I got to the camp in **Palestine**, the camp's name was **Kastinna**(ph). It was in the southern part of **Palestine**, not far from, n-now it's called **Gaza Strip**.

Q: Ah, not far from there.

A: Not far from there. I stayed there til 1945. I finished, or practically finished my high school up there. And then –

Q: Is that the tie from the cadet school?

A: Yes, that's – that's the tie that you're presents by cadet school. I also in – I have a blazer with my as – as – s-sign over here on the chest, and few of the other der – decorations. We belong to a – to a – there was a Polish division, third Carpathian division that fought under General **Anders**, fought Germans in **Italy**, **Monte Cassino** and the other places. And that division took care of our school. In turn, when our boys and the bow – our boys that turn 18, which was military age, they would be assigned to that division.

Q: I see.

A: Few of my friends that just happened that they were older than I was, their crosses are up there.

Q: In **Monte Cassino**?

A: In **Monte Cassino**, yes. For – few of my very close friends.

Q: So they didn't make it.

A: Well, they – they died up there, fighting for **Poland**. I stayed in **Palestine** until May '45. May '45, I left there, traveled through the **Mediterranean Sea**. I volunteer for a Polish merchant marine navigational officers' school in **England**.

Q: Well, did you find – did the end of the war – were you still in **Palestine**?

A: I was still in **Palestine**.

Q: So tell – do you remember when you hear – heard the war is over?

A: Oh God, do we remember? You couldn't – it was so sad. Every Friday my school would – all the companies would march, and we were on the parade grounds, and the officer would be reading names of our friends that were in **Italy** fighting, si – ones that were wounded, and ones that were killed. It was a very sad, sad – and that meant that the war will end, and that be the end of it, which is a total, total relief. Total. Specially fact that we were the winners, too.

Q: Yeah.

A: We – we survived. In the meantime, my mother –

Q: I wanted to ask, yes.

A: – my mother, my grandmother, and two sisters w-were sent from **Persia** to **India** refugee camp. They were there for my si – older sister left there in '44, and she went to **England** to join Polish air force, and she – she was part of the Polish air force in **England**, starting from '44.

Q: And when you went to **England**, you were in the merchant – the Polish merchant marine, you said?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: School.

Q: Scho – mer-merchant marine school. So, you were in the **Mediterranean**, and that's when I asked about the end of the war.

A: Well, we – I was still in **Palestine** when the –

Q: Yeah.

A: – when the war ended.

Q: And then what happened, for you?

A: Well, that's where –

Q: Yeah.

A: – a few month later, I – I traveled to **England**.

Q: And you saw your sister there.

A: And I met my sister there. A few years later my brother came to uni – to **England**, too, and in 1940 – '48, my mother and the younger sister arrived in **England** from – from **India**. My grandmother didn't want to go to **India** – to, I mean to the **England**. So she – **[meowing]**

Q: That's your cat.

A: So she went to **Poland**, too, because she still had some – two of her s – three of her sisters were still alive in **Poland**, so she went **Poland**, join them.

Q: Where did she go in **Poland**?

A: **Łańcut**.

Q: Oh, so she went back there.

A: She went to her ho – her hometown.

Q: Okay.

A: Well, I finished school, merchant marine school, but – and in November 1947, I went to sea as a regular s-sailor. Seaman.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I spent not quite two years at sea. Part of the bir – British merchant marine. I been all over. I been **Australia**, **Japan**, **Germany**, **Italy**. So, covered quite a bit of earth. And in the meantime, like I said, my family was already in **England**. We applied for a passage – at – at that time, **England** was in a very bad shape.

[meowing] [break]

Q: Okay, so you were in the merchant marine – the British merchant marine then.

A: That's right.

Q: And you saw the world.

A: I s – I seen quite a bit of it, yes. And I – and –

Q: Not bad for a boy from –

A: Pardon?

Q: Not bad from a boy fr – for a boy from **Nowogródek**.

