

This is the continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Jonas Mekas. And we are meeting two days after our first part of the interview. Now it is July 1st, 2018, still in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, New York. Thank you again for accepting us back here in your home. And I think where we left off, when we ended our interview the other day, was in Germany.

Somewhere in Elmshorn.

In Elmshorn, yes. And you were beginning to describe what the situation was like there. Before we go to that, I want to circle back to your leaving. When you left, it sounds like it was in quite a hurry. That is the typewriter has been discovered. Your connection to the person who distributed these bulletins from the BBC is very nervous. And you tell your uncle--

And I saw it. And he indicated it by pulling out the gun and putting--

Pointing it at you.

Pointing into my face. So at that moment, I did not clearly understand his action, but it was later I thought that that indicated observations that you have to disappear and disappear fast, so that it was stressed, and I had no-- I knew that was an indication that I have to follow what he's saying. No joke, there is a gun in my face.

Did you remember the name of this person now?

Now I remember.

What was it?

Ostrauskas.

Ostrauskas.

He was about 22 maybe. He had finished gymnasium two years earlier, I think than me.

But you were, it sounds like the same age. If he was around 22, you were born in 1922, and we're talking about 1944 at this point?

Yeah, maybe it was a year.

A year?

Took a year or so. He was just slightly older. But definitely, clearly he was more involved and more connected.

What was his first name, do you know?

That's more difficult.

So did you have the opportunity to go back to the farm before you left and--

Yes, we had at the time just to say goodbye to Mother and Father.

And what about your brothers?

I did not see them before the-- Petras was not-- you see, Povilas was living in Vilnius area.

Veterinarian.

Veterinarian. And Petras was living in Pasvalys as an agronomist. He had finished studies in some kind of agronomy institute.

There was one in Dotnuva, I remember. People talked about that. So Petras was agronomist. Kostas, where was he?

And Kostas-- I may have seen Kostas, but I don't remember. But he was at that time, spending most of his time working in Neciunai, just across the river.

And what--

But I bet that I saw him.

And Adolfas, was he involved in this underground activity at all?

No. He did not even know. I could not tell him. I could not tell. He did not know anything about it.

So why did he--

Because not say he was working in a large-- in Birzai at that time. I think that's what-- I would have to look up his diaries. To German police, he would be equally incriminated because he also lived in the same attic with me.

So in other words, he would have been hauled in for questioning at the very least?

Yes.

Now you told me that--

And then we also had to keep in-- we kept in mind that, yes, a month or two or three, but no matter what Germans say, looks like Soviets could be coming back. Soviet was combined almost, yes.

Did you ever work in Panevezys?

And it was clear that you would be drafted. Yes, Kostas was immediately drafted.

So Kostas served in the German army?

No, drafted by the Soviet army.

Oh, so when the Soviets came back, he was drafted into their army?

Yes.

And he was about how old when that happened? Let's see, yes, you wrote down the dates of birth.

What date it was, in like 30-- he was maybe 26. I don't know when [CHUCKLES] it was.

Let's go over this again because it is a clarification and more accuracy. You wrote down the date--

The dates of my family--

Birth.

That tape before. It was from the head. Now I will-- Elzbieta, whom we used to call Elzbuna--

Elzbuna?

--was born in 1912. Povilas was born in 1914. Petras was born in 1915. Kostas, 1919, myself, '22, and Adolfas in '25. My mother was born in 1987--

In 1897.

1887. And my father was born in 1868.

Oh, wow. So your mother was born in 1887?

They met when they were about 20 years difference.

So your father was really quite old when he had you and your brother? He wasn't a young man.

But you have to also keep [CHUCKLES] in mind that my fate-- the way my fate, my life went-- I married when I was 52.

Almost in the same-- following the footsteps.

Yeah.

Did you work at any time?

Everything went-- and that's why I say I lost-- during that period of occupations, I lost regular education. I really had no-- usually you have gymnasium then university step-by-step, and then you graduate from this or that. I did not have that. So I lost normal growing period. I jumped from child to 27. When I landed in New York, I was 27.

So there is almost 6, 7, 8, 10 years totally messed up, which then, the way my story goes, I tried to grab as much as I could and fast, like choking life what I missed when I came to New York. There was no evening-- no day when I did not go to theater and-- I missed nothing that opened to New York for three, four, or five years.

Did you ever go back for formal education anywhere?

No. Even the university after the war, still a displaced person camp. And the camps moved around. First, Wiesbaden. The next Wiesbaden, Mainz. There is a good university. So we enlisted with Adolfas into the university. But then a year later, they moved us to Kassel. So for a year, I commuted once or twice a week from [CHUCKLES] Kassel to Wiesbaden.

From Kassel to Wiesbaden?

Yes. So I go for two or three days, I settle down in mines. Then I go for three or four days back to-- the food was delivered in Kassel. I had to pick up the food and bring my food with me. And it became eventually impossible. So that type of [CHUCKLES] education--

What was it that you were studying in--

I started with philosophy. Then I changed it to literature. But in reality, I was going to any class that sounded interesting.

Let's go back still to Lithuania. Did you ever work at another newspaper besides Birzu Zinios or Najosios Birzu Zinios in Panevezys?

The last months before I left, maybe for 10 months, I worked at Panevezio Balsas, which was one step sort of more-- Birzu Zinios were edited by-- they were in education. Rudise and Lupniunas were teachers. What their other interests were, I never-- they are patriots-- educators. Panevezio Balsas was edited by Jonas Narbutas, who was a writer and was very closely connected with the Lithuanian artists, writers community. So it was a more-- they gave more space to-- he gave it to his friends. And they were writers, so it was more literary, but still the same system-- the same-- the first page to the war to Germany and war machinery, bulletins, and then the rest the same, look and structure, local culture--

And you're in--

But it was-- the atmosphere was more intellectual because in Panevezys, there were several very important writers and science people like Ivanauskas and, of course, the theater in Miltinis. It was a different-- and many of the Kaunas people, mostly it was [LITHUANIAN] et cetera, used to come to visit when they came to Panevezys to visit their friends, very openly. I could sit in the recording also and listen in [CHUCKLES].

So what was your involvement with Panevezio Balsas?

My function was similar to-- almost identical with Birzu Zinios, to put all the pieces-- Narbutas and other sort of assistant editors that he had got all the materials. Then they passed to me to take it to put it into the-- to realizing. That means give it to the-- there we had the linotypist ready to type and then to proofread, to some of-- I did not have to read already all of them, like Birzu Zinios when Lupniunas used to pass to me the materials. No time to read them all and try to correct. Panevezio Balsas had already a proofreader. And they had a corrector. So my function was to see that everything is there, every area, and every one who is responsible for the local news, for the art-- what's happening in the arts in Panevezys, and then deliver it on time, and then to put it-- that term was-- I guess I invented-- technical, I would say editor.

To me, it strikes me is that some of what your work was-- and tell me if I'm right or wrong-- some of your work was as layout. You were doing layout work?

Yes. Layout--

And proofing. Proofing was more in Birzai than in Panevezys because you had a proofreader in Panevezys?

Yes.

But then in Panevezys, it was more than just layout. It was also responsibility--

In Panevezys, all the materials were there already ready on my table to take to the linotypist. That linotypist brings to me. And then I pass it to the proofreader. And then he brings me back. And I take back to the linotypist. He corrects. And then next day or so, or 40 hours-- it's a weekly-- 40 hours later, all the metals are there ready to put it into pages and places. And I did all that.

So within these responsibilities, did this include the political articles that were required--

Whatever was there ended up on my table ready to-- sometimes with a note that, please check the language. This writer sometimes-- I looked. We think it's OK. But maybe you could check again. That's about it. But everything ended up here on my table.

And that's in Panevezys and in Birzai?

