

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Jonas Mekas
June 29, 2018 & July 1, 2018
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PREFACE

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JONAS MEKAS

June 29, 2018 & July 1, 2018

Question: This is a **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with Mr. **Jonas Mekas**, on June 29th, 2018, in **Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, New York**.

Thank you – thank you for agreeing to meet with us today, to talk with us today.

Answer: You're welcome.

Q: Okay. I'm going to start my interview with very basic questions, and we'll develop everything from there. So my first question is, can you tell me the date of your birth?

A: The date of my birth is 24th of December, just before sunrise, 1922.

Q: So, it was Christmas eve day.

A: And it – Christmas, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Which, of course, was a good reason for my mother's friends to make jokes about **Jesus Christ**.

Q: Oh, really? So, he's come, and – he's born, and he's come into the world. And where were you born?

A: In the small – I was born in a small village of – farming village of 20 families, **Semeniškiai**.

Q: **Semeniškiai**.

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A: **Semeniškiai**, which is five kilometers from **Papilys**, and about 20 kilometers from **Biržai**.

Q: Okay, **Biržai** was a larger city in the area.

A: The – the – **Biržai** was the city of the – of the – the – **Lithuania** was divided in some 25 **apskritis**(ph) areas, and **Biržai** was the capital of one of the areas.

Q: Okay. And this was –

A: **Biržai rajonas** and **Biržai krastas**.

Q: Yeah, district, region –

A: District of **Biržai**.

Q: Yeah.

A: Which was also what, 20 kilometers from the border of **Latvia**. It – by a – it was about 100 kil – less than 100 kilometers south from **Riga**.

Q: A major city. A major city.

A: Major city of **Latvia**.

Q: Yeah.

A: Capital.

Q: Yeah.

A: Capital of **Latvia**.

Q: So, you were in the northeastern corner of **Lithuania**?

A: Yes.

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Q: Okay. And the village was **Semeniškiai**?

A: **Semeniškiai**, yes.

Q: And, you –

A: Not to be mixed up with – very often they mix up with **Semeniškės**. There is another similar town in – near – near the town of **Alytus**.

Q: Which is the other end of the country.

A: Sort of.

Q: Yeah.

A: Almost.

Q: And, you said how many people lived in that village, when you were born?

A: In s – in **Semeniškiai**?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I – well, before I left, I – I counted all the people living in **Semeniškiai**, those 20 families. I think I came up with 98 people.

Q: Did everybody know each other?

A: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Q: Yeah. And, your name when you were born? Can you tell us that again, even though it's repetitious?

A: That's okay, what – what do you want?

Q: What was your name at birth?

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A: My name was **Jonas**.

Q: **Jonas Mekas**.

A: Here – here – here they pr – they pronounce in – in English lands as – as **Jonas**, **Jonas**, **Jonas**, so I accepted it, because I got tired, tired correcting.

Q: Yeah.

A: But, **Jonas**.

Q: **Jonas**. And your last name, how is it pronounced in English? Is it the same as in –

A: In – in Lithuanian, **Mekas**. In – in English, I allow people to pronounce the way that's easiest for them. So most of the time, they say, **Meek-Meekas(ph)**, **Jonas Meekas(ph)**, or **Jonas Mekkass(ph)**, some say **Mekkass(ph)**.

Q: Okay.

A: Most of the time, I'm **Mekas**.

Q: **Mekas**.

A: Funny, Japanese make special effort to a – they ask, and insist they want to pronounce my name exactly like it was pronounced where I come from.

Q: Interesting.

A: Yes.

Q: Interesting. Politeness.

A: Yes.

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Q: How many – how many siblings did you have?

A: I have an son – oh, you –

Q: Siblings.

A: – I never understood what the siblings is.

Q: Okay, brothers and sisters.

A: One sister and four – four brothers.

Q: And you, were you the oldest, the youngest?

A: I was there one bef-before the last.

Q: Could you tell me your brothers' names, and your sister's name?

A: My sister, who was the oldest, **Elžbieta**.

Q: **Elžbieta**.

A: My mother was also **Elžbieta**.

Q: Okay.

A: My father was **Povilas, Povilas**.

Q: So in –

A: Which is like **Paul**.

Q: Yeah.

A: **Povilas**, and **Elžbieta** is like **Elizabeth**. Then followed to **Povilas** –

Q: The oldest brother?

A: – oldest br – then **Petras, Peter**, and then **Kostas** –

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Q: **Kostas**.

A: – **Kostas**, and then me, and then **Adolfas**.

Q: And he was –

A: **Adolfas**, he was the youngest.

Q: And you're born in 1922.

A: Twenty-two, he was in '25.

Q: And your sister, what year was she born in?

A: I would have to check. Tell – tell – th-the – the records are – of the birthdates of my brothers were never really recorded properly.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah.

Q: Huh. Not in the church records, or anything like that?

A: Well, the – the – the – the – the – some I – I – if sa – with – with some digging, I can find.

Q: Well, approximately how –

A: In any case, okay, I'll – I'll begin with **Adolfas**, 20 fi – '25, '22, **Kostas** was ni – '19, **Petras** was, I think '15 –

Q: 1915.

A: – '15, and – and **Elżbieta** was like two years earlier, so that makes –

Q: And **Povilas**?

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A: – and po – oh, oh, pard – **Povilas** two years earlier, '15.

Q: Thirteen.

A: I'm going '13, and then going to **Elżbieta**, is '10.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: So about 1910 she is born.

A: Yes.

Q: And 1925, the youngest child is born. And you end up being one, two, three – five brothers, and one sister, all told.

A: Four bro – four brothers and one sister. We grew up six.

Q: Yeah.

A: Six of us.

Q: Six of us. And your father's name was also **Povilas**?

A: Yes.

Q: All right. What was – what was his profession, or what did he do? How did he make a living?

A: He was a farmer, his parents were farmers, but he always want to be a carpenter.

At the same time as he was running the farm, he was also known in the whole area as a carpenter.

Q: Was he good at it?

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A: And he was very good at it. He used to make special carriages. He could – he was how – that he was really good. I know that he used to fix up even musical instruments.

Q: Mm-hm. Oh wow.

A: Yes.

Q: That's something.

A: Music was always around our house, musical instruments, yes.

Q: Did you play any?

A: I – I played them all, none professionally.

Q: Okay, okay. And, had your family been in **Semeniškiai** for many generations, or had they moved there from someplace else?

A: I have to tell you that er – many det-details come with it, which – to which I'm not going, but I was very sickly in my young age, and I had somehow retreated just into myself, like – and – and I had very little interest. Then I, because of that, I – I got, you know – went into it, was – you know, my world was books, from a very, very early age, and I was not interested in the world around me. I was not much interested in the ba – background of my f – you know, family; father, mother. Only much, much – many years later, when it was already too late to – I got interested. So I – I know very – I know that at least my father's family wa – they were farmers.

Q: Okay.

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A: That's all I know. And I knew – I know nothing, I knew nothing, I was not interested to find out who my f – grandfather was, or grandmother.

Q: You didn't know them.

A: I did not know –

Q: They had – they had died?

A: No, none – yes, th-they were already dead.

Q: Okay.

A: And – and my mother's family were – they were also farmers, from **Mieleišiai**.

Q: **Mieleišiai**.

A: **Mieleišiai**, about five kilometers west, southwest. And **Mieleišiai** became known as the birthplace of **Julius Janonis**.

Q: And who –

A: – the poet. And **Juli – Jul – Julius Ja-Janonis**, who was neighbor of my mother's family in **Mieleišiai** was a poet who caught tuberculosis in **St. Petersburg**, where he was studying, and he died at the age of 23, maybe, or committed suicide.

Q: Really?

A: But he became known, became the – during the Soviet period, became the number one poet of **Lithuania**.

Q: And how was that?

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A: And became translated into, you know, all the languages, and it was not be – because of his – oh, oh, you want – we have to go into the history of that area. The – the – the – he grew up to a certain young maturity in the – 1905.

Q: Okay.

A: Which was a – when the – the first revolution took place, I would say, and against the tsarist regime. And he got very politically involved, as a young g – as a student, and wrote his poetry with very – in that sense, revolutionary.

Q: So, it would have –

A: He was the revolutionary poet of **Lithuania**.

Q: So when you say Soviet period, you mean that he was –

A: Not Soviet, tsarist.

Q: Tsarist, yes. But when he was the number one poet, during the Soviet period –

A: He was an – oh, yes.

Q: Yeah. Then he was someone who was – whose –

A: That Soviet –

Q: – views –

A: – Soviet co – socialists, communists embraced him, because all the others were sort of patriotic, but they were **Lithuania, Lithuania, Lithuania**. But he was not talking about **Lithuania**.

Q: What was he talking about?

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A: He was talking with this poetry about the workers.

Q: Interesting, coming from a farm family himself, or a farming village himself.

A: Yes, but he – he left the village, you know, I mean, he – he was 15, so it's to like – there is no – no just child – childhood. And he was immediately connected himself with other students, other revolutionaries, intellectuals, poets, and – and already in **St. Petersburg**. He began in **Biržai**.

Q: Did he spe – did his poetry speak to you?

A: Yes, he's a ver – he – he writes very directly, very – very simple and direct, and with great feeling. He –

Q: It's interesting, many people who were arti – you know, who –

A: Yeah.

Q: – who – who write as artists, get co-opted, sometimes by regimes that don't necessarily have the best purposes, and their art becomes, in some ways, propagandas –

A: They exploited him, but the choice – but the – but the choice, they were not – not wrong. He was a revolutionary, and he was with the workers.

Q: Okay.

A: And that's when the – at least officially, that's what, you know, communists, socialists, supposed to be.

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Q: And did you – wa – did you learn about him very early on, because he was in the neighborhood?

A: Yes, yes, from my mother.

Q: Oh.

A: Because he was the neighbor.

Q: Okay.

A: His mother already was telling, you know, about how – they were very poor, poor family, so when he was already 10 and 11, 12, they used to send him to **Latvia** to – to – to take care – to dur – as – well, during the summers, to earn some money, by working as a shepherd. Latvian farmers needed, and –

Q: So, he was hired out?

A: And the mut – and mother used to miss him so much, that he – she used to come to visit him. When she did not show up, she used to watch him from the woods when – the edge of the woods, that – so that she could see him, but he could not see hi – her.

Q: Okay.

A: Because she did not want that.

Q: She did not want him to be able to see, mm-hm.

A: To – you know, yeah, to – to break his heart, so to speak.

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Q: So you grew up with this kind of story, her – his mother tells your mother, and it becomes known to you, about this –

A: Yeah – no, farmers talk to each other –

Q: Yeah.

A: – and they tell – tell each other s-stories. They're all there.

Q: Yeah.

A: The village where – where I grew up until age of seven, eight, was – all the 20 families were – were together. They were not dispersed like later it happened in '27, '28.

Q: I remember reading that you said that was a great tragedy for the village.

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: Culture – culture and in many ways. That's another story.

Q: Yeah.

A: So we – we knew each other, you know, we have – and we si – we got together every day, and we could hear them – them laughing, or – or fighting, and we – if the fight was too – too bad, we used to go, you know, my father used to go and try to talk. So it was part of the whole circle, and you have the idea, also. And we – we – and then we sang together, we – later, you could hear somewhere, somebody sing

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[**indecipherable**]. But we did not – when they dis-dispersed the families into settlements, it was a completely different situation.

Q: Well, from what I understand from the history, it was that there was a land reform act.

A: Yeah, this is – oh, look at the Danish people, look at the German, you see they do very well, you know?

Q: On single farm – single family farms.

A: Yeah, yeah, that was the motivation.

Q: And what you're describing is much more the Russian **mir** system, where – where villages were collected in one place. That is, they lived in one place.

A: They – they were not collected. They original, they grew from there, and the one, and then the neighbor, ah, I like you, I will be here, also, I will, I will ma –

Q: Yeah – no, no, no, not – not –

A: It grew.

Q: – yeah, I – I used the wrong word. It was – it was natural, it was –

A: Yes.

Q: – not a – not a forced thing.

A: Yes.

Q: But that old system had people, the people who worked the land lived in an – in one sort of area –

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A: Yes.

Q: – but the land was somewhere else. The land was not –

A: Land – the land – each one had, you know, different spots there, and there, and there.

Q: Tell me –

A: Later they joined, they said, okay, let's have each one of us should ha – have all our, you know, little – those places, in one place.

Q: That's right. So that, if you had different plots of land in different areas, it's all united, and you have this one larger plot –

A: Yeah.

Q: – from the several. So, this was something significant for interwar years for

Lithuania, which is an agricultural country.

A: Economically, agriculturally, y-y-ye-yes it was a **[indecipherable]** but since man does not live by bread alone –

Q: Yeah.

A: – it was an act. We, at least the culture, the songs, the – also that there be together **[indecipherable]** many human values disappeared.

Q: It was lost.

A: That one – we became wolves.

Q: Really?

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A: You know, each one, you know – you know, I am on my own, you – you know, I'm there, you know, I have my own. Before, it was all together, it was a community.

Q: How – how large –

A: Now, we are dreaming about getting back into communities. We're met – we destroyed them.

Q: That happens a lot. That happens a lot. How large a farm, then –

A: Twenty acres. We had the top with 20 acres.

Q: So, it would have been more in hectares, it would have been wa – about 30 hectares, or something?

A: I – I never understood the difference in size of – when we say in English, one acre, and I don't know. All I know that our farm was about one – at some point, because I – to improve my health, which I said, that's another big story, I – I picked up running –

Q: Okay.

A: – one kilometer. So, we measured, with my brother **Adolfas**, from one end to the other end from the farm was almost exactly a kilometer.

Q: Okay.

A: And we ran – he was – that's what [**indecipherable**] run.

Q: And how fast could you run it?

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A: I was actually improving, so that I even participated in competitions. One kilometer. One kilometer was my distance.

Q: Okay.

A: And I practiced it until I was like 60 - 65.

Q: No kidding, really?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: That's the basis of my – when people like oh, you – you – you – oh, 96

[indecipherable] says, you have to – you know, you have to take care of your – your – it does not come –

Q: Naturally.

A: – not – especially when there's so many temptations.

Q: Well, one of the reasons I ask the size of the farm is because that also was significant in dividing people into classes in the interwar years, and especially when there were various occupations. So five acres is a small farm. Fifty is already –

A: For – like our neighbor had 40. And – and how that was decided was, you know, you – it's the wetlands, some marshes, or the – the woods. And that – the neighbor who had 40 acres, some of it was very sandy, and a lot of woods, and a lot of work was needed to put into it, to make into – you know, usable land.

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Q: Was your father – were you able – was the family able to feed itself from the 20 acres?

A: Yes, we had – well, we had enough, we had land which there – there had – there was variety, and – and earth richness, and we had – we grew everything that we needed to – for our life. Only we needed to buy salt. Just some items like that.

Q: Did – was there a surplus to take to market?

A: Yes, that's how we farmers survived.

Q: Okay.

A: They grew extra rye, or potatoes, vegetables, which, you know, every Monday there was a market day in **Biržai**, and every Monday, early, from early, you – if you read my poetry, you will find out. Every Monday there were carriages full – the roads were full of farmers on their way to the market.

Q: And in your family, who would go?

A: My father, with the oldest brother –

Q: With **Povilas**.

A: – brother, yeah

Q: Okay

A: Oh, and sometimes just with my mother.

Q: Okay.

A: When she needed something to buy.

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Q: Did you ever join them?

A: Which was all – sometimes. Which was also a meeting ground. Once a week, all the farmers from different villages th-that we friended for – for no other reason, they met there, and sometime they had some drinks. Was one of the –

Q: All the people in your village, that you knew, the 98 or so, were they all Lithuanian?

A: Yes, they were all Lithuanian.

Q: So, it was a very homogenous group?

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: Were they old –

A: They were in – the whole area that I – or – or which – and the te – 10 surrounding villages, there were no other people from any other nation, country, or that spoke any other language.

Q: Was all Lithuanian.

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: Had your father fought in World War I, by the way?

A: No. No, no.

Q: He didn't. He stayed on the farm.

A: Yes, I don't know the details.

Q: Okay. Did he –

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A: Yeah. All I know that you – oh, no, no, he was in – drafted in the army.

Q: Tsar's army?

A: But he did not fought. He was in the Russian tsarist army –

Q: Okay.

A: – because he was telling – telling about the – how they used to train, you know, them. But he was, during – n-not in the 1940.

Q: Okay. And also, he had been a – drafted in the tsarist army, but he wasn't fighting in first World War?

A: But then – then at some point he finished, you know, how many years –

Q: Yeah.

A: – there were a lot of, many years that he was – but then he headed back on the farm.

Q: Did he – did he have brothers and sisters?

A: He had one brother, who lived in one of the villages.

Q: Did you –

A: I found out that later. I did not even know that he was his brother, yeah.

Q: Oh, okay, okay. And your mother, did she have brothers and sist –

A: She had – she the brother, and a sister. The sister never married, she stayed always with her brother, and her brother was – became a prot – Reform Protestant pastor. That area, she started to – that sort of connected to why I ended up here.