A: From **Nowogródek**, that's right.

Q: Yeah.

A: Are we ready to go?

Q: No, continue, continue, please.

A: Oh. Now, we applied for visas to **United States**; my mother, my brother and me. Both sisters got married in **England**. They – they applied, but on their own already, not part of the family. Because they started their own families then.

Q: Right.

A: Well, on June 26th, 1954, we arrived at **New York** harbor, and that beautiful lady of freedom, Statue of Liberty, that invited and ac – and welcome millions of people before me and after me, welcomed us to this beautiful country.

Q: Oh.

A: We arrived early in the morning. By evening we were on the train to **Chicago**. Reason we picked **Chicago**? Because of two things. We knew that very – **Chicago** is – has a very varied industries, which would make it easy to find a job. That was one reason. The other reason was that there was a big, well-organized Polish community, which was very important to us. We arrived on the **Union Station** next morning. And my mother, who was still the boss, said boys, we're gonna start life in this wonderful country proper way. We're gonna go to church. This was Sunday.

Q: It was Sunday?

A: So we had to go to church, and we did. We went to church. After church I left my mother, and the man that we met accidentally at the church, li-lived across the street from the church, and I took a bus, and I traveled for a few hours. I had a address of a buddy of mine that left for **United States** about two years previous to us. And found him, went back, got my mothers and brother. We spent couple days with my – with my friends, and then we rented a small apartment, bought a few necessary things, and we settled in **Chicago**.

Q: And life here began.

A: And life started, in – that was ’54. In ’58 I got married. I met beautiful Polish girl that went through the same hell as we did. As a matter of fact, she was in the same refugee camp in **India** with my mother. And my mother used to see her play with her friend’s daughter across the barracks, and my mother mentioned one day, she says, hm, if I only knew that was gonna be my daughter-in-law, at least I could give her the – some candy, or some – God blessed me for 44 years. I had a wonderful wife, I had a wonderful mother of my children, and sorry, about 12 years ago, she made orphans of us.

Q: Oh.

A: And she’s in a better place now.

Q: I’m so sorry.

A: But I miss her.

Q: I can imagine.

A: I miss her lots. She was wonderful woman. She was my wife.

Q: What was her name?

A: **Wanda**.

Q: **Wanda**. And her maiden name?

A: **Karpshinska**(ph).

Q: **Kaps – Kar –**

A: **Karpshinska**(ph)

Q: **Kasshinska**(ph)?

A: **Karpshinska**(ph).

Q: **Karpshinska**(ph).

A: **Wanda**.

Q: **Wanda**.

A: Yeah.

Q: How many children did you have?

A: We have two children, **Stephan** and **Christina**. **Christina – Christina** has two boys, and the older one, **Greg**, he's 25. In May he's gonna be a doctor already. He's finishing his studies. All he need is the four years of practice, and then he can work

– he can treat me. And the younger one is – this is his last year of college, so he is graduating in – in May, too, from college.

Q: Quite a legacy.

A: **Stephan's** daughter, **Alyshia** made me a year and a half ago made me a great-grandpa.

Q: Oh.

A: She has a beautiful little girl named **Kaytie**(ph) and now she's expecting another baby. So that'll be number two. God bless, God bless, God bless ki-kids, grandkids and God bless the **United States** because this is a wonderful, beautiful country. It's – it's been good to me, and if you ever come across somebody that's complaining about it, you send him to me, I'll straighten him out.

Q: Okay.

A: Because I know what the bad part can be and what the good part is. So thank you.

Q: Thank you. Thank you very, very much for today, for sharing your story, for letting us in, for all that you have talked to us about.

A: I believe that it's my duty, my privilege to do just that, because people should know what real life can be. So, thank you.

Q: You're welcome. And with that, I will conclude today's interview with Mr.

Adam Szymel, on January 25th, 2015, in **Western Springs**, **Illinois**.

A: Thank you.

Q: Thanks very much.

End of File Two

Conclusion of Interview