Yes.

So--

Only that in Birzai, I had also sometimes to-- Lupniunas did not know that something took place then there was a

reading poetry or something that I knew-- and I knew who could review it. So I had the right to also order, engage some writer.

To assign articles to other people?

Assign, yes. But only in the cultural area, in the local cultural area.

So what about-- is it possible then, that if you had to proofread and lay out, were there articles that were anti-Semitic and--

Neither in Birzu Zinios, nor Panevezio Balsas, and I believe same for all other regional newspapers. A year after the killing of the Jews, you could really try to find with-- you need a strong light to find anti-Semitic articles in any of those papers.

In the regional press, you're saying?

Yes. The capital, I don't know. Regional, I'm talking only. And I'm quite familiar because I used to get in my little office in Panevezys of those regional papers.

But then--

They were all concerned for their local cultures. And they were fed up with-- they knew where they are, they knew where the Germans are, and when the Germans all about. I wouldn't say 100%. I did not see everything. But not in Birzu Zinios and not in Panevezio Balsas. But during the first weeks, I know because I have seen the clippings. But by the time-- after the arrest of Petronis, that's where I'm really familiar, it was nothing there.

But indirectly in a rule kind of way, sent those huge articles by Galvanauskas about the future of these fantasies of diverse [CHUCKLES] civilization, what is behind some of that thinking, I would not bet. I think some of that had been maybe totalitarian. I don't know because the thinking-- and I told last time, that I managed to even to keep some out because--

Yes, you did.

--I could not understand what he's talking about.

So what's his first name, Galvanauskas?

This one was Ernestas.

Ernestas Galvanauskas. And he--

There were two or three brothers.

And he was--

And I know that one Galvanauskas appears in the provisional. That I discovered now, that Galvanauskas appears in there.

But you would say that you-- the first year, you did or did not see--

Now I will add that from what I said, of course, I said this also what I'm saying now to our friend, Michael.

The person who--

He did not believe any of it. So my thought is that at some point, I give up. Of course, you cannot talk if the person does not believe what you are saying because, oh, yes.

So you were referring to Mr. Michael Casper, who wrote a piece in the New York Review of Books. We'll talk about that a little later.

Yes.

Let's now then proceed to-- is there anything else about leaving Lithuania, about working in these papers, and about any of those activities that you didn't mention before that you'd like to talk about now before we go on to Germany?

I would add something about the local newspapers because they felt a certain responsibility to their regions. And I think that they have to get credit-- some of the people who worked in those newspapers-- for helping to keep the local culture going. And sometimes with even a danger, we have to outsmart sometimes-- I mentioned that some major articles had to be summed up very briefly. And sometimes they did not exactly translate it or wrote the way-- they wrote it the way Germans would be--

Be happy with it.

Yeah. And they did took chances. And it's to their credit that they managed to devote most of the body of their newspapers to the life of not only what was happening at that period, but there is a lot in the past always, from pieces on that past cultural or personalities of the period [CHUCKLES] going back to Kudirka.

Two things come to mind, is that if we're talking about articles dealing with the past, I think East Europe-- I'm going to [CHUCKLES] kind of bring forth a stereotype-- that East Europeans live in the past a lot for--

And especially during that time, there was even a need-- it was positive to go back to the past. It was positive. Now it [CHUCKLES] wouldn't be positive. But under occupation, it was positive to be reminded of [NON-ENGLISH] and [NON-ENGLISH], et cetera, and all the early other personalities that helped to become Lithuania an independent--

Country.

--country. That was stressed-- that usually got a lot of space.

Here is another thought, though, and it also has a certain parallel into how people in the cultural sphere dealt within Soviet times, that you had--

It's totally different because you could not choose your own subject, could not choose your own theme, and whatever you wrote, everything was read, and had to be approved. In Germany at that period, we don't know what would have happened later. But I'm familiar, and I know how it was during those two-plus years because they were in the war. They were too busy. They did not have enough personnel, friends-- [CHUCKLES] they were all there soldiers--

That's right.

--to control every aspect. You couldn't. What would have happened later? I don't know. Nobody knows.

Yes. But when you're talking about the Soviets, I assume you were meaning the Soviet presence at that time as well? It is at that time?

Yes, I'm talking only about the-- but we know also that it continued, that the total control continued until after Khrushchev maybe. I don't know.

Yeah, that's what I'm saying, is that in later decades, there was also wiggle room where people in the arts and the culture-- in the Soviet Union in general, and this included Lithuania-- would write their perfunctory introductory

paragraph or give perfunctory play that was political and that was acceptable. And then they do what they want.

Yes, I began noticing that there somewhere around '75 or '70--

And so in some ways, it is saying, OK, we will work within the system because this is all that we've got. And we'll give them their [NON-ENGLISH], their due. And then--

That's exactly what the provincial papers did, only that that [NON-ENGLISH] [CHUCKLES] was much smaller.

See, how do you say--

And more or less page one, the war bulletins and then information, when the farmers have to deliver grain or potatoes for the army, things like that, that came also from the mayor. So the mayor's office and there are presented materials. The first page or sometimes second page, that's it.

[NON-ENGLISH], how do we say that in English? I can't even-- jeeppers. It's sort of like taxes. It's sort of like give to Caesar what is Caesar's. But I don't know what the--

Yeah, but give them what they want, more or less, and then forget it. That's how the readers treated those pages also.

But when you talk about that, here is another effect. And that is perhaps the price one pays. There have been a lot of artistic works-- whether they've been in film or in books-- that have talked about what does it mean to one's sense of artistic integrity and also human moral integrity when you decide to play with the bad guys, whoever they are?

I know during that period there were at least five poets and five prose writers who already had-- I think they got involved by mistake because their first interest in the Soviet Union began before the Soviets came. So they did not even know what's happening there. They were misled. But they were caught, and they still believed.

You're talking about those who were left--

Martinaitis there were some poets. And we knew already that [CHUCKLES] we used to-- we did not take them seriously, though they were good craftsmen and good sometimes-- not bad poets, [INAUDIBLE] Salomeja Neris. But they were caught in it.

Salomeja Neris--

But they knew exactly those four, five, six, and they kept writing. And the papers kept publishing them and pushing and building them up.

During the Soviet times?

Yes.

During the first Soviet occupation?

The Germans knew nothing, were not interested in that aspect at all. But the Soviets, they had to control the culture too and immediately. And they came prepared with who is the mayor, who is this, who is that? They came ready with their own-- yes.

So when you're talking about Martinaitis and Salomeja Neris, they were pro-Soviet poets-- I'm saying this for the camera-- and--

Yes, because Salomeja wrote--

Salomeja--

--a long poem for Stalin.

And tell us the essence of what that poem was.

I don't remember. I read it, and I forgot it. I read it because I respect her as a poet. But we were all-- could not believe that she [CHUCKLES] wrote a poem for Stalin.

It was about Stalin brings the sun.

How great-- of course, it's a poem. It's a kind of energetic praising and admiring. And, oh, he is a great. He's fabulous. I don't remember the poem. I never read it again.

Were there cultural figures, let's say then when the Germans came, that pretty much did the same thing with the Germans, that said, Adolf is the future?

I don't remember. Not in that degree. I don't know a single-- maybe somewhere something that I never saw. But there was no such--

In the world of culture?

Yes.

Because in the world of politics, I have--

Yeah, in politics, it's all a mess. But I did not know what-- we did not know. I did not know what was happening, that when I'm what reading now, I see some confusion there.

Well I myself have heard a broadcast from 1941 by a Lithuanian, who eventually became an emigre, who at the same time as he is broadcasting that we are now independent, we have chased the Russians out, we welcome--

Yeah, but that must have happened during that first month.

Yes, it did.