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Q: Okay.

A: He studied in **Switzerland**, and in **Germany**, and **Austria**. He spoke pro – several languages. But that area, the area of **Biržai**, when – okay, **Lithuania** got Christianized on paper when **Jogaila** –

Q: **Jogaila**, yeah.

A: – Polish – **Poland** said, we need a king, we will give you a kingdom, if you marry –

Q: **Jadwiga**.

A: – **Jad-Jadwiga**, our princess. But that's not – said, sure, I will do that. Said – and – but also, you will have to – to – to christia – I guess, on paper, and declare officially that **Lithuania**, on that day will become also, ca – Chr-Christian.

Q: Okay.

A: So, they accepted it.

Q: But that meant Catholic.

A: He accepted it all.

Q: Okay.

A: And it came, and that's how on paper **Lithuania** was Christian. And when – Christian meant Catholic. Then **Radziwill** came.

Q: And who was **Radziwill**?

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A: **Radziwill** was a family of – of pol – I don't know exact – there was some Lithuanian blood, but I think may – most – most of the blood was Polish blood, who didn't like the idea of **Lithuania** – he caught – somewhere he drew – connected with **Luther**(ph) and his followers, and – and there was a lot of going and **[indecipherable]** in that time in – in – so, he counterattacked with the rev – wanted to ch-chase those out – Jesuits, and **Lithuania** practically was becoming Protestant.

Q: Like **Latvia** or **Estonia**.

A: Yes, or – yes. Which, the Vatican panicked, and they sent a team, some Jesuits, and then they counterattacked again, and within – and **Radziwill** had, you know, built castles in **Papily**, in **Biržai**. I don't know why he was **[indecipherable]** he settled down in the north, but –

Q: Your hometown, yeah.

A: – of **Lithuania**. And – and – and they pushed and pushed. They work hard, and we didn't – I don't know how many years, maybe 50 - 60, and **Lithuania** went back to the – the co – the Catholics re – conquered **Lithuania**, and only in the very, very north, around **Biržai**, there were like, I don't know, maybe one hun – hundred thousand people that remained before – Protestants.

Q: And was your family also?

A: And so my family, and mo-most of my village, and the villages surrounding, they were all, I would say, 75 percent Protestant.

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Q: Was there a church in your village?

A: No, not in the village, but the **Papilys [indecipherable]** that's five kilometers, that you can walk.

Q: Did you go to church on Sundays?

A: My parents went, and sometimes we too, you know, us children also.

Q: But it – that wasn't something that was regular, and obligatory?

A: No. They went regularly. They went. My parents were very religious.

Q: Okay.

A: They were very. They did not miss. But they did not insist their children were too.

Q: Okay.

A: No.

Q: So that was only occasional, that the children would go?

A: Very, very seldom.

Q: Interesting.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did they – did they – did you ever have to study the Bible, did you ever have any religious lessons?

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A: No, no, no, no, but my father had all the – like – like – his library was 20 or so books, and they were all religious sermons. The basic, all the – all religious, and you know, the Bible, the New Testament, and – and commentaries, etcetera, etcetera.

Q: Do you remember –

A: And he read it every evening, loud, at some point when everything was done, just before going to bed, relaxed people, you know, in the winter, or what – when you just do some things that you do, still for the farm, in the evening at home, he used to read, and read from one of the books.

Q: Out loud?

A: Yes, loud.

Q: Okay.

A: Loud reading was very much part of my child – childhood. I had to read also, and when – sometimes neighbors used to get together and do some things together, and instead that just – you got tired sometimes, yapping. Said, could you read just to us something? So I read them many novels.

Q: So it's interesting, cause that's a tradition that no longer exists. People don't read to each other.

A: No.

Q: You know.

A: I u-used to read **contemporary** novels.

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Q: Another – was di – was there a feeling that there’s a difference in the culture – and I’m talking about in that sense of a person – an individual’s individual culture, a **žmogaus turi kultūra**, between how – how you saw, you know, your life as a Protestant family, and how the Catholic families –

A: Religion did – religion did not cov – nobody talked about it. Nobody ti – discussed, only, you know, they led their lives according to their religion, but it was not – never talked about.

Q: So there was never any differencing with the Catholics?

A: No.

Q: Okay. So they would not be sort of oh, that’s a Catholic li – village?

A: No, no, no.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: No, that di – that did not exist.

Q: Okay. Were there –

A: You could never know which one was Catholics [**indecipherable**] unless you were – you grew up together, and fal – and you knew it. If you did not – if you were not interested in that aspect, you – you did not know.

Q: Yeah, you didn’t know. Okay. One other thing that sounds interesting and not always emphasized, was learning. It sounds like it was something that was valued in your family. If your father read, and read every single day.

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A: Yeah, but you see, also, to the – the – **Povilas** –

Q: Your oldest brother.

A: – the oldest, was old enough for – where we grew up, he was already, in **Biržai** in gymnasium –

Q: High school.

A: – gymnasia, or it will be like a high school. And he used to bring, you know, he was avid reader. And it's amazing that though there was a Lithuanian language, Lithuanian books, that **[indecipherable]** forbidden by tsar's regime, it was amazing that from beginning of 1905, the real revolution began in Lithuanian –

Q: Well, in **Russia**, uh-huh, okay, sorry.

A: – culture. In culture, and **[indecipherable]**. And th-the – the decla – declaration of regaining of in – independence in 1918 – between 1918 and 1940 is 20 years when the Soviet – Soviets came. It – it's mindboggling how much was published, translated and publi – all – there were – I read already there, when the time of 15, I had read the American classics. Those that when ask, have you read, like this or that, or like "**Babbitt**," or like "**The Jungle**." Sure, oh, no, no, I **[indecipherable]** we will read – I had read it all. **Non pasarán**, then the –

Q: No, that's Spanish civil war, **non pasarán**.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And **Dreiser** is "**Babbitt**."

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A: Dri – yes. And – and the French classics, and the German, I had read them all, because my bro-brother used to bring them, during the vacation, during the summer. So, he read them, I read them. Whatever he read, I read.

Q: So it wa – it was he who brought the world's literature to you?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Not only that, he was interested in the writers themselves. He had notes on – on **Dreiser**, on – on this, on **[indecipherable]**

Q: Well, I'll tell you, that's not typical for a farm boy.

A: But he was, and he ended up as a – you know, he was a vet and – ad – as a veterinarian, you know. He was somewhere else, you know.

Q: Did he have –

A: And his friends, they were, you know, writers and poets in the gymnasium that we came.

Q: Well, he was born of that generation. If he's born in 1913, then he is exactly coming of age during the 20 years that you describe, of this birth of – of writing, and culture, and – and literature, in the country. But I want to go back a little bit. The books that your father had and read from, the – you know, the religious texts.

A: Yes.

Q: Were they all in Lithuanian?

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A: Yes, yes, he did no –

Q: Okay, so they – not lacking.

A: He spoke some re – some Russian, but he was not very good in – in the Russian, yes.

Q: How – how many s – how many years of s –

A: He picked it up in the army.

Q: How many years of schooling had he had?

A: I have no idea.

Q: And your mother?

A: No, no idea.

Q: Okay. Did you –

A: Basic.

Q: Basic.

A: Very basic.

Q: Was there a school in **Semeniškiai**?

A: No, no, there – it was like two villages further, in the village of **Loradishkis(ph)**, **Loradishkis(ph)**, primary school, four – four years, you know, four.

Q: Can you describe the school building for me, what it looked like?

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A: Yes, because it's not there any more, but you can see it in my film, my reminiscences of a journey though **Lithuania**. It's simple, two rooms, usually two rooms, and the – and the living quarters for the teacher, were on **[indecipherable]**

Q: So, two classrooms, and her li – private quarters.

A: And the private, with the teacher – the – the teacher lived – lived – the teacher's family lived in the same building.

Q: And in those two rooms –

A: Small building like – there were never more than 20 - 40 – 40 - 50 students at any given time in the whole –

Q: Okay.

A: – in those rooms, 25, 24.

Q: So this would have been from age –

A: Bef – two rooms, but were four classes. So in each room, there were the first class there, and the second class there. Or first class and – yeah, actually it was first class at front class –

Q: And, did the one teacher teach all of them?

A: Yes, yes – na – sometimes there was additional teacher cul – coming in.

Q: Do you have any memories of school?

A: Well, it has to be specific.

Q: Yeah, that's a very open question.

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A: The question has to be.

Q: You mentioned before that you were quite sickly. And my – my question is, is that, did that interrupt your schooling? Did you –

A: No, I have to tell you now. In my whole education, in **[indecipherable]** in schools, primary school, then the next follow – fifth and sixth grade school in **Papily**. And then in **Biržai** was se – se – seventh and eighth class, cause I skipped many classes in between, I did not miss a single day.

Q: Really?

A: I did not miss a single day of school.

Q: Well, how did you manage –

A: No matter of weather, no matter of how I felt. I never – my sickly period was before the school.

Q: So, when you were like five or six years old, something like that?

A: Yes, that's when I was very badly sick, and I don't know what sickness it was.

Q: Cause that was my next question.

A: But was in bed – in bed for months, and I remember, you know, being very weak, and all this medicine. And all the – the – the women, neighbors ara – some neighbor sitting there, and – and near bed, and talking about me, thinking that I'm not hearing them. And they're oh, poor boy, he's not going to live.

Q: Oh, well, that's charming.

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A: Very, very straight, very straight, like that. And that made me so mad, I remember, that I will show you, I'm going to live.

Q: And here you are. And here you are.

A: But that made me – that year [**indecipherable**] being sick, sort of made my body ma – physically also very weak, and thin. I remember in the – when I began going to school, and that was already like three years later, after that, they used to call me skeleton.

Q: Oh, really?

A: Yeah.

Q: The kids?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: **Giltine**.

Q: **Giltine**?

A: Yeah, **giltine**. In any case, it took – and I became, because of that, very sort of retreated in mys – that's what – why I embraced books and whatever I could get, to whatever library that [**indecipherable**] went from **A** to **Z** through everything that was there.

Q: Were you –

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A: I-I-Including the magazines. Literally all the literary magazines. And by the time I was like 15, I knew – I had read practically everything was available.

Q: That was available, yeah.

A: And actually so much that – th – I – I began gaining like reputation, that when somebody want to find something in the capital, later, already I was like se – more 16 - 17, and I had already published my sort of first, miserable poem. Says, oh, you want to know, you cannot find it? There is this boy in that village, contact him, he will tell you – tell you where to find it. And I always knew where to find it.

Q: Were you – were you –

A: But I became sort of – my world became only books, and – and reading, and I excluded practical – I did not know what's hap – I knew that there was war, though, in **Spain**. That was, even in the villages, very much – sort of – people talked about it.

Q: About the se – Spanish Civil War?

A: Spanish Civil War.

Q: Why?

A: That –

Q: It's so far away.

A: Was in – you know, was in the newspapers, and there was something that hit in their interest somehow.

Q: Well, this –

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A: And that's what – when – when it continued, then – then the sov – when the Soviets came, I was sitting there – okay, th-the war st-started –

Q: You know, I want to interrupt here.

A: Okay, okay.

Q: I want to interrupt here, because I don't want to come to –

A: I will go by your – your questions.

Q: Thank you.

A: I've been advised to go by your questions.

Q: Okay. We'll come to all of that, but right now, I still want to get a better sense of pre-war life. When you mentioned that newspapers, and you mentioned this, that the Spanish Civil War was something talked about, that leads me to another question.

And that is, how people got news in the villages. And I wanted to ask –

A: Wa – one of – there was one family in the village, which later I found out was my father's brother.

Q: Same village, **Semeniškiai**?

A: Tha-That – yes.

Q: So, you never knew he was his brother?

A: No.

Q: And he lived in **Semeniškiai**?

A: Yeah, I did –

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Q: Talk about secrets, within a small –

A: No, no, no secret, th-th-the – I – I was not interested who they were, how they were connected. I had no interest in it.

Q: It sounds like you were a very unusual child.

A: I was very closed. I was totally closed in myself. [indecipherable] again with the sickness.

Q: Okay.

A: So, later I found out he had the radio. So, there was one radio in that whole area, that sometimes so they reported, you know, what's [indecipherable]. But then, we used to – there was a – there were two weekly newspapers, one is for – was for the farmers, the other was very, sort of, general.

Q: What was the farmers' newspaper name?

A: **Ūkininko Patarėjas.**

Q: Okay.

A: **Ūkininko Patarėjas.**

Q: And the other one?

A: The other one was very important because **Binkis**, cause is **Binkis**, one of the great poets.

Q: Poets, yeah.

A: He – he – he lived – he was from **Papilys**.

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Q: So, close to you?

A: Yeah.

Q: So, you had **Janonis**, was it, in one village, and **Binkis** in another village, and **Mekas** in another village, all within that area, okay.

A: He used to write for it, and we – we never missed, we bought – bought it, and subscribed only because he wrote for it. Right now the name's –

Q: Escapes you?

A: – escapes me.

Q: It cou – it might come to you later.

A: So we – there were two newspapers. There were some others, but we did not subscribe, because there – limited fund for things like that on the farm. And they used to come – not to come, they were not delivered. Somebody from the village had to go to the post office and pick them up.

Q: Where was the post office.

A: And where – in **Papilys**.

Q: Okay.

A: So, that was the closest post office, the other one was in **Biržai**. So – and very often, they used to send me to pick them up.

Q: Okay.

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A: And then that was also – I described in the introduction to – I had to my book, “**I Had Nowhere to Go**,” how important that was to me, those trips.

Q: Why? Why was it important to you?

A: Because there was this tall, lean, black haired guy. He was about 40 maybe, who also used to come pa – you see, the post, and the mail used to be delivered from **Biržai** to **Papily**s. And a certain hour, that the Jews arri-arrived, like two in the afternoon, and he was all – and that’s when I used to go to pick up the newspapers. **[indecipherable]** And he was always there.

Q: So, who was this tall, lean guy?

A: So – and he used to get very interesting mail, like with very beaut – strange, beautiful postal stamps and – and – and – and a lot of it. So one day, I collected my courage – I was about maybe 12, and I asked **[indecipherable]** who – who is this? And – and very – they had the post – post – the ga – a guy, and there were two of them. Say, oh, he is a poet. **[indecipherable]** he’s a Jewish poet, Jewish poet.

Q: What was his name?

A: So that guy was – became one of the reasons for me going – wanting to go to pick up the mail, because –

Q: Did you ever speak to him?

A: No, I wouldn’t dare. I wouldn’t dare. And then there were, of course **[indecipherable]** not – never found out his name, either.

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Q: Okay.

A: But I knew. And then I decided that I will be a poet.

Q: I remember reading that section in your book.

A: Yes.

Q: Now –

A: I was so impressed with him – with all those magazines from **Paris**, from all the places.

Q: So, do you make the assumption he was from **Papilys**?

A: Not that you – he was there.

Q: I know. But does that mean there was a Jewish community in **Papilys**?

A: There were at least – I knew, at least in the class of – of – okay, in my class of 25, there was one Jewish girl. And she was from – and th – and they had the store. They wat – I knew that at least there were three or four families in **Papilys** what – you know, who I – I – now, I am finding out that there were more.

Q: Yeah.

A: It – you know, ma – it – according to me –

Q: To your world

A: – you know, what I knew.

Q: Yeah.

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A: So there were, you know, at least three, because I – I bought, you know, one – there was a fruit, general store, there was some other little store, and I knew they were run by Jewish families. So I knew – that much I knew. And there was one with – with – not that many. But I'm, you know, finding out now, also, that there were – that – how far off I was from – from – in my numbers, because I had no idea.

Q: So you knew that – then – but this is what we want to know, is what you knew at the time. And so, in your world –

A: But the Jew – Jewish populace, in that whole area of **Biržai [indecipherable]**, I knew only from – yeah, this – this **[indecipherable]**

Q: What's her name?

A: I don't remember, no.

Q: Okay. Okay.

A: I can't remember. I remember some names from gymnasium, but I don't remember any names –

Q: We'll come to those. We'll come to those. But she was the only girl in your, like, primary school, in class?

A: Yes, yeah, not primary – oh yeah –

Q: Yeah.

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A: – that is still primary. It was in between the educational system, we – was going through changes. Before, it was only four grade, and then eight grade, gym – gymna –

Q: Right.

A: – primary school, and gi – and gymnasium. But that – during that period, '39 - '40, they took two from gymna – gymnasium became like six, and they had –

Q: Classes.

A: – two in between.

Q: Got it.

A: So, the primary became six.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: So, in the sixth – sixth grade, there was this young, little Jew – Jewish, smart, very smart girl.

Q: Did you – **Papilys**, remind me again –

A: Which I later – even **Adolfas**, my – my brother, he followed [**indecipherable**].

You know, he describes – he does not tell, but I knew that was just that he was – had a crush on –

Q: On this girl?

A: Yeah.

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Q: Oh, I had a que – I had a thought. **Papilys** again, how far was it from **Semeniškiai**?