So I don't blame him for having dreams, and finally-- especially because this followed one of the big soviet deportation-

Yeah, mass deportations.

--period. So I don't blame. I bet I sort of-- I don't blame even those who-- they were just misled, trying to play some games, even-- they went to Berlin. Now I'm reading-- finding. But this is all second hand. I don't know what's real. Somebody someday will write a real history.

They are doing such things. And that is where much information is being uncovered, that often just wasn't known.

Yeah. I just bought a few-- a month ago a book in English came out. But I'm finding out much of this information.

What did I want to-- there was one final thought that I wanted to express to get your views on it. And that is another let's say danger or gray zone that can appear. What I see in your descriptions of how the regional press worked, is that it's an attempt to bring some non-propaganda material into the public sphere. Yet now, when I read, let's say, or glance at papers from the time, they look particularly dangerous because the non-propaganda sections could legitimize the propaganda sections. Do you see what I'm trying to say?



No, but we did not see it that way.

No, you didn't--

We did not see it. We did not accept it. We did not treat it that way. But we thought this-- that-- who cares about that? But this is our culture. This is our paper. And we don't care about that. It can be disputed. And then can be opinions. But in reality when you are there, and when you really live in that situation, you try to outsmart-- of course, you could not publish anything. You close the theaters. You just give them milk, give them-- eh-- whatever Germans ask.

But that's not how life goes in the occupation. People continued try to live not to be disturbed by it and tried to continue their lives normally and ignore and to fight indirectly in very invisible ways, the occupation. The fight is going nonstop all the time, and tried to remain-- keep your identity. That critique that you just-- possible negative aspect of it was not really real.

No, I'm not saying that as something that during those times--

[CROSS TALK] look to it.

--but reading it now 60 years later, I see, for example--

Yeah, but you are now-- when you are free. You are in America or live in Lithuania. You are not there. You are from the outside, a different context. And it's like, OK, I think Michael said, well, why did you leave or this guy Ostrauskas told you to go? This is not realizing how serious this situation can be. We did not play games. It was not a game in which I was involved. It was in a real situation, as real as the gun under your nose. So you would-- so OK, I go. You say that I should leave. Why should I leave? And also the German military police look specifically for that type face. It was not a joke. So it was all real. Now it's more or less like a, look, a game. It was not a game.

Thank you. Let's go back to Germany. Though I think that if we have other thoughts or you have other things you want to say about this, we can come back to it.

And actually it was more serious than I thought at that time because I was still a little bit naive just from the village. OK, back to Elmshorn [CHUCKLES].

Back to Elmshorn. So in one of your-- I remember reading, probably in your book *Nowhere to Go*, that you describe going to Hamburg with your brother, and you find a bookstore, and that you are allowed to go.

Yes.

I found that strange--

No. It was--

--that being in the labor camp, you could do it.

Rules were very strong. But there were areas open where you could go out as long as you are back by that-- oh, whenever you left the barracks, you had to go first to the Lagerfuhrer's office and get permission. And the permission indicated exactly where you are going and when you must return. So you could go to a movie. There were limited places that you were allowed. There were some cafes, bars-- where we never went, and I'll forget-- Italians-- you cannot have-- we discovered that French and Italian, both prisoners, they were there under different conditions. They had different conditions than the forced labor workers.

Better?

They could go to bars. They could go-- still, I think they needed permission to leave the barracks. But they were allowed to write home, to receive packages-- we were not allowed. We were a much stricter regime. But we could go, if permitted to go, with a bookshop. And nobody asked to go to a bookshop except myself [CHUCKLES] and my brother.

[CHUCKLES]

So they were looking at us with amazement. And movies, that's all what we used to--

Did you go to any movies? Were there any movies playing in Hamburg in that time?

No, I'm talking about Elmshorn.

Elmshorn, OK.

And we were permitted during some weekend days-- I can remember I think Sundays-- also to go during certain hours for-- it took 20 minutes to reach Altona station, which was the last station left there. And that was the only area not destroyed. And that's where the bookshops-- [CHUCKLES] luckily, it was the bookshop area that was not destroyed around the station of Altona. And very often, when we were-- we tried not to go. We avoided Hamburg because whenever we went and snooped the bookshop, it was always air raid. So we used to-- and the train was always there to move out of town. And so usually, we run to the train, and then the train moves away for a mile to the suburb and stops because they used to bomb running trains.

Were you hungry in camp?

[CHUCKLES] If you get-- if you have the ration of meat for the week that you can cook it and it's food. So that's-- or if you have soup with worms floating in it--

I remember you were telling me about that. You were telling me--

So you eat some. [CHUCKLES].

Were you able to get food on the-- were you able to do anything on the black market?

Some Lithuanians in others barracks, they knew how to get some fish because there was a lot of fish around Hamburg. But we did not have any contact.

About how--

We were not smart.

Paint a picture of the barracks for me.

Just a shack that you can build from wood and tar--

Straw, you mean? Or--

--in one week or in three days. And you can kick with your fist the wall, and the fist will be on the other side.

And how many people--

And then there were-- in our room, there were 10 double cots. There were always about 15, 20 people.

And about how large do you think the entire complex was?

I think there were-- I don't know-- three-- four or five structures. I would guess between 300 and 400 people.

People?

Yeah, maybe 100 or 200 French, maybe-- these are approximate, my guesses-- maybe 50 Italians, and then 50 or 100 mixed. We were there during the period of the war when the Italians were already enemies of [CHUCKLES] Germany. So there were many Italians, some Belgians, some Dutch--

Were there Russians?

Most of the Russians were in separate barracks.

Were they Russian soldiers?

But there were Bulgarians, Romanians in our barracks.

Do you know whether the Russians were civilians or prisoners of war or--

Mixed.

And were there Poles?

There were Poles, I know very well, because I managed to get to have from Lithuania, to take with me and remain with me in one of my pockets, a watch. And one day when one of the Poles visited me, I stepped out for a moment. And later I discover that my watch was missing. [LAUGHS] And the Pole managed to steal the watch. There were Poles, and not many. There were maybe in some other areas.

Tell me, you worked you said at a place called Gebruder Neunert?

Yes.

What was that factory? Or what was that--

They called Maschinenfabrik. They specialized in metal, usually small parts for other machineries. And the rumor was going that what we were making-- they were just pieces. You never could guess what you could do with those pieces. You had to drill holes in them or polish them in one way or other. But the rumor was going that they were intended to-- they were parts for U boats.

And were there many people who were assigned to that particular factory?

In our factory, there were between 50 and 70 workers were there.

All from the forced labor camp?

Yes.

And were you ever assigned--

From, actually, different camps.

But all around Elmshorn?

Yes.

And were there any other places you were assigned to work?

No, on there--

Only there.

--from the beginning to the end until-- and that's what leads to us leaving Elmshorn, that during last-- by January--

So let me--

--of, yes?

Yeah, let me step back just a second. I wanted to anchor this in a certain time frame. You were leaving for Vienna in what month, do you remember? Was it July, '44?

[CHUCKLES] I have to look up my book.

I think it was July.

Somewhere there, yes.

July, '44. So that means July, August, September, October, November, December-- yes, January is the eighth month.

January or February, somewhere in there-- already by January, the factory began running out of supplies.

This is the winter of '45?

Because they're bombing all the factories. They couldn't get metal. They couldn't get this. So suddenly from 16 hours a day of work, or somewhere there, they began cutting. First they cut one hour, then another hour, and of course the more hours they cut-- as they were cutting down, our spirits went the same speed up. We knew that, oh, they're running [CHUCKLES] out of stuff.

Yeah.

But that was not much better than the work because you still have to be there many hours. And since there was no more materials to really work on those pieces, we had to keep cleaning and cleaning. And it became so-- the work you do, automatically you begin to forget even that you are working. You begin to dream your future fantasies. But when you're just cleaning and cleaning, the boredom of it is suffering.

And so--

So eventually-- and that's when we concocted a-- when it was reduced to five or six hours of actual work, and the rest was cleaning, we talked with Adolfas, what-- when we came, when we left, it's on the same train. Not on the same, but later somehow they joined-- they transferred from some other train into our train to Karaims, Tinfavicius. And then when we arrived, already, they brought us to Elmshorn, we found that there was one more Lithuanian. And I knew him from Birzai.

He was a young graduate of medical school in Riga, [NON-ENGLISH]. He was very bright. Spoke many-- Riga at that time was a university where you could study Sanskrit, you could oriental languages and philosophies, and he spoke them all. And he was in music. We learned a lot from him.

So for some time, they put him into our barracks also. And it's from him-- and he was very close to Jakubenas. Professor Jakubenas was teaching in Kaunas. And there was some protestant religion institute. And he was quite prominent in this field in Lithuania. And he ended up, when some of the intellectuals left because the-- even he left during the first weeks,

I think, or months of German occupation and settled down in-- Holstein--

Oh, Schleswig-Holstein?

Schleswig-Holstein. And [? Krakte ?] knew him. And Jakubenas was respected by local Germans there. And he persuaded them to give to [? Krakte ?] a job in one of the local hospitals because he was a medical-- he had just graduated. So he ended up in Schleswig-Holstein, in that area. But before he left, he said, if one day you want to try to-- if you think it's realistic to run to Sweden to escape, I will give you some leads. He knew from Riga during his studies, he had made contact with Sweden. So he said, but first before you go to Jakubenas, see me, and I will give you then the latest contact to the boats that could take you to Sweden from--

Schleswig-Ho--

Yes.

Schleswig-Holstein.

From a town just across on the other side of the border.

Kiel?

Denmark.

In Denmark. Oh, OK.

So we thought-- [CHUCKLES] somehow when the hours became shorter, we thought, why don't we tell brothers Neunert that since there is no work here, we could maybe-- we are willing to go to-- they could send us to Kiel. But also when we said this, we knew that Kiel was bombed almost every day, every night. So somehow he did not know what to do with the workers.

Because they're all cleaning, they have nothing else to do?

Yes. So I think the idea came first-- we overheard from him that he was with his brother. He had a brother who was very actually nice supervisor there. He used to be a teacher. And when the war started, they put him in the factory. So he never liked-- he was a-- and it's he that helped me. You see if I had a machine-- I was working with a machine-- I always had little pieces of paper with German words. I was studying there my language. So he used to come to me like a teacher and examine me.

So I think we overheard then figured out what to do with the workers. And that's when we dropped this Kiel idea. So oh, yes, I think we will be sending some people, some of the workers because there they still had materials.

How did you know that Kiel was being bombed?

It was not very far from us. All the workers knew-- everybody. It was, don't go there. And don't go there.

And was there anybody-- did you get broadcasts from anywhere?

No.

No?

No, only in these local newspapers. So one day Neunert call us and give the papers to us, which tell-- it's clearly written that please permit to travel there, and that we're going to Kiel to a factory so and so, and that's it. So we said, OK, we go. But on our way, when we crossed the river, we got rid of our documents. And we continued to Flensburg, naively

thinking that we can very easily-- but before that, we continued to Flensburg. And from there, we walked to Husum--

Husum? OK.

--where [? Krakte ?] lived.

Lived? OK.

And he gave us some information, whom to meet on the other side of the border. So we go back to Flensburg. We board the train that was going towards Denmark. But just before we boarded the train, and the police comes to ask for our papers. So we had the basic papers that Germans had given to all the workers. So the identification was there. But the fact that we're supposed to report to Kiel, that was not there. They did not know.

So he says, no, you cannot cross the border. So they threw us out. So we walk around. We took [CHUCKLES] our time. We walk around. And we go into two or three wagons. And we walked, there around, and we jumped on a train that was already moving out. But in 15 minutes, we realized that [CHUCKLES] it was not going to Denmark. It was going back to Schleswig or to another town back to where we came from.

Someplace in Schleswig-Holstein?

Yes. But then we also noticed that every station, every train was full of German refugees, that it also already-- there were so many Germans running from the eastern parts that already were the beginning of the chaos there. So we said, why don't we mix up with them?

And did you?

And that's what we did. Just like taking chance. But it was easy to take those chances because we noticed that even the police could not control anymore.

Did you have any Lithuanian documents when you left Lithuania, any passport--

Yes.

--IDs?

A liudijimas, not a passport, but a one page with the photograph and name.

So it is sort of like a declaration, an ID paper? Is that what it was?

Yes.

And who issued that? What kind of authority issued that?

I still have it. So I could [INAUDIBLE].

You still have it?

Yes, in Birzai, in the mayor's office. In any case, then we also noticed that when Germans run, they run in a very organized way. Everybody knew in what school they can sleep-- there were schools were made into-- they were closed by that time-- and where they could stay with some families. So we kept watching and look-- and we discovered that they were sending to the schools. So we said, why don't we join them and go-- so we ended up sleeping in that school together with all the other-- and they said, what are you running? We are also-- we come, we said, from Karaliaucius.

From Prussia?

Yes. And not much there. And then even we were still sleeping, we hear that some local farmer walked into the space. And he's asking, any workers who know the farm work? We need workers. That was spring. That was spring.

Oh, so now we're coming-- it's January, February--

Now we are in--

--March, or something like that.

Or April, somewhere there.

You're in April? OK.

It's in my book.

So we immediately dress up, say, yes. So the farmer takes us to his farm.

And what was your conditions there?

It was like paradise suddenly.

Really?

Yes, because the farmer, an old farmer by himself, with 10 cows and 2 or 3 horses there, and he can handle it. And his wife is sort of an invalid. But his mother, who was pretty old, she embraced all us like her children. She fed immediately-- cooked chicken or [CHUCKLES] and we became like your children.

So was this the first decent meal in Germany?

Yes, we could not believe it. And suddenly we are in-- and the closest police over there, it was like 5, 6 miles away. It was just in the countryside, very remote area. And that's where we stayed until the end. We did not-- we missed even the end of the war.

Did you?

We discovered only three, four, five days later that the war had ended.

So it was that quiet and that remote?

Yes.

Do you know the name of the village that it was?

I had it. Thiessen was the name of the family. Havetoft was a village.

Havetoft?

Yes.

Thiessen family, Havetoft village?

Yes.

In Schleswig-Holstein?

Yeah.

And who told you that the war ended?

From the local newspaper.

And when was the first time you saw soldiers, allied forces?

On our way to Flensburg when we-- we did not see any soldiers. Only we read in the paper that they are already in Flensburg. And the farmer then told us also-- Thiessen-- that-- and for [CHUCKLES] I think a day or two or three, he did not know himself until it really settled, and it was clear. And then he told us, you can stay. And we stayed. We did not rush because it was still, we believed, maybe chaotic. So we stayed another three or four days. And then we packed our books. And with his best horse, he himself took us to Flensburg.

And that's when we saw-- we were going into Flensburg. And from Flensburg, there were hundreds and hundreds of soldiers, some of them even with guns because they were already prisoners.

German soldiers, prisoners of war?

With like hundreds of-- and maybe three or four British guys guarding them because--

Is Flensburg-- excuse me, my geography fails me here-- is Flensburg north of Hamburg?

Yes.

Is it--

On the very border of Denmark.

Of Denmark? OK.

Because soldiers, they were all fed up. The British knew that they're not going to fight anymore.

So from there--

So keep your gun, who cares?

Wow. So this farmer takes you there. And where is--

And then we-- [? Krakte ?] had given us name of one of his friends who lived in Flensburg--

So this is [INAUDIBLE].