A: Well, about five – four or five kilometers.

Q: Sounds like a much bigger place, if it has –

A: I-It – there were a – there – a populace, it had between five to 700 inhabitants, at that time.

Q: Okay.

A: **Biržai** had 5,000, at that time.

Q: And you – an-and you had, in **Semeniškiai**, 98.

A: Ninety-eight.

Q: Okay. Now, in **Papilys**, that was where your parents would go to church, was –

A: They – that's where the churches were, that's where the churches, the stores, the doctor, th-the – all the fo – that served many, many villages around.

Q: That was the church that your parents would go to?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay. Do you remember the name of the church?

A: We knew it as a church.

Q: Just that. Okay. Was there a Catholic church in –

A: No, **Reformuota bažnyčia**.

Q: Okay. Reform church.

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A: The Protestant Reform church.

Q: Okay.

A: I – I – I am not so clear, and I was not very good in religious history at that time, I'm beginning to know more now. And so I dir – have no idea in the – what the difference is. We was **Latvia**, and they were Lutheran Protestant. In **Biržai**, there were Reform Protestants. And there were differences, some potential differences, which I have no idea what they were.

Q: Was there a Catholic church in that sem – in that – in **Papilys**?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: And was there a syn –

A: Because already – **Papilys** was already merging with the rest of the country. Is – was already split.

Q: Okay.

A: It's not – when you go north, it's like almost a se – like I said, 75 percent maybe, and with 25 Catholic. But the point – from **Papilys**, and around **Papilys** already, we was reversing. Was 75 Catholics, 25 percent Protestant.

Q: And was there a synagogue in **Papilys**?

A: That – no, I know it was in **Biržai**, because I was tempted to go there, with – not

–

Q: Not in **Papilys**.

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A: But I – but I do not know. I – I may be wrong. I would love, you know, to – to go to now, to somebody who knows, because so much research took place after the Soviets left, you know, on the Jewish communities. Maybe I said there were three families, but maybe there were 10 families. And if there were 10 families, then maybe they had the – because Jewish are invol – Jews are more reli – religion, even when – when it's forbidden, than Catholics or Protestants. They're full of. So, they may have had.

Q: Okay.

A: They may ha – I don't know. That I cannot answer.

Q: Did you visit the grocery store? Is that someplace where you would do shopping in **Papilys**?

A: Some – because, since I walked every day, the four kilometers to fifth, sixth grade. So when Mother – my mother or father needed something, you know **[indecipherable]** here's some money, buy – I need that, and that, and that.

Q: Okay.

A: Some thread, or something.

Q: Were there also, you know, what is so common in east **Europe** is that there were Jewish peddlers going from town to town. Would you have that –

A: We had no Jewish fe – peddlers. I have no memory of any Jewish peddlers. But, Gypsy peddlers, yes. And – and Gypsy peddlers used to pass by quite often. And

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sometimes, if they come ba – you know, pass at the evening time, they used to set up the camps, and – next to our house. And we – we had to, whenever – if they – on every Monday, we – our – the – our – our parents went to [indecipherable] my brothers were not there. Before they left, th-they – just see that you don't let any of the Gypsies in. Lock the door, you see, lock the door.

Q: So, there was this – there was this belief that you –

A: Not belief.

Q: It was pro –

A: Reality.

Q: Reality, okay.

A: Sorry to say, reality.

Q: Yeah, that something could go missing.

A: Because, were some visits – some visits, we missed something.

Q: I want to talk –

A: And they knew that oth – if – only children, and they have a chance. And they used to try to pass away through the o – locked door, and talk to us, let us in, let us in.

Q: Let us in, let us in.

A: No, we just sat there and – yeah.

Q: I want to turn to another aspect –

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A: But they were all very happy, and very nice. And people liked them, it just [indecipherable]. The people made jokes about it na – but there was no – no – no hate.

Q: Okay, okay. Was – okay, I want to turn to another area, and then we'll go back to more – larger topics. I want to know a little bit more about your families' personalities. Your father's, your mother's and your older siblings. So, let's start with father. What kind of a personality did he have?

A: I – I think that he always wanted to – I – see, I don't know his childhood, I don't know his youth, you know, growing up time. I only began knowing him when he was, you know, 55, or with the – you know, a – a grown-up, and doing work on the farm. He was a typical farmer. But he was also a dreamer, because I always felt that he really – there was some very good reason why he did not continue his carpentry, because that's what he was interested in. He was like the poet carpenter. But sil – question of survival, we could not survive from that, so he – he sort of stuck to the farm.

Q: Was he a sad person?

A: No, he was actually very happy.

Q: Okay.

A: And my mother wa – so, she was very – she – I – I – she was very respected, she was always the – the – the – like some – one, two, three, four – some six, seven

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villages, what th-there were regional area, like **Biržai**, embraced all the villages, and embraced even **Papilys**. **Papilys** was part **[indecipherable]**. But then it was – there were different – that area was divided into small – smaller areas, that developed and stuck together sort of naturally, so the – there were like seven, or eight villages stuck around our village.

Q: Was he like a **seniūnas**?

A: That's what I'm leading to, stuck together.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: And each of those areas had occasionally got together, and they usually got together in our house. And my father, our father was always, for as far as I remember, **seniūnas**. **[indecipherable]**

Q: So, he's a village elder.

A: A village elder.

Q: Okay.

A: So they trusted him and respected him enough to – to – to – to help, you know, sort of make some decisions when needed. So that much I know. And my mother was not very involved in any. She was always helping, you know, my father, and on – on the farm, and which she took care usual of vegetables. Vegetable garden. So that was her area, where – you know, with our sister and sometimes we children had to help her.

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Q: Was she an outgoing person?

A: She was always – she was very religious, and always singing all, you know, every – from early morn – when I was still sleeping, I could hear her singing somewhere, religious hymli – hymns. Melodies, no – no more, just like melodies. And I knew, I recognized them. Just for herself, quietly, not loud, for herself. But you could hear. You could hear. And – and she was very, I would say mystical. Which was also a joke sometimes in the family, because – and that made her very angry. Sort of, in her own way angry, because she used to come from milking cows and tell oh, I saw the **rydien(ph)**, and they waved at me – little cre – little people on that blue stone, on that big stone there –

Q: I saw what? Little people on the blue stone? So she saw almost like apparitions of some kind?

A: No appa – no apparitions.

Q: What did she see?

A: I believed her, and I still believe that they were real. Those are real if you – you have to live – have you – have you lived in **Iceland**, or **Norway**?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Then you would believe that they are real.

Q: But I'm asking what, because I didn't quite hear it.

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A: Little people, that they're f – they're spectral. They're not – they're of very thin material, that they can –

Q: Like fairies?

A: Like fairies, yes. They can disappear, and reappear, because they are very fragile, they're like smoke, and go – where co – they come from the trees, or from the stones. They dance – if they like you, they dance and they wave. And that's what they do – used to do to her. So – and then, my brothers used to say, ah, you are crazy, you are crazy. And that's what –

Q: And she'd get upset, because they didn't believe her –

A: Yes.

Q: – her – her telling.

A: But I always believed her, because I sat on the same stones, there were –

Q: Did you see them?

A: I – I – I made the rule, and many interviewers have tried me to – to bring that to –

Q: Okay.

A: – not to talk about my mystical experiences.

Q: Okay.

A: So, I – I – I believe, I know, all I can tell that I know it's all real. But that's all that I can –

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

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A: – that I will talk about.

Q: That's okay.

A: So, she was very, very – she was like somewhere else, in that sense.

Q: Was she a warm person?

A: Yes, they were both – that's very difficult for – to a child, to – to – to talk about aspect of **[indecipherable]** because a child has no real perspective to –

Q: That's true.

A: – to – to it – to it. So, of course, that – to – I think she – I would say she were – was – because of her mystical sort of – I mean, she comes from an – if her brother decided to become a priest, so there is a – really something deeper in the family lore, into that sort of, direction.

Q: Did you meet him?

A: Not only that I met him, and even when she was studying still in **Switzerland**, during their vacation, he used to come with this straw hats, and he always gave me, before leaving, his straw hat. So that –

Q: So you have the honored hat.

A: – I – I – I inherited these hat – not cap, hat with – from him. And then, in **Biržai**, when I went to high school, I stayed – the first year I stayed in some little, old Jewish place. A Jewish man who was running bagel shop, and had an extra room.

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And the next year, and after that, I stayed in his – he had an empty attic, I stayed in my uncle's house – parish house.

Q: Well, one of the reasons I asked –

A: And that's where – is the next library of my life. That's more interna – that's where I already could read some French, and German. That became my international, it turned out – because he had ver-very important, large, international kind of library.

Q: I will come to that. One of the reasons I ask the questions, this more personal type of question, is to get a sense of who had – who, of the adults in your life, would have had a strongest influence on you.

A: I would say mother, my mother.

Q: Your mother, your mother, okay.

A: Definitely.

Q: Okay. And, of your siblings –

A: And **Povilas**, and **Povilas** were – yes, the – my brother.

Q: Okay, your oldest brother.

A: Yes.

Q: And –

A: Because – again, because of his library.

Q: Now, did your other brothers have the same interest in books, and in reading?

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A: Very – **Petras** had some – no, they did not have. They did not have.

Q: Okay. Tell me, in a – in a very –

A: But a – ar – music – **Kostas** will be – had his own **kapilla(ph)**, he played violin.

Q: Oh yeah, oh, so his field was music.

A: Not only that he played, he composed lyrics, yes, which, you know, he – you know, I used in the reminiscences of a journey, some of songs were his lyrics.

Q: Oh wow, that's impressive. So, it was –

A: And pat – **Petras** was very good in the organ, and accordion.

Q: So, if I'd say, **Povilas** with books, and with reading, **Petras** with accordion, and vi – did you say violin with him?

A: No, **Kostas** was –

Q: **Kostas** with the violin –

A: – the violin.

Q: – and composing. Yourself also, with literature. And **Adolfas**, well, he was younger, but did he have a –

A: Yeah, I guess. He was, you know, still being three years –

Q: Younger.

A: – younger. Three books of his diaries that survived, are out, if you'd –

Q: I've – yeah.

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A: – seen them. He was just beginning, he was following me, more or less, he was very much under my sort of influence as an older brother.

Q: And as –

A: So he did all – whatever I did, he tried to do also, in that sense.

Q: And **Elżbieta**, did she really play a role in your life?

A: Who?

Q: **Elżbieta**, your sister.

A: Oh. Really, no. She got married early, and sort – sort of fa – moved away from my sort of life on that period. A-And – and did not – did not really play much. She took care of me when I was, you know, three, four, five, six, during that period, I remember, you know, playing with her, doing something. So, she was, when – that's what I do not remember much, or too much. But she had – her influence was the smallest.

Q: Okay. Now, it – did – did the – did the struggle for Lithuanian independence, did that involve anybody that you knew; your father, your uncle –

A: If you talk about that period –

Q: 1918, yeah.

A: – it – then there is – you cannot ask me, I was born in '22.

Q: No, I'm talking about your father, like did he take part in anything? Did –

A: I don't know.

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Q: You don't know. You don't know. Now –

A: No, I have not noticed any Lithuanian patriotic nationalistic struggle when I grew up until ninet – until the Soviets came.

Q: Okay.

A: That did not exist.

Q: Okay.

A: Did not exist, it – we took it as natural, and we thought, oh, no, no, you know, it will be, you know, for 100 years, I guess.

Q: Did people ever talk about **Smetona**, the president of the country?

A: No, **[indecipherable]** did not talk. He was there, he was our president. He was invisible. I may – again, you see, there I was, in my sh-shell.

Q: Yeah.

A: But I don't know what was outside. They may have talked. Actually, now – now, when I'm thinking, they did not talk, but I know that he was not always – not he, but the government of the independent **Lithuania**, of – of – okay? At least the period of 30 – of this **[indecipherable]** I remember, during that period –

Q: Okay.

A: – sleeping, like see, one end of the house – this a house, this was living room in here, and there was sleeping, the bed. And there was a separation where we kids slept, here –

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Q: Okay.

A: – and there was another room where was **Povilas**, when he comes, he slept there. And then any kind of meeting that he met, took place there. And the wall was very thin. And I remember sleeping and – and one of the people during that evening was **Markitas**(ph), my brother's – my father's brother, and some other people from some other villages, they were talking politics, and they were talking – okay, another footnote. My brother, in **Biržai** in gymnasia –

Q: **Povilas**

A: – the high school got – a-a-and some of his friends, like **Azisia**(ph) **Kobanas**(ph), later [**indecipherable**] they got connected, they got a-a-a-already with some people who were discussing prep – this was immediately, I think after the revolution.

Q: Russian revolution.

A: It – yes.

Q: 1917.

A: And they ga – were discussing soci – thi – they were – I remember ve-very clearly, lying there, and there was no – I did not know, you know, what communist mean, they were the wi – there was no social – social democrats. They were talking about social democrats, which was opposed to **Smetona**.

Q: So you're – so what you're describing to me, if I understand it –

A: And they were what – what – why I remember this –

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Q: Okay.

A: – that this is the first time I heard singing [**sings**]

Q: “**The Internationale.**”

A: And the – and they were singing. They were singing in Lithuanian, and they were – they – they – they were singing **Internationale**.

Q: In Russian?

A: No, interna – interna –

Q: International. “**The Internationale.**” So, it was –

A: So that that means, what it means, that there were people opposed to – to – to –

Q: **Smetona.**

A: Yeah.

Q: And the – in – so this was, if I understand it –

A: And that’s where I – I also discovered my – my – that – you see, my – **Povilas** was also trying to write poetry, at some pe – point. That he was publishing some of them in the mag – what’s the magazine o-of sort of socialist – again, I can’t remember now the – the name of the magazine, that – so that he was involved in – with – we can talk about this later, because I have other things to tell – tell about **Povilas** involvement, because he –

Q: Okay. So, he had already more leftist ideas?

A: – wer – yes.

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Q: Okay.

A: For some times, he was very, very close to – to – to – to – to – to **Wachay**(ph). At some point – at some point, when **Paleckis** did not want to accept the post, he conferred, I know, with my brother.

Q: So, your fa – your brother was a – a **CP** member.

A: He was – you see, it's here we – where I do not know the details, because many things during that period, were very, very, very secretive. Because, I remember in **Biržai**, people used to point near **Biržai pilis**, the castle in **Biržai**. There was some little valley space. Said, that's where **Smetona** shot the six –

Q: Communists?

A: – communists. More or less, they identified –

Q: Is this the place where **Požela** and **Selenderf**(ph) were shot?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Is – okay.

A: Yeah. So [**indecipherable**] that he was involved, but that there was a movement, part of the Lithuanian – or came between maybe generation that maybe was around 30 or so, 25 or – between 20 or 30, had still s – a-and that comes from, I think, 1905. Did not come directly from – from the newly great **Soviet Union**.

Q: I'm –

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A: It was still coming from there, that movement of the – that clashed with officials,
Smetona, you know [indecipherable]

Q: Okay, I want to – I want to ex –

A: No, this –

Q: Yeah.

A: – what I'm telling now, is what – sort of my – my deductions [indecipherable]

Q: I understand. I understand, but – but I'd like to articulate them back, so to se –
make sure that I understood it correctly.

A: Yeah.

Q: So, we're talking about – when I ask you about **Smetona** –

A: I need some cold –

Q: Okay, let's cut.

A: – water, and I – [break]

Q: Okay, th – we're running.

A: Sure, when I'm talking about, you know now, around the questions here, and I'm
sort of trying to get to it. You see, intuitively, and as a poet, and who sort of was
there, and some of it I remember like un-directly, and un-directly, I know that I'm
right, but I cannot feel – put my – you know, fingers on – on – on – on – on facts, on
specifics, that I'm no – I know that I'm right un-direct, about the feelings of the
people there. I know – remember very clearly, you know, sort of, you know, what I

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heard – some glimpses out there, and I don't need everything literally, from **A** to **Z** to make my – my – my observations, yes.

Q: I understand that. I understand that. It is – excuse us – okay. There are – I'm going to talk now, more than I usually do, but it will be in two parts. One, in trying to say back to you what I think I understood. Second, about the purpose of interviews like this, and the whole idea of oral histories. When – when we – when we conduct them, the strengths of oral histories are exactly what you say, you know you're right. It is in the impressions, it is in the experiences, it is in the memories.

A: The danger is always to have – make it too narrow, too restricted. Permit a lit – me to open that's there, and –

Q: Yeah.

A: – which sometimes, on direct memories observations, are more truthful than – than factual sometimes, factual.

Q: Well, that – people say that about art.

A: Yes.

Q: That – but in the – in the purpose of what we're doing here, is we're trying to establish an historical record, through the memories of people, decades after the events happened. And – and that's why, in some ways, it is a counter kind of purpose. And, I would say, you know –

A: Why?

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Q: – forgive me for that. Because as much as possible, I need to anchor things in context, in dates, in understanding. So I think – a-and I think it –

A: But that's what you are getting.