--in a private apartment. He was also a doctor. So we stayed for two or three days with this other doctor. And then we found out they are collecting all the refugees. And British immediately established-- usually in the army barracks.

So they--

And we went there.

And so then you became official displaced persons?



Yes.

Were you issued any kind of IDs by those authorities?

Yes. And then already there were Lithuanians in exile there in Germany, had created their own centers very fast and issuing sort of mini passports, which said, I am a Lithuanian refugee. And I refuse-- this was the-- I refuse to go back to Lithuania under the Soviet regime that was reestablished there. And why? Because at the same time, there were all those millions of Russian boat prisoners and forced laborers. And immediately the Soviets had made a deal with the Americans and British that they should all go back. They should all go back, and the train full immediately began being-

Did you see this? Did you see such trains?

Yes. And not only seen, I have experienced stones on myself on my head, thrown by the Russians going back home. First they stayed in the same barracks. And many of them-- and I had many conversations with many of them.

With the Russians?

Yes, who were most desperate to decide to go or not to go back. And then they usually ended up, oh, it's a bad. And we have this guy, this criminal, he's our king, but Russia still is my home. So I go . I don't know what will happen to me, but I have to go. But then every train was supervised by-- and all those groups, who were dedicated members of the Communist Party. And they're all in charge of those trains full of Russians. And they immediately put flowers all around. The joy of going back home. And forced them to sing. And not only that, when we stood and look there, they threw stones at us.

[GASPS] So it was--

You are remaining here. We are going home to this great Soviet home. And you are here. They used to throw stones at us.

So it was the guards, these soldiers, not the ones who were going back, who were throwing the stones?

No, the guards.

The guards?

By force-- they were taken home by force.

Any--

And they were afraid that at the same time they considered that Lithuania is part of Soviet Union. Many Lithuania did not sleep during that period in the barracks at all. So if they took them. They may take us also.

So were you afraid of this?

Yes, we were very careful.

How long did this period last?

Like two months. Within two or three months, all the Russians were sent back.

So that was the reason for that paper, that identification for the Allies, that we don't want to go?

Yes. I haven also.

It's an important piece. Did you stay in this particular displaced persons area?

I moved-- we stayed in Flensburg for maybe a month. And then, we thought, we are stuck here. And there was nothing there. So why don't we go somehow to the south, to the American zone? So we bought bikes. And we again-- because they said, you cannot go. There are no bridges. How can you go even with the bike? So we managed to reach on bikes, Hamburg, which is like 30 miles or so through--

Not exactly--

--the center.

--the South of Germany.

[CHUCKLES] And then we can't go any further on our bikes. So we stayed in Hamburg for maybe a month or so. And then we had enough from Hamburg because there was nothing left in the city, you know. So we just decided to board the train and try to go to the south as far as we can.

Did you have anything like money?

We had some money. And the money was-- and this remained so for almost until we left for New York, for five years-- cigarettes. Cigarettes bought us food, bought us bicycles. Cigarettes bought us books. We could go to movies with cigarettes. Cigarette was the money because we did not smoke. And everybody was smoking. And you could not get by-- you could not get cigarettes. But the British army, and later Americans, every family, every individual, grown up individual, every day or every two days, got a package of cigarettes.

Ah, so that meant when you--

And chocolate.

And chocolate?

Yeah. British came, the first thing they did, gave us chocolate, on which it said from the Queen of England. But the cigarettes, that saved even later when we started magazine and my books-- cigarettes. Always cigarettes paid.

Common currency.

Yes.

Across all nationalities.

Yes, international money.

So in other words, it wasn't that when you were a displaced person officially, that you're really confined to a certain place. You can roam?

Oh yes. You couldn't get food nowhere else.

Only in that place?

Yes. You had to be there.

But you could leave if you wanted to?

Yes, you could go to another camp.

And register there?

Yeah.

So did you make it to South Germany?

We managed to reach Flensburg-- not Flensburg, I mean Wurzburg.

Wurzburg, OK.

And it took three, four, or five days. As I said, there were no bridges. You go on a train. You reach the bridge. There is no bridge. There is some temporary passing you walk through. And then you rode-- there is another train that takes you to another [CHUCKLES] river. By the time we reached Wurzburg-- between Flensburg and Wurzburg, there was like a month of traveling with no food and no water and no-- every place we passed there is a well, I said, don't touch the water. It's still contagious, the diseases. It was the first--

What did the landscape look like?

[CHUCKLES] Landscape, read my book. The roadside, there is the tanks and ruins of the cities. There were no more cities. But all the wartime-- cluttered with their wartime weaponry all over. In any case-- and Wurzburg was flat. There was no Wurzburg. But we were so exhausted that we cannot go much further. We had to stop somehow. So I said, let's take one more chance. We know that there is-- and somebody said, yeah, but Wiesbaden was not destroyed. Just let's go to Wiesbaden.

So after we regained somehow our-- from our sleepless-- because you could not sleep. Every train was crowd-- there was nobody sitting. They were only standing, and no eating, no water, no sleep. So we managed-- it took us another day to reach Wiesbaden, where we said, that's it. We stay here. [CROSS TALK].

And so you mentioned that in the beginning when we were talking about formal education.

And yeah, because next to Wiesbaden on the other side of the Rhine, is on the Rhine, is the University of Mainz. But first we did not join immediately. We just had to settle down and regain our sanity and health.

And was that another DP camp in Wiesbaden?

Yes, there were 3,000 or 4,000 of Lithuanians there.

Uh-huh. And so--

It was a-- that's why we went there. Says, oh, there is a Lithuanian in the camp.

And for how long did this place stay home for you?

For one year plus.

For over a year?

Yes. And they moved-- they dispersed us to different camps. So us, they took to Kassel.

And then how long were you in Kassel?

In Kassel-- one year In Wiesbaden, four years in-- three years in Kassel, and the last year was again they were

dispersing, closing that camp. They sent us south to Schwabisch Gmund.

Schwabisch Gmund.

Schwabisch Gmund, which is south, near Stuttgart.

And how is it that you went--

So that's where we spent our sixth, seventh months-- our last months.

And what was your goal when you were in these camps? You certainly didn't want to go back East. But where did you--

We did not-- the way they were dispersed was that first, these came from camps that were controlled, like this-- United Nations Refugee Organization.

UNRRA.

We were a part of it. So UNRRA used to check for the Canada, Australia, very well-- what kind of-- how many refugees can you take? And what kind of professions you need? So there used to be signs in the morning on the board for everybody to see. Canada needs 4-- Canada that needs 200 wood workers. So all the strong-- might be healthy, strong people. So that was the procedure, how they-- life professions. So everybody was trying [INAUDIBLE] they were courses given to teach you in three days how to become this or that or that professional [CHUCKLES]. And I am a woodcutter. I have one. I have--

You have a certification to be a woodcutter?

Yes.

It certainly bespoke of your later profession now, didn't it?

Yeah. So that's how this-- And then at some point, we did not want to go to the woods because we were not the types.

What do you mean by you didn't want to go to the woods?

We had other dreams. For instance, we want--

Ah, you didn't want to be a woodcutter? Excuse me.

Yes. We had a dream already-- somewhere around that time, the first dream was to go to Israel and start a movie industry.

[CHUCKLES] And why Israel?

Because they were already getting interested in film. You go to America, and we cannot get to Hollywood. But here, it's just country, just coming into existence. There is nothing there. There's why don't we go to Israel and begin-- we can maybe do something to start film.

Did you meet any Jewish DPs in these years when you were in Germany?

After the war, no. No, not a single Jew in Germany. So we go to the Israel-- they had already a representative in Kassel-- said, we would like to go emigrate to Israel. He says, no. Now they have no instructions. But at this point, we permit only the Jews of some relative close. But there is no quota for Lithuanians.