Q: I know. But here's the thing. What you are telling me, makes sense to me. But that is because I know of a lot of the history that people who will be looking at this interview, may not. So that's why I want to repeat it back, and see if I have understood it properly, so that someone else can understand it properly.

A: Yeah, do it.

Q: Okay. So, here's what I'm under – here's the impression I'm getting, is that at some point in 1936, or 1937, because that's the time of the Spanish Civil War, and it is a topic that is discussed, you remember being in your bed area, you know, the – separate from the living room, and lying and hearing – lying down in your bed, and hearing others in your family, behind the curtains, talking about politics.

A: Not o-others, only one: **Povilas** and his invited friends.

Q: Ah, okay, not your father –

A: No, no, no –

Q: – no – not anybody else.

A: – no, no.

Q: And so these are young men.

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A: No, they – they had their own [**indecipherable**] they slept in the complete different area.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: So you – for example, at that time, you're about 14 years old. Your brother is already a young man, he's around 23 - 24 years old. And he invites his friends over, and they're talking about the Spanish Civil War, and they're talking about social democracy of a certain kind, and in the end, they sing "**The Internationale**," in Lithuanian. And then you remember, but you didn't know this at the time, but you remember at some point in later years, hearing that when **Justas Paleckis**, who is someone most American or English speaking people would not know about, but **Justas Paleckis** was a leftist writer, who, when the Soviets came into the country, became the president, quote, unquote. I don't remember his exact title, but **Sniečkus** was the first party secretary, **Paleckis** was the president, and under his signature, a lot of people get sent to **Siberia**, both then, and later. And what you are saying is that you intuit that your brother was somehow or other, a trusted person, because **Paleckis** –

A: Now I remember why.

Q: Okay.

A: They – the name of the monthly was called **Joniemas**(ph).

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Q: **Joniemas**(ph).

A: **Joniemas**(ph). And they both wrote from it – for it. And maybe **Paleckis** was connected with the editorial staff, or something. But that's th – how they – they sort of –

Q: What their connection was.

A: – the connection was, that she wrote – she published some poems, a-and his daughter sent to me some of those poems, they were sort of po – okay, I mean, they would call it at little – the leftist kind of – no, wa – politically – they're obviously political poems.

Q: Okay, and about when would – would have this been before the war? Befor –

A: Thi-This – this was before.

Q: Okay, so during independence times.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay. And so, your brother is trusted enough by **Paleckis** wa –

A: To ask for his opinion.

Q: – to – for his opinion to be asked, should **Paleckis** take that post, which was quite –

A: I don't know what that discussion was, but I understood that I do not remember my brother's voice. But I think was to the – in some way, he was consulting him, should I take it, or not, trying to make up his mind. And I have no idea what my

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brother told him. All I know that he – I understood from all of us – late – he told me this later, later, later.

Q: What does later mean?

A: Already in – in '71, when I –

Q: Okay, when you went back.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay. So this is 30 years – 33 years later, something li – well, sa – 30 years later.

A: My – my brother is a – fell out of that – went to the – very soon, after the Soviets came in, my – **Povilas** come – went – come – abandoned that direction, completely.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. But he had it. In other words, if there was a direction of political thinking in your family, through po – and **Povilas** sounds like the most political –

A: The other two brothers, they were not political at all.

Q: Okay.

A: They were totally farmers, kind of immersed in – in the world of their own, local.

Q: And your father as well?

A: Yes, very much.

Q: Okay. But **Povilas** was an influence on you.

A: Yes, yes, he was, in this – his books, his books, yes.

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Q: Okay.

A: No, I – I sort of looked up a little bit, you know, yes.

Q: So –

A: Not in that – that – his political world was totally – like he subscribed –
subscribed to so – **Socialdemokratas**, a weekly newspaper, which was you know, so
– so – social **[indecipherable]** Lithuanian party. And I could – I – I – I hated it.

Q: Did you really?

A: It w-was so boring and so serious, and so the whole – I could not be – I just –

Q: So i-it – it didn't speak to you.

A: He used to subscribe to it. No, no.

Q: Okay.

A: That was totally out of my interest.

Q: Okay, okay. Thank you. That's what ga – that's what I wanted to get a sense of,
of what was the – not only the facts of pre-war life, of you know, the circumstances
of your family, but also the atmosphere. You know, what did people talk about?

What was their world, what mattered to them? And in – in – in very specific ways –

A: So, there are glimpses that there were talks, political talks **[indecipherable]**

Q: Okay.

A: – betwe – in which, you know, about which I cannot tell more than what I just
told.

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Q: Yeah. So –

A: That's one memory I think is pretty oh – revealing.

Q: Yeah. So we come to 1939, and –

A: And more – more than that, that – like between **Papilys** and **Semeniškiai**, there was a village of **Kubeliai**.

Q: **Kubeliai**.

A: And pu – if you have to fix sometimes some shoes, or also the – some sewing to do, some – there was some – a family, I think, of two brothers, perha – the-they were very – they were special at crafts [**indecipherable**]

Q: So they were –

A: So, I used, sometimes, to stop if my f – mother gave to fix something there, and they, whenever I was there, they were only talking politics.

Q: Really?

A: An-And like all – like oh, you see, sorry for this mess. The police was here last night, and they look for, you know, everything turned, you know, they look for –

Q: Upside-down.

A: Upside-down.

Q: Okay.

A: Because they were talk – they were really involved, so much that the police was ask – look for –

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Q: They had socialist orientations?

A: They were, maybe there were some publications –

Q: Okay.

A: Or they were maybe involved – oh yes, now I remember that that week, on the branches of the trees by the road, by the cemeteries, and the cemeteries were by our house, there were some leaflets attached again, political leaflets. I have no idea what they promoted. And it was next day after that, that I had to stop at their house in **Kubeliai** – **Kubeliai** for something, and the police was – and I saw that, you know, everything was – was in a mess. The police was there. They probably suspected that they produced those leaflets and hung them there.

Q: Were they known to have a particular political view?

A: N-N – people maybe knew. I had no idea.

Q: So, it could have been they were very leftist.

A: I – I will not have any ideas that there were any other views than those that came from – from – from **Kaunas**, from the capital.

Q: Okay.

A: I-I was not in that age, and I was still in my shell.

Q: Yeah.

A: But those were glimpses into the real world, which I remember very well, that there were people who were doing something, I don't know wh-why, and what – for

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what reasons, and what is said, what was in those leaflets. Because police came, people said, oh don't touch them. Let the police do – come, and took, so I had no – had no idea what was in those leaflets.

Q: So, you don't know if they were right wing or left wing?

A: Ki – kill – kill – kill **Smetona**, or –

Q: Oh, I see.

A: – or emb – or embrace **Stalin**, I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: I have no idea.

Q: When 1938 – well, actually, 1939 come around –

A: I want to interrupt one more.

Q: Sure.

A: Same as later, when the Germans, same as Soviets, they did not come blindly, with no preparations. They had already people watching for years, probably, and some of them were connected, preparing, you know, here and there and there. Like Germans had same. Some of them – some of those people maybe were, you know – I don't know. But none of those occupiers came with, like they do now, sometimes they just go to another country, with – I think they had planted people. I'm thinking that now.

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Q: Yeah. Yeah. So, let's come to 1939. Do you remember whether there was any reaction in **Semeniškiai**, or **Biržai**, or **Papilys**, about the German attack on **Poland**, September first?

A: There were two reactions. The dominant reaction was ah, we have **Vilnius** now back.

Q: Because of the controversy with **Poland** on **Vilnius**.

A: Yes, yes. **Vilnius** was the center – there was produced happiness. The – the Poles were the most hated nation in the world, for Lithuanians.

Q: Why?

A: Why? The –

Q: For – we have five –

A: They took **Vilnius**. They took our capital away. **[speaks Lithuanian]**

Q: So that's a little ditty in Lithuanian, about Poles.

A: No. Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: No, no, they were – they're more **Pilsudskis**, and all those – those guys, they – they were all most hated people.

Q: Okay.

A: So th – there was elation when the – the Russians decided to – to – to

[indecipherable] eventually put – attach – to reattach **Vilnius** to **Lithuania**. So for

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some time, that, almost like sort of – that elation, almost to cancel all the bad things for e – for – at least for a moment, until they began to think, you know, and see, oh, they're bad, bad [indecipherable]. They are the [indecipherable]

Q: So you said there was another. There was – there were two reactions. One was nice –

A: Oh, the other reaction that says oh, now – now – now, we may have another war. We are having another war, and – and – and –

Q: So people started talking about that?

A: Yes, yes, they did – I – I don't remember [indecipherable] but I – I – I cannot con – yes, every family already knew that this is bad.

Q: Okay.

A: That this is bad.

Q: Okay. Now, was the – when you mention that – that **Russia** attached **Vilnius** back to **Lithuania**, why would **Russia** do –

A: I don't know really, again my mem – see, I am very bad at dates – at which point that became real, because first the – okay, **Germany**, and the – they met – they made a deal with Russians, and they wanted, sort of, **Poland**.

Q: That's right.

A: But at which point – and then Russians march into **Lithuania** only in 1940.

Q: Thirty-nine.

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A: Thirty-nine?

Q: Thirty-nine.

A: Oh, so immediately, so that decision was –

Q: What – what the – what the – the factual reference –

A: All I remember boy – being in **Papilys** in sixth grade, in the bench, sitting there in the middle of the class, and the teacher – somebody comes in and take the teacher out, and then the teacher returns, and asks everybody to listen carefully, and tells that the war started, and that – and the Soviets – that the message was given to the teacher, and that was the situation. So – and so that – that's how we found out what happened.

Q: Okay. The background to this, from what I – from what I have read, is that that **Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact** was signed in August, 1939 – August 23rd, and one week later, September first, is when **Hitler** attacks **Poland**. And sometime in the fall, I believe it was October, I could be wrong, the Soviets start marching in, and that i – then – start marching in, but do not take over the country until 1940.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, something like, yeah.

Q: Okay. So, during that – those several months, did you continue going to school, did you –

A: That was very intense, that was my first, you know, no – yes – my first year into – that was fifth grade, yeah.

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Q: You were then – if it was – if you were born December 24th, 1922, you would have been 17 years old in December 1939. And were you then – by then in gymnasium in **Biržai**, or still –

A: No, no, no, I was in this – sixth gr – sixth – fifth – sixth grade in **Papilys**. I was in **Papilys**.

Q: Okay, you were still in sixth grade –

A: I – I went – began going to school very late, because I was needed on the farm. And then, after the fourth grade, I skip one year again, before going to the fifth grade. So there were many – I was not – the family was not even sure if I will, you know, ever go to high school or gymnasium.

Q: Okay, okay, okay. That – that – that makes sense.

A: Because first I was still very – I was not in the best of – my weakness body remained for a good – until I was fif – di – 16.

Q: Okay.

A: That's all. And I did not talk to anybody, I was always [**indecipherable**]. I did not communicate with anybody. And sud – and – and I – no, and it happen, as things happen, that suddenly I – I – I – for some reason, I wanted to tal – I was ready to talk. So, neighbors said, he talks, oh, he talks. It became a – a joke. I was known as the silent – you know.

Q: So you weren't a very sociable person for a long time.

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A: No, I was –

Q: Okay.

A: – I was in a shell.

Q: And then –

A: And I remained in the – in the shell, I mean, to –
today, I'm in a shell.

Q: What are your first memories of life changing, when the Soviets appeared in
Lithuania? What are your first memories of that?

A: Fear was – you began to feel – I mean, feel fear. You could feel it floating over,
like everybody – like how it manifested, that fear, I cannot describe now. But you
could feel it, and see it in the – in the – almost in the physical movements, in the
faces, and how – in the relationship. And silences here, and – creep in, and – and
then you – we immediately began hearing about neighbors being arrested there. It wa
– it started before the mass deportations, even those small deportations and arrests –

Q: Of people you knew?

A: Yeah – hm?

Q: Of people you knew?

A: [**indecipherable**] not in our village, but in the neighboring villages, you cou –
you know, families, and all individuals, you immediately heard. You know, that –

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that became be – happening – began happening immediately after the Soviets marched in.

Q: Was the – and so, what about –

A: We talk about, you know, the big deportations.

Q: Yeah.

A: But small arrests and deportations began immediately.

Q: Did your schoolteachers change?

A: Yes, the atmosphere felt like – like – like the de – joyful hap – sort of blissful, careless atmosphere [**indecipherable**] like some cloud began descending.

Q: Did that mean that the teacher who might have formerly been a friendly teacher, now became more closed, or did it mean it was a new teacher?

A: No, they were the same, but you could almost feel, you know, a certain kind of seriousness, a different kind of – it changed da – through the village, it's – I mean, i- i-it's difficult to describe how a system, repressive system like that, and especially when you begin to see the actual, real results can begin to affect the whole – th-the – and like produces kind of invisible atmosphere there, that is there. You cannot describe it, but you – you – you feel it's there.

Q: Let's cut for a second. [**break**] Okay.

A: And then, some of the neighbors that had a larger houses were – immediately there – some rooms were divided by the – by the order from the – from **Biržai**, from

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– and some people from other places, cities, stranger, total strangers, we did – did not know where they came from –

Q: Were they Lithuanian?

A: – they became – Li-Lithuanian.

Q: Okay.

A: Planted there as – as sort of – I – had to be, you know, you had to accept.

Q: So, was there anybody that you knew who was locally known to have been a sympathizer of the Soviets, when they came?

A: Not in the lib – not in the villages that I – not in our villages.

Q: So strangers, it was really strangers who came, or – who came and were planted in the villages, but not local people who suddenly –

A: No, no. No, no.

Q: – unmask, and say alright, I'm a –

A: No, no –

Q: Okay.

A: – no, we did not know, and at least I have doubted there were, you know, cases and places. But – where that happened, but in the few villages around **Semeniškiai**, I have not heard cases like that.

Q: Did you, during this time, start going to school in **Biržai**?

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A: No. See, there is – there was sixth – sixth – now – now, we’re trying to place.

Right, but I was in the fifth, not sixth grade. Then, one year I skipped. I have notes somewhere, I tried to recreate. Since I was too old – you had to be certain age to go into the third class of the high school – there were six years. So, since I was too old, I had – I was at the age when I was – I – I could have been accepted only in the seventh grade.

Q: Okay.

A: So – but I wanted to go to high school, and it was actually my uncle, my mother’s brother, who kept telling my mother and my father that he should – you should really sum – he has to go, this [indecipherable] kid has to go to – so, because he sort of, I guess, believed in me.

Q: Did they have to pay? Did it cost to send you to high school?

A: No, no.

Q: No.

A: It was free. So, that year, I decided to learn to go to – to – to am – he helped my uncle, rented a place, a room for me.

Q: From the lady with the bagel shop?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

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A: And I s – managed to skip through – I had to go through all those years, four years, or five year of languages, Latin and French, and – and all – oh boy. That was very, very intense. And then there was an exam, and I passed. And when I passed, they said, you did better than most of ma – our students did.

Q: So, this was to get into high school?

A: To get into the seventh class.

Q: To the seventh class, okay.

A: So I skipped four years of high school, in one winter.

Q: You mean, skipped four years of high school in one winter?

A: Yes. I jumped from the – from the – okay, second grade to seventh.

Q: Oh wow, that's a jump.

A: That's a jump.

Q: That's a jump.

A: And to – it was the sensation of the – of **Biržai** for some time.

Q: I can see why. I can see why. But you had to do home studying –

A: Yes.

Q: – in order for that – to do that.

A: I had the – I had the – my runk – uncle – uncle paid for the tutors, and – and all that.

Q: Okay. And he was still pastor in **Papilys**, at the Reform church –

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A: No, no, in **Biržai**.

Q: Oh, so he had become a pastor in **Biržai** now.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Yes. He was never in **Papilys**.

Q: I thought that's where your parents went to church, and that he was the pastor there.

A: Yeah, but the pas – you go – you don't have to go to your pastor's church.

Q: Got it.

A: You can go to –

Q: Any – any.

A: – any Protestant church.

Q: Okay.

A: Or any Catholic church.

Q: Okay, got it. I – I misunderstood.

A: No, no.

Q: Yeah. So, this is when you actually moved to the city, the local city, **Biržai**?

A: Yes, for tha – yeah, for the winter.

Q: And –

A: And then –

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Q: Now, the bagel shop – excuse me now.

A: Ye-Yeah.

Q: The bagel shop, was that in a Jewish neighborhood? Was there a Jewish neighborhood?

A: I do not – I – there must be **clattered** in the different areas of **Biržai**. I – I only remember that there was – you know, I know there was a – not mok – what do you call that, mosque –

Q: The synagogue.

A: Synagogue. I don't remember any specific Jewish area, but there must have been.

Q: Okay.

A: Because even in **Biržai**, when I moved, I was as – as you can see, I did not have time to walk around, and know the city. To skip si – you know, six classes, imagine – five –

Q: Yeah.

A: And even later, I was not that – I was – I still remained a book person. I did not – I – I did not famil – now I regret it, I did not vo – familiarize more with the city. But –

Q: But you – in other words, you didn't really know whether or not it was neighborhood that was predominantly Jewish, or not. It was just a neighborhood.

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A: No, you could see them there and there and there, different stores, scattered through the whole city. I did not – tell you the truth, I did not know the – did not – was not aware.

Q: Okay.

A: Even th – maybe there was, but I was not aware. I under-derstood that they were every – you know, scattered.

Q: Okay.

A: Through the all, sort of – there was some bur – suburban par-parts, where there were no Jews, but in the center, they were ev – you know, there and there and there and there.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I did not even – could not even tell how many, you know? I figure that there must be, in a city of 5,000, which I was told by the mayor of **Biržai** later, in **Brooklyn** – he had the [indecipherable] in **Brooklyn**.

Q: Oh, he also went – he – he was also an – a refugee, in **Brooklyn**?

A: Yes. **Kulibis**(ph).

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

A: Ye-Yeah, that – there were five – at that point was five. He would have known the – how many Jews there may have been. I figured that there may be two – 300.

Q: Okay.

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A: But then later – now I – I keep the information that I have seen was that there were 2,000 Jews still in **Biržai**? Says, how could that be? Because that means that 5,000 people lived in **Biržai**, and there were 2,000 plus killed, that means almost like a half. So th-there is something wrong, but I think that that figure comes that when the Jews were killed in **Biržai**, they brought them from all other places, like including **Papilys**.

Q: Okay.

A: Probably that's what – that's how the 2,000 come. Th – it does not come from the city itself.

Q: Okay.

A: It comes – I think they collected from all other areas, and then th-thi-this – this is – this is the place where we'll dump [**indecipherable**]

Q: We'll come to that.

A: Yeah.

Q: But right now, we're – chronologically, we're in that first Soviet year of occupation, where you – during this time is when you skip four classes, through your uncle' s sort of both suggestion and – and strong advice –

A: So my first gymnasium class, the seventh, was already – was under the Soviets.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah.

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Q: Do you remember anything in particular from that year, in that cla – in this – in this grade?

A: Oh yes, I k – I remember.

Q: What – what can you tell us about it?

A: I mean, there – one – one thing is – is that we immediately in this, besides la – that – no, no, no, no, the first – first year was still – there were no Russians the first year.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: That's why I had one year of French – not fr – that – actually, before that, I had two years of French, and Latin, because the next, in the grade, under the Soviets, first then went out, Latin out.

Q: Okay.

A: French out, Russian in. French no good, Latin no good, Russian good. So I had at least one year –

Q: Okay.

A: – of –

Q: Russian.

A: – Russian.

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Q: Well, that would make sense, because the government, in July 1940, is when there is that vote to join the **Soviet Union**. And that would have been after your seventh class –

A: Yeah.

Q: – but before your eighth.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: And then, one new category was introduced, the political education.

Q: Okay.

A: The political teacher, political –

Q: And who was the political teacher?

A: Don't remember his name. But very boring, talking like somebody who tells that this is what happened, this is what communist party is, and what's a – it's very good for the people. Talking always a very monotonous voice, and very like somebody who did not believe in it himself. Somebody who was like assigned material, he did not sound that he believed in what he was –

Q: Sounds like a parrot, almost.

A: – what he was saying. But you had to learn, you know, first thing you had to learn by heart, the history of the communist party. A-And then, there was another one. He was, you know, radical – class to teach. That was the subject we had to learn. But

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then there was another, assigned – a ka – general political supervisor of the gymnasium, of **[indecipherable]** the high school. And don't remember her name. She was a woman of some 40 – 40 – some 40 years, and she was always there, and we knew who she is, and why she is there. And when she was approaching passing, everybody became silent until she passes, and – but I – to me it's wa – very, very – became very, very, very important, this woman. She was also hated, hated by everybody, not – not for another reason – that – because she was Jewish. And because the mayor, as Soviets marched in, the mayor – they appointed as the mayor, a Jew educated in **Moscow, Kelber(ph)**

Q: **Kelmer(ph)**?

A: **Kelber(ph)**.

Q: Okay, **k-e-l-b** – **[break]**

A: – at me straight, and says, never do this again.

Q: Wow.

A: And put that – puts where it was, just **[indecipherable]**

Q: Wow. That could have ended a lot differently. Wow.

A: And thi – and that's, you know, one of the moments you never forget.

Q: Yeah.

A: Because it could have ended badly, not only for me, but for – also for my family, and – and we don't know how far that would have gone. But then, all these years, I

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have been also thinking, why did she do that? I mean, one thing that, you know, was – I was still very fragile, and very naïve, and very – sort of like, she may have really meant okay, he made – he’s a stupid, little guy, and he made a mistake. If I tell him maybe – you know, she like, had a picture of me. But then I thought, maybe she played double game. Maybe she worked also for the underground. She may have worked – okay, here I am, I’m hated, you know –

Q: Right.

A: – by everybody. I will – knew that, but I will – will be – I will also help the underground. She may have been a double like, agent.

Q: Was she – do you know if she was from **Biržai** herself?

A: No, no, she – she was not from **Biržai**.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: But when the – and now, now, when you ask this question, I – I – I cannot guarantee, really. We assume that she came from **Moscow** with the – you know, but she may have had some relatives in – so, I will never know. I will never have an answer, because later in that she retreated together with the – when the Soviets retreated, and she was shot with other Jews. But she saved my life.

Q: Yes, she did. Yes, she did. And it’s interesting how they – I mean, did that mean that they look through all the caps of the students, to see if there are papers in them?

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A: No, they knew. They were educated, they went – went to **KGB** training, you know, where to look next, if somebody hides something. They knew where to look for – where people usually – they had track of record where people usually hide.

Q: Did you speak of this to anyone at the time?

A: I could not. I could not. Because I could not let the other students – they were asking, so what did she tell you? I made a joke, or something, but I could not tell, because then other students would know that they are connected with underground. I could not talk.

Q: And they wo –

A: And later – I don't know where that was already, on the Germans.

Q: Okay.

A: That's another story.

Q: So, did you ever –

A: But this, I – I – I – there, I could not talk about it at all, to nobody, absolutely nobody.

Q: Not even the student who had given you the leaflets.

A: No, I could not.

Q: Okay. Okay. Now, you mentioned earlier, someone who had been the mayor of **Biržai**, Mr. **Klabees**(ph), is that his name?

A: **Kle-Kle-Kleibas**(ph).

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Q: **Kleibas(ph)**, **Kleibas(ph)**. And then a new mayor comes –

A: Thanks to him, I bought my first **Bolex** camera.

Q: Oh, no kidding.

A: He lent – he was the guaran – guarantor, for when I had to buy, and had no money. I went to **Peerless(ph)**, and he was the guarantor, so that I could pay in installments.

Q: That's quite a significant step. Now, was he – he was the mayor, and then comes the Soviet system, and then comes Mr. **Karibel(ph)**, or **Draugas(ph) Karibel(ph)**, Comrade **Karibel** from **Moscow**. Did – does that mean that Mr. **Kleibas(ph)** was thrown out, or did he stay?

A: Must be, because – must be.

Q: Okay.

A: I – I don't know, I nev –

Q: He never told you anything about the –

A: Because I was never interested.

Q: Got it. Got it. It's okay, that's okay.

A: My interests, I – people don't understand that – how could one be, and done what **[indecipherable]** with no interest in what's around me. In the social life, I don't know if you are aware – you must be aware that somebody did a very, sort of dirty paper on me in – in the **New York** book.

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Q: Review of bilk – books?

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: And ha – it’s all – you know, it’s all absurd, all these **[indecipherable]**. But I could not – he could believe – he could not understand that one can be so totally submerged in what one is interested in, and lack for – he was ask, would you tell me, you must have been very involved in – in – in – in the local, you know, with the **[indecipherable]** I don’t know the society. I know no – I knew nobody there, and was not interested, you know. He say, oh, but you wrote in your book, “**I Had Nowhere to Go**,” that you were very, very involved in – in – well, I was. And people who were ri – who were in literature, they knew. But that was my work. The rest did not exist. That’s all. So that – that’s – life was going there, you know, everything –

Q: Did you ever –

A: So I don’t know, I never asked – same as never asked my own father, you know, who was your father? So, **Kleibas(ph)** to ask – **Kleibas(ph)** never came to my head. The more that I met him here in **Brooklyn**, and we had already different problem here. So – but of course, automatically, I think the nec – I’m – what I’m amazed that he was not deported. Oh, I – I think he ran – he maybe had left before the se – Soviets came in. He knew, he was not that stupid.

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Q: Okay.

A: So he ended up in – in German – in German displaced person camps, like that.

That's where I met him.

Q: Okay, the –

A: How – yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Did you con – now, after that, did you continue distributing those leaflets, or had you –

A: Yes, and I even intensified, but that was a lesson, that was a lesson that – how foolish I was. And I di – you know, I – I did not carry – I had to be much more careful.

Q: Well, who would you get them from, and who would you give them to?

A: This very – okay, first where I got them. There was one teacher, **Kavalunas(ph)**.

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

A: **Kavalunas(ph)**. He later ended up in **Chicago**. And he started the Lithuanian department of that University of **Illinois**.

Q: Okay.

A: He was very, very important. But – and there was another one, there was a **Vitakunis(ph)**.

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

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A: **Vitakunis(ph)**. So, I know what happened to **Kavalunas(ph)**, I don't know what happened to **Vitakunis(ph)**. But, **Vitakunis(ph)**, when she was studying, his – hi-he – he studied history of liter-literature, and this thesis that she wrote, was on the – on cu – futurists, Dadaists, the whole period transition, beginning with the – with the – what was happening in – in – in **Russia**, pre – before even **Mayakovsky** here, with the young **Mayakovsky**, and all the – the – all the early constructivists, etcetera, were the early, modern arts. That was his dissertation, and he was deli – teaching literature in the – in the high school. So, one day, he said, don't tell anybody, but I want you to – to read this now. He said, now it's, you know, forbidden, even to know – read about the history of the – and I read this dissertation. And that was my introduction to many, many, many things.

Q: Okay, so yes, of course **Mayakovsky** –

A: An introduction to modern art in the – in the west [**indecipherable**] **Russia**, in **Paris**, etcetera. And then a – we discu – tal – after I read it, and thanked him and returned it, we sort of became friends. And then it was he who gave me the first leaflets. And then he in – he wrote – he did not introduce me personally, but **Kavalunas(ph)** appro – yo – he – they knew tha – you know, **Kavalunas(ph)** and **Vitakunis(ph)** were like that.

Q: They were friends.

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A: Yes. So, he told me that, you can trust this guy. So **Kavalunas(ph)** was the one – **Vitakunis(ph)** had not – he was not so connected with the underground. But **Kavalunas(ph)** was very involved. I don't even know how deeply. He was very, very, very, very. So, the leaflets came to me from **Kavalunas(ph)**. We used – and we used to meet – a-and we – we ru – at the – at the castle, somewhere.

Q: And, what was the content of such leaflets? What was written in them?

A: Mostly transcripts from **BBC**, and some other short wave radios, mostly news, news, news –

Q: Okay.

A: – concerning the – what Soviets were doing, and what Germans were doing in their areas.

Q: So this is during the Soviet times?

A: They were – they were news.

Q: Okay.

A: It be – yes.

Q: This was –

A: It began and continued under the –

Q: Under the Germans.

A: – under Germans, it continued, but I got deep – deeper involved.

Q: Okay.

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A: That's another story.

Q: We'll come to it. We'll come to it.

A: Here, I was only under the Soviet sa – was only distributing. We helping to pass –

Q: And who would you distribute it to?

A: Only very, very close friends, and they distribute it to their close, close friends.

Q: And these friends, were they your age, most of the time?

A: Some older.

Q: Some were older.

A: Some – some were older.

Q: But still your generation.

A: Not exactly. Some – **Patra(ph) Zablotkas(ph)**, who later helped **Miltinis** to start the theater in **Biržai**.

Q: Oh yeah, mm-hm.

A: He was already quite well known poet, you know. He was one genera – generation before me.

Q: Okay.

A: So yeah, I worked within my generation, and the one above.

Q: So now that, you know, you got this very pointed warning from the **politruka** –

A: Yeah.

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Q: – did you put those newspapers in another part of your clothing, or did you continue with your hat?

A: No, I did not get it – no, since then I did not carry, because they – they won't – I did not know, maybe she informed somebody else about me, and I may – maybe – may have been followed. I had to be very, very, very careful after that.

Q: So you didn't – you didn't continue, and –

A: I continued, but I had to be much more careful how I made my – how I meet the – to whom I – I want to pass, and had to be worked out.

Q: During this time, was there any violence –

A: Also, that – that – that happened actually very close also, to the Germans marching in, yeah.

Q: So that would have been spring 1941, because they march in June, in 1941.

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And that's wa – maybe why I don't remember her name, because I met her very, very soon after that, yeah.

Q: Okay. Now, during the Soviet time, was there any open – you talk about this atmosphere of fear, that's even hard to describe, but it kind of descends. Was there violence? Did you see people beaten up in the street?

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A: I was – there may have been, but I'm not aware of th – I was not involved in it, and – and the use of any violence against Soviets in **Lithuania** would have been very, very, very much kept suppressed by – by – by this – would be difficult for facts like that to come out.

Q: I even mean violence by Soviets. Was there any –

A: The violence as psychological, and – or – or – or direct, you know. If you are arrested in – you – you know – you know what happens [**indecipherable**] with so – the – the – how the Soviet police handled those whom they arrested, or – or deported. So that's – if that is not violence, then what is violence, yes.

Q: I'm talking before the deportations, the actual deportations, in that intra-months, and so on, when you talk about that, was there –

A: It was an – it was deviously – the control was like a – a – a – okay, it began immediately, because they came with a plan. And immediate wa – slow was the critique, of course, in the press and presentation of the existing, previous system, preparation for the – for **electivization**; it was to take place immediately. So that there were – they were restructuring every part of the society, of the – if the – under the Germans, who had, you know, they came in, in action, they were chasing somebody. They had no time to stop and – and control everything. Here they came in, and they settled down. In two days they cannot began – they began exerting their control. If under the Germans – you give them first page of the provincial paper, for

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their bulletins; it had to be, or – or [indecipherable]. Then you can do whatever you want. Under the Soviets, not a single sentence, not a single word we passed at – you cou – you could pass without being – without approved. Because they were there.

They were, you know, they had nothing else to do, but to control and – and transform it into their own system. And their – you know, they came prepared.

Q: So, is that sort of total control, you're talking.

A: And – and – and – no, we are talking about total control. Total. Absolutely total. And they always a – a – managed to call up if – I mean, many came already prepared from **Moscow**, the key persons. But many satellites, local, either – at the beginning, maybe even had some dreams and fantasies that this may be good, we can, you know, the – when – because all the propaganda was, you know, that this is it, this is great, this is way – you know, that was real bad, and now we'll be paradise. And some felt – some sort of believed that, maybe not hundred percent, but th-th – they thought that they can also have some impa – impact themselves, and they say that, what I will do a lit – with we will shift it that way, we'll be okay, maybe, maybe. So what happened later, like a – maybe when the deportations began, is something else.

Q: Yeah.

A: The be – e-even those who real believed that – that maybe had fantasies about that this could be maybe somehow turns the right direction, I think there were very, very few who believed 10 months later.

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Q: So, what was going on with your brother **Povilas** at this time? The Soviets have come in –

A: He – but like two or three months later – he told me this later.

Q: Yeah.

A: When he was already – he was already out.

Q: Okay, what was – was he still studying?

A: But he was struggle still, you know, leftist, and he sort of – he had some ideas. Which is nothing wrong. But – but he was out of the – of the – if he had even any dreams that maybe this was clear with – immediately, it was clear to anybody.

Q: At this point, **Povilas** would have been about, oh, 28 years old, something like that.

A: He – he was working as a veterinarian already.

Q: Okay. In **Biržai**?

A: No, no, he was in **Kedainiai** – **Kedainiai**, and later in the **Vilnius** area.

Q: Area. Okay.

A: He was – became also very closed just in his profession. He did not write any more, did not publish.

Q: Hm. Well, you know, it was, for someone who has leftist leanings, this kind of experience was quite traumatic, because it is belying the idealism that a person could

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have had, you know. And you have this inner immigration, what the East Germans call **innere immigration**, you know?

A: Yeah, you know, that's – that's what – they said that. Unfortunately, the whole – this [**indecipherable**] communists started in their own – in their own country, and their own time.

Q: I want to touch on something else that you mentioned earlier. And you said – and that's on the – the anti-Semitic aspect. You say that both the **politruka** –

A: Yeah.