For Israel?

To go to Israel.

And this was after 1948 that you did this when Israel was--

I have to look up. It's in my diary. It's in my book.

Oh, the reason why I ask is that before 1948, it would have been the British. And then after 1948, Israel was already independent.

Yeah, it was already independent. That's why we wanted to go up, to help the new country. We were the naive idealists. So we go back to the barracks. We say, OK, so what's next? And then my brother Adolfas jumps up. I remember he says, oh, we can go to Egypt. And then from Egypt, we can walk to Israel. You know how naive we were? [CHUCKLES] So next day, this is good idea.

[CHUCKLES].

And we go to the Egyptians, says, we would like to go to--

Open a film industry in Israel, can we come to your country?

No, I don't know what we said. We just wanted to work there. They must need workers or something. And then we don't tell our dreams. You not tell that we want to go to Israel. We had not known the relation. So they look up. They treat us already seriously. Says, yeah, we'll see. And then the secretary, the person in charge, comes back, says, oh, why didn't you come yesterday? There were three places left. And they were taken by your other friends, Lithuanians. So years later, I had a little correspondence with Greimas.

Greimas is--

Professor Greimas, the linguist, the semiologist. He was teaching at Sorbonne in Paris later. But first--

He was also Lithuania, expatriate?

Yes. Very important-- internationally important-- became a scientist. And he revealed that he and his family were those three people who [CHUCKLES] took those visas-- got the last three visas for Lithuania.

To Egypt?

Yes. And that's when he became-- for years worked at the University of Alexandria before Sorbonne Invited him. That must be-- oh yeah. That's OK.

Cut for a second. So Greimas--

It's running?

Yes, it's running.

Yes, note on Greimas. I cannot tell enough what important scientists in the science of languages, semiotics, Greimas' place is-- how high he's been considered internationally. Then he returned to Lithuania. But there are people who knew when he was still-- before he left Lithuania. And that was some-- I don't know exactly when he left Lithuania. But during this--

But was he a refugee?

And during the correspondence, questions, answers, and meetings with Michael-- I'm getting a lot of information about that period.

About 1941?

Yes, transition and German, first months and years. And some of the letters, materials that I have received express great anger about Greimas, who supposedly-- I do not know the details-- has made statements that could be interpreted as anti-Semitic. So there are in Lithuania today-- there are people who are still working researching and digging deeper into the past, who did what, who contributed to the Holocaust, who-- I know that during one of the recent conferences, Greimas died-- actually, I was supposed to meet him in Paris. That was 10 years ago or more. And on the plane, I pick up the newspaper from there. And Le Monde says, Greimas died yesterday. And I'm there going to Paris, not specifically to meet him, but on that trip, I was planning to meet him.

But there was a memorial, some event, for Greimas international event. I don't know in what city or country. And there was this representative also from Lithuania representing the linguists of linguistics in Lithuania. And during the conference honoring Greimas, he stood up and announced openly to the conference that he was anti-Semite. And how do you honor him now? For which he was very reprimanded very much this. So I don't know what documentation, what he has said, but there is this aspect there, which I want you to know.

Thank you because I was not familiar with Professor Greimas. As I did not know of-- I know the name--

He is one of the really most important-- Gimbutas [INAUDIBLE].

Yes, of course, I know her.

Gimbutas and Greimas are the two maybe most important Lithuanian scientists from that generation.

So let's go back to-- your stuck again in your barracks because Israel is not a possibility. Egypt is not a possibility.

Oh, and then we said, OK, so may as well we stay here until those who run camps decide where to take us because we have no profession. We are totally-- we can do anything or nothing. So we continued staying until they moved us from Kassel, until suddenly from the blue sky, we are contacted in Kassel by the government of-- by UNRRA-- and we were informed that a certain Variakojis, whom I discovered later was from Birzai-- a banker-- he was running a bank in Birzai-- who had heard-- he had heard because we had already published books, et cetera, in Kassel, that we are in Kassel, and that we had from Birzai. He knew that.

He made up papers. That was another way. If your relatives in the United States or some other country pay for your travel, and have place for you to stay and a job-- job was the condition and the place-- that he made-- he was living, working, had some business in Chicago-- and he had persuaded Cicero area, there somewhere, a baker to give jobs to me and my brother.

In the bakery?

In the bakery. And he paid-- he arranged the whole trip. He paid and had rented apartment for us to--

In Chicago?

In Chicago-- to come to Chicago. Oh, Chicago. OK, let's go to Chicago.

So was he a banker in Birzai or--

In Birzai. What he did in Chicago, I have no idea.

But he knew you from those days, from Birzai days?

No, I knew the name. I knew the name. And that's what I call bankers.

And so it suggests that he was rather well-to-do when he was in Birzai, if he had a bank.

Or maybe he became even wealthier in Chicago. Who knows?

You never know. Question though--

But he did good. If not, of course, I wouldn't be sitting here with you.

He told Variakojis.

Oh, and why? Because in between-- one day we woke up and said, oh, maybe it would be good to work on a ship since nobody wants us. So we went to a French ship company representative. And we were practically hired to work on the ship cruising between Le Havre and Sydney. And we were just waiting to be called on the ship. That's when this Variakojis, invitation from [INAUDIBLE] now we had to decide. Oh, let's go to America.

Now you mentioned something that I had not asked you about, and that is your cultural activities while you're in the displaced persons camps.

[LAUGHS]

Can you tell me--

Stupid, those activities. Stupidly--

Really?

--dragged me always into activities-- stupidity.

[CHUCKLES]

As soon as we--

What were some of the--

As soon as we arrived in Wiesbaden, maybe a week later, there is an announcement that there is a-- the culture committee of the camp is meeting. All those who are interested should come. And it was, I think, run by a certain professor, Bendorius.

Bendorius.

A professor of geography. So I come there, and there are some 15 people, did not know who they are. But there were two other people there that I had already met second day, and that was [INAUDIBLE] Landsbergis who--

Oh, yeah.

--became later playwright.

Playwright and--

And Leonas Adamkevicius, who was a painter, artist. And they are there also. So there is a discussion that we should do this and that and inform people. But one thing is needed is some daily bulletin. So is there somebody here who could--

Put together a daily bulletin?

So he looks around and looks at me.

[CHUCKLES]

OK, I will do it. And that's how I engaged to editing daily bulletin for-- And what was it called, this daily bulletin?

Oh, "Wiesbaden [NON-ENGLISH]."

So the news of Wiesbaden?

Yeah.

The Wiesbaden news.

The information from everything. And later even had one page. Sometimes weekend had fourth pages, one page for children, [CHUCKLES]--

Was there any--

--like a miniature newspaper.

Was there any news--

And then later Bendorius used to laugh and tell, says, have you had this meeting? And we thought there is nobody who will do it. Then we'll see this shabby kid in the corner. And he says he will do it. And I thought it's a joke.

[LAUGHTER]

But he did it. Was there any news at all--

Then, if you--

Whoops, OK.

OK. That's not the end.

OK.

Then that was already like five, six months later. You see those camps where not just simple people, workers or some people like me, mixed. There were some in that camp-- in Wiesbaden, there were at least 10 top professors, professionals from the University of Kaunas alone. So again, Bendorius who was very active, had a meeting. And he said, we should have peoples kind of university. We have all these people here, specialists, authorities in various subjects. So we could have a series of lectures. So again, he looks, and nobody wants to do it. Bendorius says, you want to do it? I said, OK, I will do it.

So that means you became the organizer?

[INAUDIBLE] camp university [CHUCKLES] in Wiesbaden. So when they moved us to Kassel, yes, but then the same, I continued in Kassel, continued not the university aspect, but the camp bulletin. I still have, I think, a good number of issues with me.