Q: – and the mayor, were hated –

A: I think that – that fact that both were Jews, to the farming community, who had just 20 years earlier, managed to liberate from tsars, and had this very – like a sense of being independent, unfor – a-a-and still very, very fragile. To – to – to see that we are again of controlled by somebody else, if not tsars, then Jews, somebody. I think that these un – it was not – I could feel that. It was not talked much about, but jo – j-jokes were made about [**indecipherable**]. I don't remember those jokes, but – but then the Russians – now we had again Russians, and the Jews, and the – a-a-and the – and I think that that aspect – this has not been – maybe it has been written about, sort of mentioned that this instituted just fresh liberation. And now again, somebody else is there, on the – on top of us. Had important effect, on the why some were – some – some of them ignored, or – or did not pay too much – and then, he – he – I –

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especial – the killing of Jews, coincided with the big deportation, you know, of **Lithuania**. But that minimized, I think, simp – sympathies for what was happening, at the same time, to the Jews.

Q: Okay.

A: It affect how much, you know, the – like – like same went out and discuss, you know, how **Putin** and **Russia** affected **Trump's** el-election – election, and one says this and this, the other [**indecipherable**]. But definitely, yes.

Q: And had you heard before, like in – before these events, before the Soviet takeover, had you heard people make jokes about Jews, or say anti-Semitic things?

A: No, no, no, Jews were some – and what – even if I could read in those transcripts from **BBC**, and later in the – you know, was typing them, it's still – it was so outrageous, that many did not believe that this really happened.

Q: Okay, what –

A: Saying that you don't re – hu-human beings are not made up to react personally to – to abominable events. Like, okay, I – I have to confess that I did not react to the 9-11 event, until I saw – met some, really peop – people who just managed to escape. Or the – or the – the firemen from **SoHo**, right there where I live, then – then it became real. When I watched the buildings collapse, and I knew that thousands of people are there collapsing, I-I had no emotional res – it's like, it was too big. It was too big.

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Q: Not that you – does it mean that when you had no emotional response, you didn't care, or it was too big?

A: No, no, that you – that you are not made physically to – it's – it's like too big.

Abstract. Too big. Only when – it has to become more personal.

Q: Well, you know –

A: I will tell you later another story where the si – killing of the Jews.

Q: Oh, you know, that reminds me of what **Stalin** said, which many people say was his strategy and his tactic, that the death of six million, or – he didn't use the word six million, but the death of a million is a statistic, the death of one person is a tragedy.

A: Yes.

Q: You know, I'm paraphrasing here, but it's –

A: Well, that's **[indecipherable]** it's too – it's too big. We are not made up psychologically **[indecipherable]** and that you need something personal, something that you could iden – identify. So –

Q: So here is my question. When you –

A: So when I was sta – people were – those – again, the nor – the population did not get that information, those newsp – **[indecipherable]** newspapers. Mostly the intellectual kind of community saw them. So that the rumor that oh, it's the ge – you know, Germans there are killing all the Jews? They're taking out somebody in the

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village shoots one German soldier, they wipe out the whole village. They believed, and they did not believe. It was like it's – how could anybody do – be so horrible, you see?

Q: So, you're talking – if I can – I'm going to try to anchor this –

A: Yes, yes.

Q: – in as pa – particular time. You're talking about **BBC** transmissions that you are involved in distributing, not yet transcribing, but still distributing –

A: What the Soviets were doing in own country –

Q: With the sa – yeah.

A: – and the gulags, etcetera.

Q: Okay.

A: That was easier to – to – to wr – because that was already happening to Lithuanians. So that was at – easier to understand.

Q: That was real. That was actually –

A: That was real.

Q: – real. Okay.

A: What Germans were doing, it was not – not – not so real yet.

Q: But was the **BBC**, at this time, while they're still allies, the Soviets and the Germans, were they transmitting already, the crimes of the Germans against the Jews? That is, was that something that you were picking up?

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A: I – I think they were – when they did already, they were doing that in **Poland**,
you see –

Q: Yeah, that's right. That could have ve – very well been.

A: Yes.

Q: That – that it was happening in **Poland**.

A: Yes.

Q: So you would have been getting news of these atrocities through the **BBC**.

A: From **BBC**, yes.

Q: While the Soviets are still in power.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And – and people were a-at – in their circumstances, non-Jewish people,
the Lithuanians, and whoever else was not Jewish, was looking at the Jews who
might have been put in power, and saying, look at, they have brought a new regime,
we're not independent any more. And at the same time, if they get news from some
underground press, they don't believe it too much.

A: Yeah, but the – but [**indecipherable**] as I said before the bys – the population of
the **Lithuania – Lithuania** did not know that, did not get that news. They did not
read **BBC** then, yeah.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: That was known by sa –

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Q: But you knew it, yes? When you – you knew it.

A: I knew it, as hard as it was to believe. I – I – I – I saw – I – I knew it.

Q: What was going on in **Poland**, you know at that time?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. So this – this time when the teacher – the **politruka** – the – the political officer, gives you this warning, is coming close to when the Soviet Nazi –

A: During the last months of –

Q: The last months.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: Somewhere there. I – I – I – I – I – there, I cannot place the memory –

Q: That's okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: That's okay. Now we come to June 1941. Do you remember the actual deportations? Did you see any of it?

A: At – during one period – and, but I do not know a – if it was during that period, and I don't know what month, but I remember that, with some other – some other friends, students, the railroad station in **Biržai** was lit with sort of – on the side of –

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not in the center, as in many old cities, which will be – on the side of the city. And I – I was very good in mathematics, and some other things, and I was tutoring some students in mathematics, and – and not far from this station. And – and then there, as we walk back to my place, says, let's go around. Those – those are the trains where the – yesterday th-th-they arrested, you know, some **[indecipherable]** they are full, and there are guards, and they're ready to go to **Siberia**, or wherever they send them.

Q: So someone told you, as you're going back, that – first of all, the train station is not in the center of town, it's on the outskirts, in **Biržai**.

A: On the side, sort of.

Q: On the side.

A: That – so we – we looked at those trains, you know, wagons, was like five, six **[indecipherable]** and we knew that that's – they will go to **Siberia**, and we –

Q: And did you see the guards? Did you see guards?

A: No, we were to – too far to know – know. To that we just saw – you could see the train. So that's the – the only thing that I – I could ever – ever under – you know, and I don't remember which ma – I don't think this was – because I was not in **Biržai** during that June – during that period.

Q: During 14 – 15 –

A: I was on the farm.

Q: Okay.

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A: That was during, you see, during the ske – school season, I was hol – I was in **Biržai**. But during from May – end of May, from May to the September, I was always on the farm –

Q: Okay.

A: – helping my parents.

Q: So, when –

A: So I know that during that period, we – we were tre – we heard, you know, the rumors immediately, you re – you cannot [**indecipherable**] fast.

Q: Okay. So, did anyone from **Semeniškiai** get deported?

A: No, no. Nobody from – but from the – from two or three other villages, we know that there were deportations, yes.

Q: And –

A: Families.

Q: Okay, so we're talking now for the camera, for those who will not know about this, the Soviets implemented a series of deportations in the territories that they controlled. And in the **Baltics**, the first wave took place June 14th, 15th –

A: As a mass, the – this is –

Q: As a mass –

A: – outside of the individual –

Q: Arrests.

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A: – the individual families deported before.

Q: That's right. That's right. As a mass deportation in June 14th - 15th, 1941. Which is about a week before the Nazis attack the **Soviet Union**, which **Lithuania** was then a part of. So, this is what I'm asking about now, is about these deportations. And, was there talk in your family that, oh, we're going to be on the lists. Or –

A: No, no. My – my –

Q: No. There wasn't any fear.

A: – my – my family was never afraid, because by that time **Povilas**, who was involved in politics, was in **Vilnius**. Politics, he wa – he was not – not part of the family already for like a decade.

Q: Yeah.

A: He was outside in the studies, then he wa – so they – they were just considered, and would have been considered not very important, in the [**indecipherable**] working, just of – workers.

Q: So their farm was too small.

A: Yeah, yeah, farmers.

Q: Yeah, they're too small a farm to be deported.

A: Yeah, yeah. The people I know that from the re – village of **Paroveya**.

Q: **Paroveya**.

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A: There were some richer families there that those were af-affected in the ra – that’s where – but I do not know, I never had again much knowledge who lived in those villages. I was, again, in my shell.

Q: Okay.

A: But there were some richer families, I know. And also, there was one ka – **Latpe(ph)**, the name was. Was very connected with – they had relatives in **America**, and they used to send money, and they had very special horses there. And we – we – everybody knew that that’s because they have a family in amer – in **America**. So, they were deported.

Q: Okay.

A: Things – they – sometime the reasons were not even clear, why the – some people were deported. Somebody had to say something bad, somebody – we’ll **[indecipherable]** you know.

Q: So now, we have –

A: Not always had to be **kulak(ph)** – **ku-kulak(ph)**, each one.

Q: Yeah, **kulak(ph)**, yeah.

A: There were many other reasons.

Q: Well, you know, that’s why I had asked earlier about how many hectares you had, because that sometimes determined whether or not a family was deported.

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A: Yeah, but we were known for – we were not – our family was not known for actual – in grou – the whole, like – okay, not all of those seven, or eight or nine villages of – that I am talking like a bunch of villages around **Semeniškiai**, when my father was **seniūnas**, were – th – moved, like families moved apart, in individual plots of land –

Q: That's [indecipherable]

A: – not at the same time.

Q: Okay.

A: Not the same time. **Semeniškiai** was one of the first ones.

Q: Okay.

A: And why I'm – oh, and therefore, they had to destroy the beautiful old houses, and to begin to – to build the whole set of, you know, the living house, the barn, a – a –

Q: Everything that belongs.

A: So the – the village was known, because of that, as a very ba – and it was very, very deep in debts, very poor, because I know from my father, used to make ch – toots – he send – used to send me monthly, to pay interest on his two –

Q: On the loan.

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A: – he had so – yeah. He had so many loans from different people, from doctors, from – I mean, for police, and – and so that the village was known as a – pretty poor – dirt poor, because of that.

Q: So, **presaskulina**(ph), we'd say in Lithuanian.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: They were in debt because of having to build.

A: They had to build a new –

Q: Okay. Now –

A: Yeah, well, I'd ler – and even now, I watched it all built. I can build a house any time. Actual, **Serpentine Gallery** in **London** would – would like me to build one.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, a Lithuanian living house.

Q: Oh, sort of like a farmhouse, an old-fashioned sort of –

A: No, no, I – the one living house. Like, five, six years ago, they ask me.

Q: Okay. Let's come –

A: And I could do it.

Q: Let's come now to the Nazi invasion. Do you remember when you – how – where you were –

A: My – my Russian invasion, I remember very well, and I have described it, and told about it many times. You can read about it in my book.

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Q: Yeah.

A: “**A Dance with Fred Astaire.**”

Q: That’s the Russian invasion?

A: Yes. Also in the film that **Douglas Gordon** just made, based on my book, “**I Had Nowhere to Go.**”

Q: Okay.

A: It’s in the book, right there –

Q: Okay.

A: – in the introduction. Or, maybe not. In any case, the German – we did not – also, th-th-th-the Russian invasion besides – they came in with the tanks, along the dusty, country road, with little wooden bridges. And stupid. And in the tanks, then later, you know, he went on the bridge, and of course, went into the rivers.

Q: Because the bridge couldn’t hold it.

A: It couldn’t hold –

Q: Yeah.

A: – those bridges. Th-Th-They miscalculated. German I did not – we did not see. We discovered we – for – for weeks, we knew that they are there. They passed. We listened. We kept seeing, you know, army marching, passing along the road. But that’s –

Q: Main road? Main roads, or through the villages themselves, or thr –

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A: Through the main roads, of course, but through the small – the – the only road from **Biržai** to **Papily**.

Q: Okay.

A: And that's almost thir – 25 kilometers. Was the only road.

Q: Okay.

A: The one that passed – pass, you know, our farm, to wa – our farm. They make the –

Q: So you saw it?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: You saw them all march past.

A: Yes, the army, I saw – that's the only one – road there was.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: So they – they – we saw them. But, you know, we s – I had my lesson already, with the Russians, so I – I – we – we – we stayed – we just looked from – from the curtain.

Q: Okay. Well, tell us what that lesson with the Russians was, when the Russians had come –

A: The Russian was when everyb – e-e – you see, to me, it was the first occupation, the first army, the first war in my – but to the parents, it was the second, at least their second. They went through 1914. So, when they saw the tanks rolling, you know,

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Russian, from **Biržai** to **Papilys**, or maybe it was the other direc – no, no, from **Biržai**, they – they came from. They – they – they th – the fear was there, and they looked through their windows, there – the road was like 300 meters from the house. And only through the slit of the curtains, they were so, you know, they knew what may be coming.

Q: Okay.

A: But to me, it was – I just – **Povilas** had just sent to me, as – as a present, a still camera, a tiny still camera, my first camera in my life. And there is a frish – fresh roll of film. And I see, you know, oh, fantastic, the tanks are rolling, the dust is ya – this is perfect, this is perfect first image. So I run – I run to the – to the road, and others are trembling, yeah. I'm running to the road because you know, I'm a – I'm a innocent, you know, I – I – and this is just the tanks rolling, dust. And I run. It's – in the cemetery there, I sit on the edge, on the stones, on the wall of **[indecipherable]** relaxed, and click, I take a nice picture.

Q: Picture.

A: And of course the – the captain, or whoever he was, was there, noticed that immediately, you know, he said there, look, you know, there, you know, somebody may be shooting us. And runs to me, grabs the camera, pulls camera, rips out the film, throws it on the ground, and rubs with his boot into the dust of the road.

Q: The film, and the camera?

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A: The film. The camera, he hands – amazingly – hands back to me, with no film, and points to the house, and more or less, he spoke in Russian, but – but he said, I understood, you stupid, you better go back there, you stupid kid.

Q: And did you?

A: I ran. I did not have to be told twice.

Q: Yeah.

A: And that's where my first image ever taken, with my first camera –

Q: In the dust. In the dust.

A: – under a Russian boot. So I had, when the Germans were coming in, rolling, I really – I had better –

Q: You didn't take any pictures.

A: No, no more pictures.

Q: Well, what do you remember of them, in your mind's eye?

A: Oh just see the thing there, visually. I see the tanks, I see the dust, the motorcycles, the – the soldiers. Visually. There is not – it's very visual.

Q: How di –

A: Very impressive.

Q: I've heard people say that in that part of the country, they marched for days, you know, days and days.

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A: Bec – maybe that was one of the sort of comfortable – that’s the road that red – led in – maybe – now, to **Riga**, there were other – maybe to some, you know, strategic spot. I-I don’t know, that’s not for me to –

Q: So, how did life change, under the Germans?

A: Not much. Not like the Soviets. Everything send – is from the sec – changed from the second day, and essentially. Here, for some time, all – I mean, they were in – Germans were in the war, in the war business. And they were marching during that period, very, very intensively. And concen – in a concentrated way. So, though I – I believed that they had planned, and everything prepared what they will do in **Lithuania, Latvia**. And brought, you know, some people with them, you know, who to do. But they took – they could not concentrate – they were in action, it’s a concen – like an inac – they were in a action, not like the Soviets, who came and s – and st – and wa – stood there. They were there. Here, they were the moo – they were moving to **Moscow**. So they could not, I think, concentrate, could not pay enough attention to everything, to the details. They said, okay, we are going to win. We’ll do what we are going to do. But now we have no time. All we need, your meat, your – so they were – we need grain, we need food.

Q: So requisitions.

A: Yes.

Q: Requisitions and confiscations.

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A: I think that what would – and horses. They were concentrating on that.

Q: Okay.

A: And everything else, what would have come later, we don't know. But, they immediately dealt with the – what did they call it – not the problem – question of the Jews?

Q: **Judenfrage**?

A: Yeah, was **Juden** – that, they dealt – they felt, I think – think that, to the others, you have to deal immediately. And that's why I think that the – what year they marched in? When, what time?

Q: It was June 1941.

A: Which part of June?

Q: It would have been the 22nd, I think is when.

A: So end of June.

Q: End of June, yeah.

A: And – and the killing of Jews was [**indecipherable**] must have been July?

Q: August. July and August, yeah, yeah.

A: Aug – July, August.

Q: Started, started.

A: Yeah. And then tr – yeah, but most, I think, the same – okay, you – you have more information. That happened in all of **Lithuania**, same time?

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Q: Well, in –

A: Because I think that the pla – their plan had to be to do it at once, and the whole – so that –

Q: What we do know – what we do know, is that between June and December, 1941, in that six months period, the majority of Lithuania's Jews were killed. And a great many in the summertime.

A: As far as I – I – I have been, you know, told, in **Biržai**, in that area, most of the Jews were killed right – maybe in July, like in a very short period.

Q: Well, it was – what I've read is that it was August, early August, very early August. But, what in – is interesting for us is, did you see anything of this? Did people talk about anything of this, of what was happening?

A: They – they – they – they – they talked, I don't remember how and – you know. We talk about the usual – you know, you couldn't see in the –

Q: Okay, oh you –

A: – if you are in the countryside, you don't see.

Q: So –

A: But you could hear it.

Q: Could you hear it?

A: Because farm – you know, farmers still went every Monday, to the market.

Q: Okay.

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A: So the farmers had to hear, or had to miss like – okay, I know that my mother, every time she came back from the market, she brought us with her – used to make special, tiny sort of – but very tasty, bagels. And so – and those bagels were made by one Jewish family. So, of course, those who are used to buying certain things, the farmers that they need, and then most of the stores, the key stores were owned by Jews. So they – they went, and said, where? They could see. They could – they could not not miss it.

Q: Okay. They could not not see it.

A: Yes.

Q: Is – that's what you're saying.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And so the bagels stopped coming.

A: The bagels probably stopped coming.

Q: Yeah.

A: I don't know, I'm using as an example.

Q: I know. I know. Did you yourself –

A: Tha – they were – they were aware of it, they did not know the details, or they knew that it was – they were shot, and th-th – and where they were – and – and where they were buried. They knew that. You know, you cannot – those are just – just basic facts, of any situation.

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Q: Did you go to **Biržai** that summer?

A: I met – I went to **Biržai** that summer, someti – like, I think was two or three – at least two weeks of – after the – the big, main killing.

Q: Okay.

A: So, must be somewhere, that means in August, maybe. Or – and – and the reas – I don't know what the reason, cause I still had my – my attic, all my stuff there. And also, I was trying to get a job.

Q: Okay. What kind of job?

A: Any job, but I ended up – now, that's where my memory fails. Was it next summer that I worked for two weeks in a upper – up – in a pharmacy.

Q: In a pharmacy.

A: In a pharmacy.

Q: Okay. Okay.

A: Pharmacy, two weeks, because I could not stand the smell. They were packaging some powder kind of medicine into paper bags, and that powder was floating up –

Q: In the air?

A: In the air, and I used get dizzy, and – but there was another reason, which is funny. And some of the workers, I noticed they just did not like me, for some reason. And the reason was, you know, I'm a naïve, country boy. Some – I noticed that some very strong, macho guys come in, and they don't go to the – I noticed they come –

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they always come to me, not to the young – two young women who were also working there. They come to me, and then they wi – sort of don't talk normally, but they said, do you have a – do you have a – those conservat – conservatives – conserva –

Q: Prezervatyvai?

A: – some – something that I understood that I did not know, but, you know, it was condoms. It was condoms. So I used to go, hey, do we have –

Q: You shout it.

A: I shout it.

Q: You shout it.

A: Which made those guys sort of b-blush, and then the – the – the girls, you know, they took it, and – so they thought, oh this crazy, nitwit guy from – who needs you here? And so the –

Q: But this – you don't remember if that was the summer of '41 or '42.

A: I would have to – to really try to trace it somehow.

Q: Okay. The summer –

A: I – I had later tried to recreate my – where I was, what I did in what period, but that was done like 10 years later, and – and it's just covered – I made some mistakes, I would have to – to – to – but I – in the – and that was like in the – must have been

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later – I know it was very close to the s-school season. But then I went back – back – back t-to the – to the village, but I think it was **thats** year.

Q: Okay. Let's – let's still concentrate though, on the summer of '41. You hear of these things that are happening, of the shootings of the Jews, through, let's say, trips to the market that your parents would take, and they come back with news.

A: Through the – you know, through the – the people, through the neighbors.

Q: Through the people, yeah.

A: Yes, yeah, I mean, events like that, I mean, every farmer had friends. Many of the very useful items that the farmers needed, were handled by the Jewish – it's long tradition; they had contact, they could import the – and the Lithuanians, you know, after 1918, they were all – all new still, in the businesses, they were not good, so that some of the best stores were run with the Jews.

Q: Yeah.

A: So – so the – the – the – the – the – the – they knew that si – that something horrible –

Q: When the Germans had marched in, was there the same feeling of fear, as there had been with the Soviets, amongst people, amongst the farmers, amongst the villages?

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A: No, because the fear is generate – generated but – by what they do to you, or – a- and then – and immediately, they didn't do anything to the – they left everybody alone, you know. They noticed Germans only at – with the killing of the Jews.

Q: Okay, so it was – it was that – that non-Jews were left alone, but Jews were immediately – were immediately affected.

A: Yes, I think so.

Q: Immediately rou-rounded up, immediately taken.

A: Right, it must be, yes.

Q: Did the people ever talk about anybody in the villages who was involved with this type of activity?

A: No, I never – never – never heard, because I bet there were some involved, but they were not from the villages. Maybe closer villages to **Biržai**.

Q: Okay.

A: But we were 20 – 20 kilometers in those days in **Lithuania**, is like here would be 400 – 300 miles. So we were not in the – in – really not in the vicinity of **Biržai**.

Semeniškiai was not [indecipherable] populace.

Q: Did anyone have a car in your village?

A: No car, no – there was one radio in seven villages.

Q: Okay.

A: No car, no electricity, no – no nothing.

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Q: Okay. And did it – and did you know – did anybody join the uprising? You know, the uprising against the Soviets?

A: I knew one student who was in ma – the same – it was not in my class, wh-who was later – okay, one student, I knew him because he was also writing. A-And in – in the – in wer – in the – in high school, the eighth grade was divided – it was – there were 20 students, so there were – th – it was on different floors, different rooms, but I knew him through the writing – sort of interest in writing. And later, he was the one who – that Germans – who started like a week or – this is all that I'm finding now, when – that I – for instance, people don't believe when I tell that we did not know, in the villages, that there was this temporary government created in **Kaunas** or **Vilnius**, wherever.

Q: The provisional government.

A: Yeah, provisional government. We found about – something about it later, when it was already long gone. But why I'm – oh yeah, so – but they knew – the – the provisional government – this I [**indecipherable**] you know I did not know then, as I'm finding out now, create – instigated creation of provincial some – maybe four or five different instrumental, and originating, or create newspaper for – provincial newspapers.

Q: Okay.

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A: Not every provincial newspaper was – came – was instigated from – they just came, very naturally, or they derive some other, you know, former –

Q: So papers that might have –

A: But the paper in **Biržai** was – I understand now, from what I'm being told, instigate original idea to revive **Biržų Žinios** came from this provisional government, and it was one of those two [indecipherable] that I knew, **Jonas Patronas**(ph), was like one of the editors, though the – the paper, the connection came through cer-certain – **Lypnunescu**(ph) was teaching, and – and **Rudise**(ph). **Rudise**(ph), who later ended up in **Chicago**, and who later became very much connected with the underground.

Q: Okay. Before **Chicago**.

A: But he was – even though he was connected, sort of very close to the provision – provisional government –

Q: Okay.

A: – and he was the director of the high school [indecipherable]

Q: Okay.

A: So he – they started this newspaper, and invited to – to do the main work, **Jonas Patronas**(ph), whom I knew [indecipherable]

Q: Okay. But he had been part of this uprising then, this **Patronas**(ph)?

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A: Oh, he was part of the uprising – uprising. And that’s – a-a-again, he was – it’s then that I –

Q: Excuse me for a second.

A: – discovered already, in like some two months later, after – in the newspaper, they – he published a poem by – by the local poet, describing the underground, sort of poetically, activities of this mysterious group that called themselves, ‘the six.’

Q: ‘The six?’

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: So then, it’s from that poem, that I discovered there was this underground activity going, that I knew nothing about. And that, under **Patronas(ph)**, who – whom I sort of knew, later, you know, in a small way, was connected with it.

Q: When you talk about ‘the six’ in the underground, now you’re talking about the Soviets’ times there were underground, or during the German –

A: Under the Soviets.

Q: Under the Soviets, there had been an underground group?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: And there was – and that is that **Jonas Patronas(ph)** was connected.

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Q: So you never – let me – let me ask this a different way. Did you ever see anybody in your village who wore a white armband, or was a **Baltaraištis**, or something like that?

A: No, no, no.

Q: No, no.

A: No, no. Wi –

Q: And did – does **Patronas**(ph) – was he –

A: What does that mean?

Q: **Baltaraištis**? It was part of the pe – the people in the villages who were part of the uprising against the Soviets.

A: Ah, so my – my village is not very patriotic. No. No, I did not see that. But, I don't even remember later to – when I visit for the first time we re – may – may – maybe something that I saw, and I forgot [**indecipherable**]. But in any case – and then, since I knew that – I knew him a little bit, when I was – when visit – I was in **Biržai**, I decided to go and say hello to him.

Q: Okay.

A: And just – oh, oh, you are – you are the – th-the one who – who never misspells, because I was –

Q: A good speller.

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A: – known as a – I could have gone to the – the bee of spelling bees. So, when we need some but – when you have time, sometimes, come and help us to – to proofread. Said, maybe I – you know, if I have – because you don't walk 20 kilometers to just help and wa – when you are needed in the summer, the busy period. But when I came back in September, quite often he used to call me whether – when he could not deal with his own proofreaders, somehow, and I helped him, too. That was my first contact with newspapers. [indecipherable]

Q: Okay, with this per – with the newspaper was called **Noyosius(ph) Biržų Žinios** this one?

A: Yeah, I did not know, and we never – it was never used – no, no, we were such – such – it was known as **Biržų Žinios**.

Q: **Biržų Žinios**. Did you still live with your uncle now, after that first year –

A: That win – that ne – next coming year, I was – I was still in the eighth grade, until the spring. I wo – I was living still in the attic of my uncle.

Q: And you had moved – you'd lived with the – the bagel lady, the seventh year. The seventh year.

A: Yes, that was before, yes.

Q: Yeah. Was that far from where your uncle lived?

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A: No, it was actually close to – to – by the lake, next to the ch-church of – it was – that may have been the Jewish section, because it was very poor, little houses, not very far – close to the Protestant church, yeah.

Q: Did you ever walk by it, after you moved out of that place?

A: No, no, ah – next to where – almost like two houses from where I si – lived, with the Jewish old woman, bagel, there was a – a – another, more modern, official building. Which, when Soviets came in, they yi – moved immediately into it, and it became the secret police, the **NKVD** house.

Q: Oh jeez. Okay.

A: So everybody stayed out from – from – from there.

Q: Okay. What was her name? Do you remember her name, this landlady that you had?

A: No, no, no.

Q: No, no. So, after that, you never walked in that neighborhood, that part of town again?

A: Very close, because I had very, very, very close friend there, who was – happened to be Jewish, and he – he also – he was modern philosophy, and that's what I began, occasionally to the re – go to the – with him, and actually, by myself, to the Jewish – oh what –

Q: Synagogue?

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A: Synagogue. I used to stand in the ba – I was interested – I was very much in – I was in **Vydūnas**, in **Krishnamurti**, that was the period, I was very much in the ancient, and all the mystics.

Q: Mystics, yeah.

A: And in religion, in general.

Q: Okay.

A: So – and – and – and I remember that I used to go to synagogue, because my – some of the friends of my uncle, who was a pastor, you know?

Q: Okay, yeah.

A: Told me tha – why do you go? You embarrass your uncle by going there. You embarrassed – then they told me not to go to the synagogue.

Q: So they thought that you're embarrassing your uncle –

A: Yes.

Q: – by going.

A: Yes.

Q: Was your uncle –

A: Because religion is – Catholics, Protestants, they were sort of – Catholics were not very happy that there were still some Protestants left. They were following the Jesuit plan.

Q: And, was your uncle embarrassed?

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A: So that's why I remember it so well.

Q: Yeah. Was your uncle actually embarrassed, or did he mind?

A: I never asked him.

Q: Okay.

A: No, he no – he never told me that. He was very open, he was ver – he was – you know he was very, kind of open person.

Q: And do you remember the name of this friend, the philosophy friend that you had?

A: I – well, I n – **Andri-Andrioskas**(ph).

Q: **Andrioskas**(ph)?

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah. And what happened to him?

A: I don't know.

Q: Okay. Okay. So when you – let's go back now. You're working on **Biržų Žinios**, and –

A: Not – not working on **Biržų Žinios**.

Q: But you're just hel –

A: Helping –

Q: – proofing –

A: – sometimes helping to proofread –

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Q: Okay.

A: – when they failed, because they had official proofreader, and sometimes you could learn **[indecipherable]**

Q: Okay.

A: That's not cal – that's like if I would say that now, bringing sandwiches for – for **Scorsese**, that I'm watching for –

Q: Got it.

A: – movies' production.

Q: Got it. How did your life progress then, afterwards? How did your life progress, in –

A: My life did not progress very **[indecipherable]**

Q: Well, how did things go on then, after you came back to school that fall?

A: I just stuck to my school, and did a lot of writing. I did a lot of writing –

Q: Poems?

A: – during that period.

Q: Poems?

A: Poems and prose. A lot of short stories.

Q: Did you get anything published?

A: I published some poems on the – yeah, some poems.

Q: And what kind of publications?

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A: The only one I knew.

Q: Oh.

A: No, actual I – I published before I public – had published already in – in the
Ūkininko Patarėjas.

Q: Uh-huh. The farmer advisor, yeah.

A: My first – I published first my – my first poems when I was 14.

Q: Oh wow. Okay.

A: So I had already – I was al – in-in some children magazines.

Q: Okay.

A: And then, I think I published at least two in **Biržų Žinios**, and maybe at least two
later in **Panevėžys**.

Q: So, did you –

A: I was not very good. I wrote a lot, but it wasn't that good.

Q: Well, in – in this article that you mentioned before, the one from the “**New York**
Review of Books” –

A: Yeah.

Q: There is something there that you published regularly in **Biržų Žinios**.

A: Not regularly.

Q: Okay.

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A: To publish two or three poems. And – and one end of the year Christmas, sort of anecdotal s-story, with farmers talking to animals.

Q: Ah, okay.

A: So that's – that's called regular, that's –

Q: Okay. So that – your association –

A: But this is not the end of the story.

Q: Okay.

A: You see, we – we did not progress further from – from July, or whatever.

Q: Okay, we're now in –

A: Because **Patronas** remained the main worker do – the paper was controlled totally by **Rudise(ph)** and **Lipniūnas**.

Q: Okay.

A: It was not you – **Patronas**. And that went for almost [indecipherable] **Patronas**, they began publishing very soon, whatever, and the Ger-Germans, you know, came in. And he remained the main worker until like maybe March of next year.

Q: So, that would have been March of '42.

A: Forty-two, that's right.

Q: Okay.

A: When he was arrested by Germans, and sent to – to the east, to – in the army. He was drafted. He just went – came in – there were – Germans went through the

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periods of when they surrounded the city, and every wa – and anyone of the army age was drafted, automatically. I was in one of those **[indecipherable]**

Q: Oh, really?

A: I almost.

Q: Okay.

A: I walked down dressed – again, you can read it in my book – dressed up as a girl.

Q: No, really?

A: That was my transves – trans –

Q: Vestite?

A: – moment. And I succeeded, because I went with two – I was – when they surrounded the city, I was tutoring two young girls, so it matched. Was my – everybody thought I will be rich mathematician. So – a-and so we – what to do? The neighbors came in and said **[indecipherable]**. So I, since we were in the – on the edge of the city – I told you this before – they dressed me up, you know, three of us walked that – walked out of the city. Walked out of the city, and actually walked to the – around the lake, where I had a friend – friend family, where I stayed, and there were three or four days. And that house was only like a – in the visible distance from **Astravas**, where they shot the Jews, where the Jews killed in there, the Jews.

Q: Did you ever walk by **Astravas** after –

A: No.

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Q: – that shooting?

A: That was the only dista – somehow, during that period. – you know, later the – the Soviets, you know, you could visit [indecipherable] children. No, it was like, the fear, it was so – like, again, another fear, floating there, covered, another horrible cloud. So, i-it was even – when I was staying in the friend's house, we – we – we – we could not walk towards the de – we looked at from the distance.

Q: In those ye –

A: Th-There were trees, and you know, were two – we knew it's there. So that's – and – and even so, it was horrible to – to – to be there, and to know that, even from that distance.

Q: Did people talk about this, after the event?

A: Not much.

Q: No, huh?

A: No. I think that was too – too horrible. You don't talk, you know, about – at least, you know, farmer – the life goes on. [indecipherable] At least I – they may have talked, but I did not hear.

Q: Okay.

A: You know, I lived in a different world. But – oh –

Q: So we were tal –

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A: – okay, 10 months or so later, there he is arrested, one of those – you know, during one of those –

Q: Round ups?

A: Round ups. And – and – and then **Lipniūnas**, who was, you know, my teacher, walks, like with the **politruk** – said, I wanted to talk to – a-and he tells me this privately, that I ne – we need – we need somebody. You know, you are familiar with, you know, with all the aspects, you know, the printer, and the – the one – the one who sets it, wa – all the problems. Can you take fa – **Patrone(ph)** and help at least some aspects of **Patronas**' work? So it's – it's – and we don't say to it, the teacher, no, I'm not going to do that. So – an-and I was inter – you know, I – I – I knew her, you know, to me, somehow, my invol – my life being books and literature and writing, made me ver – made me also interested, you know, what – you know –

Q: In publishing.

A: – to really touch everything, smell the [**indecipherable**] because it was set letter by letter, it was not – no light on – not – no linotype. So I said sure, I will do it. And then that's what I did for – for quite some time.

Q: Okay.

A: You know, helping.

Q: So you were setting –

A: No.