Oh, really?

Yes.

I know that those would be very valuable.

And then, of course, already the literary activities in Munchen, in Hanau, and other places, the Lithuanian electoral community. And journalists organized themselves, writers, the Aidai monthly magazine, began publishing.

What was it called?

Aidai.

Aidai, which means echos.

And then one of the problems was that there were already appearing-- there were books for grown-ups, but nothing for children. So this guy, Gedraitis in Kassel, says, why don't you help me to prepare some books for-- fairytales, something for children? So as you can-- I didn't have to tell you--

You were-- you said, OK [CHUCKLES].

I said, yes. So we began organizing publishing. And we published with [INAUDIBLE] multiplication.

Oh, how do you say it in Lithuanian?

[CHUCKLES] [LITHUANIAN].

[LITHUANIAN]?

Mm-hmm.

Which I take to mean a mimeograph machine, you mentioned that earlier.

Kind of. You type on stencils. It was Adamkevicius, Landsbergis, those were my buddies because I needed help already. The projects were expanding [CHUCKLES].

What did I want to ask? Yes, was there any news at all coming from Lithuania?

And my own journal started. We became very [INAUDIBLE] controversial-- [NON-ENGLISH].

[NON-ENGLISH]?

Literary magazine.

And how did it become controversial?

Because of its content. We concentrated in modern literature, not what was happening in the West. And the Lithuanian Literary Community thought we were too avant-garde. I can show you some later, some issues.

Any news from Lithuania during this time, during these years in the DP camps?

No. The first time that we could write to the family was when I was already published in film culture. And Iskusstvo Kino in Moskva knew about the magazine and used to visit me in New York and asked also to write for Iskusstvo Kino.

How do we translate that into English?

The art of cinema.

So iskusstvo means the art of?

Art.

OK, art.

Iskusstvo and kino.

And kino.

So the art of film. So--

And that would've been--

--we knew that they-- and now I'm safe, maybe. Maybe I'm safe. And that's when we slowly began correspondence.

Was this the 1960s?

Yes, in the '60s, what year I had the first issue of Iskusstvo Kino with one of my reports from New York.

So you wrote for them?

Yes, with report on cinema. They asked me. It's their main film publication.

For the Soviet Union?

Yes.

What did I want to ask now? So we asked--

And that's when at Chicago, Cicero Lithuanian community began calling me communist. [CHUCKLES].

You never know how avant-garde can become controversial. I want to go back to another point. And I want you to describe for me, if you can-- people have images of a group. And sometimes they get reduced to stereotypes. And sometimes those stereotypes happen to have truth to them, you know?

Yes.

And one image that stays in my mind is what you had said earlier during the first part of our interview, when we talked, and I asked, did you know of anybody who had participated in crimes against the Jews, who could have been--

No. I can tell you right now.

You didn't?

No.

You didn't?

No. But from Michael-- his last name always falls-- has written to me and said that some of the people that I knew had

participated, like [INAUDIBLE] and in which way, not in crimes, in that the poet Matuzevicius, who was from gymnasium Birzai city, two or three years earlier than me-- and some of his friends. So I understood from Michael that he has confessed to the Soviet secret police that during the shooting of the Jews, he was asked with his friends to take care to protect their home belongings [INAUDIBLE].

Their items, their assets, yeah.

Their assets. So that is the-- so I knew and actually, I admired [CHUCKLES] like their younger buddy poets want to be published and want to be known. But every young poet wants that and has some people close that he-- other poets that he or she admires. At that time, Matuzevicius was the poet of Birzai. He was the young Pushkin of Birzai. And he was good and very promising. It did not happen because he was arrested. So he went to Siberia, et cetera. He was destroyed.

But we-- all the younger ones who were writing poetry-- wanted to be poets-- admired him. So when I heard this from Michael, it to me was a little bit of a shock. But he was also one of the six. He said-- so those six-- and he wrote a poem about six of which was published in Birzu zinios, I don't know at what month. And the six became heroes. People did not know that they existed. And when they found out that somebody was in the underground, whatever they did-- some of them later, I don't know-- but I think they were instrumental to help others to decide that they should work underground also, like those six who worked against the Soviets.

When I read it, I also admired that they did it. But I also thought, why is he publishing these? He didn't name the names. The poem does not name names. But I thought, already, I was connected to the underground by distributing leaflets. That is why-- and then this was already on the Germans. And then somehow it was clear that this was wrong time [CHUCKLES] to publish something like that.

So if I interpret what you're saying, is that Matuzevicius was a poet you admired before. Then with the Soviets, he works underground against the Soviets. He's one of the six. When the Germans come, he publishes a poem about this underground--

Six, yes.

--six And you were thinking, this is not the right time to publish your connection to the six, whatever that would have been?

Yes, I never understood-- I was always wondering why he did that.

And the next time is when Michael Casper, who has written the New York Review of Books article, mentions to you-- shows you that he had confessed in a Soviet trial--

Yeah, but that-- whatever is confessed to the Soviets, I never take it for real money.

OK. But I started this questioning for a different question. And that was about all the--

But I answer your question in a very simple three or four word, do I know anybody who killed or committed criminal acts against--

I didn't finish the question though.

Yeah, and I said--

No.

--no. I did not know [INAUDIBLE] yeah.

But what I wanted to say with that is that when you answered this in part one of our interview, you said but in the DP

camps, you had met some people who very--

Whom I believe could have been.

Were capable of it?

Yes.

Were capable of it.

Yes.

And so there's an--

No, there was another-- this was when I was still in Flensburg because that's where the last resistance against the German divisions that fought English army. The army came from Denmark. So that's where they ended up. And then that's where they were released, including those Lithuanians. And there was this Lithuanian general, very educated person, Daukantas, whom I had never heard about that I met him there in the camp, though he-- Germans did that-- if a Lithuanian was a general of that stature, Germans-- even if that Lithuania or from any other country was up that military stature, Germans had so much admiration for the army, they used to give them special individual apartments.

But English did the same. They gave to Daukantas a room. And I met him because some of those young army Lithuanians from the German army-- really, they were criminals-- introduced me to him because admired him because he was a general.

Does he figure in this story? Was he one of those that you would have had this--

No, not Daukan-- no, not that general. No, he was-- we remained friends during our stay in Flensburg because he was also very much an oriental mysticism, the general. And he asked me to come and talk to him about it--

About it?

I have nobody here to talk about it.

But it was these-- these were--

And about him and some of these meetings, I am writing. You will find in the Lithuanian version of my I Had Nowhere to Go. I eliminated it from the English because it was of no interest like--

We're going on many topics, but let's finish this one just for a second, because I think it's rather short.

But those young criminal types from the army had just released--

German army?

--from the German army, some of them were drafted and became like that in the army. The army, as you know from Vietnam, can change one into criminal. Some may have even volunteered. Who knows? When they were all released, they were ready to kill, to steal, to continue their criminal [CHUCKLES] activities.

And so were they still spewing anti-Semitic hate?

No. They did not talk about Jews or anti-- This is my assumption that criminals of that kind of personality-- so that kind of criminal personalities-- would be capable. I can assume.

I see.

If they're really-- and now we know that left some Lithuanians who collaborated and were killers. It's that type of Lithuanian--

Of person. Yeah.

--in every country-- that doesn't mean that it shows bad light on Lithuania. It's just that category, that segment of population, you'll find in every city, every village, every--

Yeah. My question was really geared to DPs. So I wanted to see if there's a characteristic of DPs. And you have explained to me that what you described about being in Germany and hearing about people who would have been capable of this kind of murder sounds like--

No, I assumed that. I did not--

You assumed.

--hear about it.

Yes, I understand now.

I assume it.

I assume.

Yes. But it's also not really about the DPs. It's about people who-- about young Lithuanians who had been in the German army and their--

But there are people in any country in general. There is a segment--

Do you think amongst the--

--that is criminal.

Yes. Do you think that amongst the DPs, you heard any such sentiments when they came from Lithuania?

Sentiments?

Sentiments that had been very popular in Lithuania for a time for the Jews are responsible for our misfortune. The Jews helped the Soviets. This sort of--

The only thing that I heard was [CHUCKLES] not in the camps, but in Lithuania, that some of them were accusing Jews for helping bringing into Lithuania communism, the Soviets, because the farmers, they were much working with the Jews. In Birzai and Papily, we depended on them. And I know from my neighbor, from my mother, they very liberal, you know, part of the family. It was not-- and that kind of the communist rumor I did not hear from my farmers, actually. I heard that in the fall when I went to the already back to the studies in Birzai.

I think that--

Farmers were very open in at least northern Lithuania to the-- there were Jews in every smaller town. And that's why when Klibas said, oh, 5,000 people in Birzai. But then I hear from Michael that there were 2,200--

400.

How could it be? That's half of the city. I haven't seen, told there were like 300. But they were brought from those other little towns that have small populations. And sometimes maybe it's three families. But sometimes in some of those smaller towns, maybe they really were 100 because how else can you make up 2,200?

2,400.

400.

I think that--

But farmers, I think, there was a watching-- some of them, of course, were not happy that some maybe-- and we had all kinds of business sharks in every race, in every group, so some-- there were Jews like others were wanted, maybe make some profit-- more for profit than they should. But in general that was not in the air. It was [INAUDIBLE]. And that I would say Lithuania in general. And that's why we had this renaissance of the Jewish culture, literature, arts, in Vilnius in Lithuania a century earlier.

Let's proceed back to Germany, back to the DP camps, and where you are about to leave for-- [CROSS TALK]

And even in the camps, I was not so involved what was going the camps. There were three or four or five of us interested in literature and the arts. We were publishing, working in that area, and the rest, again, did not exist to us because we almost hated the rest of the camp because to us, we're just interested to go somewhere, and make money and become successful. And they were boring, all of them. We kept ourselves apart. So I'm not authority even to not even talk about the rest.

OK. So you find a way through this Mr. Varakojas. Who--

Varakojas, silver legged [CHUCKLES].

Silver legged, yes, Varakojas. Or copper legged.

Maybe close.

Copper leg, yeah.

Vara, yeah.

Who arranges for these affidavits to come for you and your brother to work--

And we come.

And you land where?

On the pier on the 23rd Street.

In New York City?

In New York City, on the Hudson River.

When?

At night, on 29th of October, 1949.

Wow. Of all that you say you don't remember dates, but you remember that one.

That's a very important date because that's where my life begins. I was 27. And on that 29th of October, I began my real life.

Did you ever make it to Chicago?

So Landsbergis, who had arrived before us and settled down.

The playwright, Algirdas.

And Williamsburg number 1, Meserole Street-- so he comes to greet us. And he said, I will take you to the station to Chicago-- train to Chicago. And we say, oh, before we take us, let's go on the upper floor at the pier. And let's have a view from higher. We had to see Manhattan. So we go. We climb up there and open big-- windows.

This is on Meserole Street?

No, this is still on Pier 23. We are still there with our bags with our stuff. And we look at Manhattan from that big window at Pier 23. And myself and Adolfas, I remember very clearly, we said almost at the same time, and we said, here we are in New York. It would be stupid to go to Chicago when you are in New York. We never went to Chicago.

[CHUCKLES].

So can we stay a day or two with you? And Landsbergis said, I will put you up for two or three days until we find job.

And what was your first job?

Very similar to what I did at Neunert. I went to the-- on Warren Street-- there were several agencies offering jobs on Warren Street in lower Manhattan. So we went there. I went there. And they said what profession-- do you have some profession? I says, I can work with some machines. Oh, here. So they found me a job for two weeks in some very similar working with some machines. I had a profession. And then they let me go.

[CHUCKLES].

And then it continues. I was not choosy. I took any job that anybody could give me.

I'm going to--

Though that was how our life--

Here began.

--began.

I'm going to skip--

But the very second evening, we went already to a film society in Manhattan. And we saw two avant-garde film classics.

What were they?

One was known as Cabinet of Dr. Caligari. The other one is known as The Fall of the House of Usher, based on Edgar Allen Poe.

Poem. Or story? I don't remember which it was.

Because we read the New York Times. We bought and we saw the announcement. I said, we have to see it.

Our interview, of course, doesn't cover this part of your life--

Yeah, that's OK.

--just the major part. But there is one final episode that I'd like to touch upon. And that you already foreshadowed when you said that you wrote for Iskusstvo Kino, and therefore became in some ways not popular in the Lithuanian emigre community. But it re-establishes a tie to what then is Soviet Lithuania.

Yes.

Either in your book, or you mentioned it, is that after the Soviets returned, your mother told-- at some point--

Yeah, when I visited in 1971.

She said that they had been looking for you for a year.

Yeah.

Why?

First because I was not there. That means I may be in the woods, joined partisans, myself, Adolfas, we're not dead. Where are they?

Yeah, you're of the age.

They ask-- yes. They ask my mother. And mother doesn't know. [CHUCKLES] I don't know where they are.

So explain for the camera what that means. Excuse me, explain for the camera what that means to be in the woods at that time.

In the woods means that you joined Lithuanian anti-Soviet partisans. So they figured that I may have joined the partisans. But there may be another reason because I had also somewhere in the maybe fall or winter of '41 published in the Birzu Zinios stupid little poems, like a banal. But it was anti-Stalin and anti-Soviet. "Anti-Stalin's Anthem" I think I called it. And it was talking very openly against Stalin. So I don't think they liked that.

When you went back in 1971, that also suggests of having some special treatment on the part of the Soviets.

Yes, as editor Film Culture magazine-- I have to tell you that right now when I'm talking to you, I should be in Berlin, where a huge conference is opening tomorrow on Film Culture Magazine-- international conference about the importance of the magazine. So the magazine very fast-- because it was the only serious magazine in the United States-- became very important for the United State and the world. It was international.

And this is a magazine you founded?

Magazine that I started in December, 1954. So it became very fast the leading world publication. And this conference is just a reminder what that magazine contributed to the American film community and the world. So in Moscow, of course, if they wanted to know to have contact with anybody, Iskusstvo Kino had to go to film culture.

And therefore to you?

Came to me, and they kept inviting me to film festivals because they need coverage. So one time I decided to go. And



that's, of course, another story. In 1971, that's when I went because already by that time, I was clever enough and learned enough about how the world works, that I thought I can use this maybe to visit my mother.

And could you?

And I did. But that's a long story. That's another story. But you can read it because it's very funny. I will give you this book. You should read it.

Oh, thank you. A Dance with Fred Astaire. I will. Thank you.

And you will read my story, how I managed to visit my mother.

Then I have one last questions.

But that's another chapter.

Yes, it's another chapter. Did you ever discover if you had a KGB file?

How could I discovered it?

After independence.

But I bet there was.

But you've never seen one?

No. How could I see?

Today one could. Today one could ask for one's file from--

Ask whom?

The Lithuanian Special Archives in Vilnius. And a search could be made to see if there is one. It could be done.

I bet.

But my question is, did you know of one, and had you seen it?

No.

You had not?

No.

I think we've come to the end. And I thank you for your time--

Welcome.

--for your generosity of the time.

If as you work on this sort of-- if you feel that in some aspect, you need some additional [CHUCKLES] elucidation, I will give you all the time that you need.

Thank you very much. And I will say that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with

Mr. Jonas Mekas, on July 1st, 2018, in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, New York. Thank you.

[SIDE CONVERSATION]