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Q: Your job was what?

A: No. **Lipniūnas** and – and these people bring all the materials ready, and I then take to the printer.

Q: Okay.

A: I set, I do the proofreading, and I put – make up the pages, the layouts, and I did that, and I did it very well.

Q: And you mentioned earlier, the difference –

A: But I had some – I had some control about covering of the – we – of the **[indecipherable]** artistic, you know, activity, because they di – they did not know, and they were not interested. So there, I – I had some, you know.

Q: So does that mean you wrote about cultural things, or you were able to get –

A: – I – I – I remember – no, I – I – I asked some of the – who knew, who were in the field wat – because there was r-really somebody else, **Patra(ph) Zablotskas(ph)** was pulled in also in the same time, and he was very already known poet and writer, so he was like the editor.

Q: Okay.

A: But there were some little things like okay, I did it first, and very good review – I just found, not long ago of the **Miltinis** theater, in **Biržai**. His first – first performance play that he presented in **Biržai**. And that's when I met **Miltinis**, also.

Q: Oh, I see. I see.

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A: So I had some –

Q: And he was a playwright, and – **Miltinis**.

A: He was theater director.

Q: Theater director.

A: Friend of **Jean-Louis Barrault** in **Paris**, and **Louis Jouvet**, he was educated in **Paris**. And he was my – one of my – another of my teachers, who brought me into the – into like ca – introduced to – okay, to **Sartre**, to – to some of the wit – part of my introduction to the wester – western culture, west literature, through **Miltinis** and his friend ka – **Kariotis**. But that's – okay, that's – but then I was very much involved in local culture of **Biržai**. I was very interested who came, because okay, we had **Binkis**, we had – we had **Janonis**. But there were others before. So I did a series of articles on the early – in **Biržų Žinios**, about early poets of the area, of that.

Q: So, if I can –

A: But so, that's my contribution to **Biržų Žinios**.

Q: You mentioned earlier that there wa – there seemed to be a difference in – in censorship. Di – when you put the linotype, you know, when you – when y – not the linotype, when you would arrange, you know, you'd get the articles, and you'd arrange –

A: And pick up the – lay out, yeah –

Q: – the newspa –

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A: – metal.

Q: Yeah, the metal. Was – was that already after a censor had looked at those articles?

A: No. No, no, no. All this – okay, Germans insisted that every local paper, before it's printed, the main pieces –

Q: Okay.

A: – would be summed up in a fo – paragraph there, no time to read, and presented to some loc – to some person the Germans had in the mayor's office, as their representative. I have – I don't know the details, how that worked, but that was done already by **Lipniūnas** and **Rudise(ph)**, before they handed to me, the materials.

Before – because otherwise, suppose they – you – if you do it later, it will be too late to – to – because it's already –

Q: It's already set.

A: – made up.

Q: It's already set.

A: So they have – what they gave to me was already total **[indecipherable]**

Q: By the Germans.

A: They did not **[indecipherable]** which was **[indecipherable]** first thing. But they – they – they insisted. That was part of the job of the publishers, **Lipniūnas** –

Q: Were there – were there anti-Semitic articles that the Germans wanted –

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A: Ga – I was told by wa – wa – this guy who wrote that article, that – not only that he told me, but he se – he actually sent me the – the clippings, I have some clippings, there were not – I think – I did not mean to **[indecipherable]** not so directly, but indirectly it was clear that it would – those were anti – anti-Semitic –

Q: Pieces.

A: – pieces, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: But that was during the – the – most before the killing. After the killing of Jews, tha – you – you – you – you really have to find – but I – I wouldn't have – I would not bet that in the capital, in some of the – maybe newspapers, there was some continuation until – for another quite some time.

Q: I see.

A: But that – that I don't know. But in – in – in – in the local newspapers, in “**The Provincial**,” everybody had already seen where the Germans stand.

Q: Okay.

A: It's no joke that this is real.

Q: I think one of the sorts of implications, in that piece, in the “**New York Review of Books**” piece was that you had your own work published in – in the same –

A: In the – in the provin – vincial – in the paper that also printed th-the German ri –

Q: Anti-Semitic articles.

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A: – yes, that, but that was normal, and nobody even read those – those – those cra – those pa – first pages. That was a – without it, you could not publish. And the job that the provincial newspapers, I think that the contribution of the real work of the pro – provincial newspapers, during the German occupation, has to be understood, and credi – and – and – and – and recognized, how despite the situation and the politics, and the – the writers managed to promote the local cultures. It was – dealt with local cultures. And that's why I had the series on – on the past, you know, ke – arts in the area, tha-that – that din – doesn't start with us. I mean, there – there were this, you know, poets and – from the past.

Q: Well, you know –

A: Ah there – they did a – also a risky – they took chances, devoting all the rest to the local – promoting local cultures, and reducing the German space to – to – to minimal, to usually page one.

Q: And you know, when you say the German space, do you also mean –

A: Because the only oth – possibility –

Q: Yeah.

A: – would be okay, now we have German occupation, so we should not write, should not publish, and let – permit them do everything. That will be the other option, you see?

Q: Okay.

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A: We decided that we'll do, and we'll do our way, and we'll de – we will outsmart them, and we'll just give them crumbs.

Q: Was – were the **LAF** – li – **LAF** –

A: Th-Th-That was not discussed, it was –

Q: No.

A: – taken for granted.

Q: Okay. **Lietuvos Aktyvistų Frontas**, the **LAF** proclamations, were these the ter –

A: Where – where is that – where was it?

Q: **Lietuvos** – Lithuanian Activist Front.

A: What was that?

Q: **LAFAS**(ph). Have you heard of it before?

A: Not then. I heard about it for the first time of the – by the guy who wrote the article.

Q: I see. Okay. Well, some of –

A: Because we did not know that there was this provisional – provisional ga –

Q: Government.

A: Is that identical provisional government?

Q: It was – it was the force that started the uprising against the Soviets.

A: Yeah, but you see, we did not know even about the uprising.

Q: Okay.

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A: We only knew that German now came in, and there they are.

Q: Okay.

A: We did not know, in the villages. In our village, in **Semeniškiai**, we did not know. Maybe somebody knew. I didn't.

Q: Did anybody talk about that there was Lithuanian help in getting rid of the Jews, or did they usually phrase –

A: I – I'm reading, and I'm told, and I – I – you know, I'm one who, when somebody tells me, I believe. Later I descr – that has caused me many problems sometimes.

Q: Yeah.

A: But I believe. If they say that there was some help in – the – wh-where I doubt is that some of the aspects of that help are taken from the Soviets – Soviet sources. There I become immediately very, very skeptical. The participation there, it's clear there was, but when they say, even if it's a mild participation, comparatively, so we will – we will shoot them. But you grow and protect the property that is left, which is, you know, on direct sort of difference, likely. I – which has been picked up from the Soviet sources. The Soviets were masters in impli – in making one guilty, inventing reason, you know, so that when **[indecipherable]** one of friends of **Atronas**(ph) was – is ac – or maybe his friends, I am told that they were asked to take care, protect the properties.

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Q: While the Jews are being shot.

A: Yes, Jewish – Jewish properties. **[indecipherable]**

Q: Yes, yes.

A: So, is it true, or is – an-and when they say, this they found out from confession during the Soviet investigation, I – I don't know it's real or not real. They did not like **[indecipherable]** because he was part of 'the six' in the underground, working against the Soviets. So – so there the – what otherwise – here – when especially, when I was already in this – in – displaced, after the war, in **Germany**, in displaced person camps – and again, you have to read my book, "**I Had Nowhere to Go**," some of the young people, between 20 and 27, they were so horrible, they were – they could kill anybody an – I mean, they could steal, rob, kill. And they came from the – some were volunteers in the German army, some were drafted by force, but while in the army, they became like that, but some volunteers. So, I have no doubt that they could have shot Jews, or anybody, with – with no blink of the eye. They were so – and – and I was living among some of them –

Q: Yeah.

A: – in – immediately after the war, because they were, you know, just from the army.

Q: Okay. Well, you highlight something –

A: So I'm – I have no doubt that there were some, yes.

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Q: But you don't – you don't remember hearing about people saying –

A: No, no.

Q: – oh, this guy down the street, he was involved.

A: No, no, no.

Q: Okay.

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: But again, do-doesn't mean that people were not – not talking about it, but you had to take it – m-my case, individual case –

Q: Yes.

A: – that you know, I – I was not – I was still in my shell.

Q: Well, you were in a literary world, not – that's – it sounds to me that that's what you are trying to tell me, is that it was literature and – and culture –

A: That's all – was only one part. My retreat into the shell was caused by my illness.

Q: Okay.

A: And the illness went me into the mystics. And that's where – in the period when I was totally in **Bhagavad Gita**, in **Krishnamurti**, in **Vydūnas**. I was there. The only book I brought out with me was **Bhagavad Gita**. We do – we do an as – translation.

Q: No kidding?

A: From Lithuanian.

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Q: No kidding?

A: I was completely in a different world, which later I began trying to libera – it's not good to get lost in mysticism too much. It took me years to – to become more real. I'm still not there. I'm still with **Eckhart, Meister Eckhart**. So that – so it's not only the – the literature is – it takes you over, and you are with – with it somehow, your sensibilities are somewhere else, interests somewhere else. It is – takes – the muses take complete control.

Q: But you've become more involved in the paper, now with your setting the type, and – and –

A: Not setting the type, those are specialists.

Q: Okay.

A: No, those are spec – oh, that's a art, in itself. But yes, I was putting the pieces together of the –

Q: The layout, excuse me, you were –

A: – and – and actually, I could not – I sometimes – there were couple people, and actually, there was one who is – was connected. Later, I find this out.

Q: Okay.

A: And I – and I stood by, connected with the provisional govor – government, **Galvanauskas**, you see –

Q: **Galvanauskas**.

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A: **Galvanau** – he, **Lipniūnas**, the – my publisher, used to bring, you know, together with auditions, all the peo – articles by **Galvanauskas**. And they were all very long and involved, and I could not understand what he was talking about there. But it was – I was read – you know – I – before I sent – took to the printer, I always read them, because there were many mistakes I had to, you know, correct. Language mistakes. And – and I read those ar – an-and I could not believe that **Lipniūnas** is giving me to publish this. And two or three times I pass away that him not to publish it.

Q: What kind of topics were written in there?

A: Very political, the future of **Lithuania**. I – I could not tell – they were so above my head.

Q: Were they like, we're together with the Third Reich type of articles?

A: Now, now, now, when – when – when I'm reading, you know, whether **[indecipherable]**, I would like to read, and maybe they were corn – maybe they had – there, where you could lead it to – maybe it came from there. I don't know. At that time, all I understood without having any much knowledge about the – the Third Reich philosophy of politics, all I knew that there – oh, they want to occupy countries, and spread **[indecipherable]**

Q: Was it like the Marxist teacher, who was saying to you by rote, that this is what's important about the revolution? Is that what you –

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A: I did – no, I did not –

Q: It was a –

A: All I know about the – the – the – the – knew at that time about the communists, Russians and Soviets is that – is what I had by heart, by heart, to learn – memorize the sov – the history of yo – the Soviet –

Q: Well, this was what I'm – I'm – I'm asking, were these articles of the same kind of boring –

A: Boring – boring – very boring. It goes and goes and you don't know, and you lose the sense what he's talking about. But I – I take, to my credit, that I managed to eli – to persuade something not to print.

Q: Okay.

A: And they were long, also.

Q: Oh. All right. So –

A: Next, I did not know that he was also, or – or his bro – he had a brother –

Q: Okay.

A: – connected with –

Q: But it sounds like, at this time, you weren't in any danger, really, through whatever you were doing. None of it was the kind that –

A: No, I was not in danger exce – except I had to be very, very careful, because I already – we are not even ca – came to that, that I got – that under the ger – very

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soon, after the Germans came, and I moved back to school, I was asked also to – to –
to – to type those materials. So I became already, technically connected on the
ground. They used to give me transcripts –

Q: Okay.

A: – from **BBC**.

Q: Okay.

A: They gave me special typewriter.

Q: Okay.

A: Which I had to hide, because Germans were looking for that face, of type face.
That was the only way they could detect who is publishing them. So this specific lit
– little publication, four page, which was a – not printed, not set in any of the
printing shops, but typed. And then –

Q: So, in other words, the newspaper –

A: – and then multiplied by what was known as **shapierografas**(ph).

Q: **Shapierografas**(ph)?

A: You – you – I had to type them on stencils, on special types –

Q: Is this like a mimeograph machine?

A: Yes, some – yes, like – yeah.

Q: Okay.

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A: So, they used to bring texts. They brought the typewriter, which after I type, I had to hide, because being searched by German military police. And [indecipherable] type, then the guy comes, picks up the stencils, and they reproduce, and do whatever else they do with it. But that was my job, and the job was because those tr-transcripts were ri – ri – written fast, they listen and they try to write, and th-they needed a lot of corrections. So I had to –

Q: Were the trans – okay – so, the –

A: Whoever was taking notes from the radio was doing the – that – do – during the transmission time, secretly also. And then those notes were given to me to transcribe on stencils.

Q: Okay. What I would like to clarify –

A: And that's where became dangerous, and that's what brought me to here, to this table.

Q: Okay. I'd like to clarify again, for my own mind –

A: Yes.

Q: – what I understand you're saying, is that when you worked for this **Biržų Žinios** –

A: Yes.

Q: Which I – in the article is named **Naujosios Biržų Žinios**.

A: Yeah.

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Q: That is totally separate from this activity that you're talking about now.

A: Which **[indecipherable]** same time.

Q: Yeah, you did it – you did the one, and you did the other.

A: Yes, and many other things.

Q: Okay.

A: Which we are not even talking about.

Q: Well, what are some of those other things?

A: Well, I wouldn't real – would have to try – no, let's talk about what's

[indecipherable]

Q: Okay. It is – is that –

A: I was involved in the theater operation, in the theater, and there are other activities here.

Q: That – okay, let me get my train of thought again. That – that you start – first you're – you – you work, as well as going to school, at that newspaper. And then you take up underground activity again.

A: And – and working. I was there – because I wa – remember, that this is when I'm still in gymnasium.

Q: That's right.

A: That means I'm there, and I – between like ever – every like s – every week, mayb – certain days when the materials are ready. So I spend there maybe, on some

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two or three different days, two or three hours. So that's – that's – that's my workplace.

Q: Did you get money for this?

A: No.

Q: Di – how did you you live?

A: I lived in my uncle's house, and my mother's sister was living there, and she –

Q: She took care of you.

A: [indecipherable] yeah.

Q: Okay. So – so you're – you – you take up the underground activity again, after a certain interruption.

A: Not again, there was no stop. Only that under the Soviets, I was only helping to distribute.

Q: Okay.

A: To disseminate. Under the Germans, I was helping to distribute, and also involved in the production.

Q: Did this – did these leaflets –

A: I was also, you know, connection with **Jukas – Jonas Snarduotas**(ph) who later was editor of **Pano – Panevėžio balsas**. He was involved in a bigger way, much bigger, a national way in the – in the underground publications. So – but I – there a –

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it – I – I di – I helped to distribute. But here, in **Biržai**, I was directly involved in the production.

Q: Now, did you ever – I have so many questions about this. First of all, did you ever listen to these transmissions –

A: Sorry, this light some – sometimes –

Q: Did you ever listen to the transmissions yourself –

A: No.

Q: – from **BBC**?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: I did not know English at all.

Q: So everything came in English?

A: Yes.

Q: And so some –

A: Everything came in li – to me, in Lithuanian.

Q: So somebody who listened –

A: And this –

Q: – took notes and translated –

A: Tra – immediately – immediately transcribed. Whoever listened, knew English, and immediately wrote **[indecipherable]**

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Q: Did you ever know who it was who was listening?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: I bet several people.

Q: Okay. And –

A: There were several different handwritings, so I know it – it was differ – different people.

Q: And they started already with 1941 – in 1941, in doing this?

A: I don't know when this started, but their contact came to me sometime in the late fall. In the fall. That means like four or five months later.

Q: Okay, '41, yeah.

A: **[indecipherable]** after Germans came in.

Q: And during this i – was it the same group that had been in the anti-Soviet underground, or was it different people?

A: No idea. It was very, very secret.

Q: Really?

A: Totally – you could not – you knew no – you had – the only – I had only this one contact. And I –

Q: And who was that? Who was your contact?

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A: And I don't – now, I don't – I knew him, because I knew his face. He was in a pre – earlier cla – one class before me. So I knew – I knew – I knew who he was, but – and I sometimes remember his name, sometimes. His name slips.

Q: You forget it, okay.

A: But that's all I know – knew. And he would – he was very, very, very, very close. Not only close – okay, now the time comes when one night – I typed only at night, in my attic. I go for the typewriter, and there is no typewriter. The typewriter was stolen. I used to hide it in the outside, by the barn, sort of barn, in a huge, wooden stack. And I thought it was very safe, nobody was coming there.

Q: This was by your uncle's home?

A: Yes.

Q: But, you know, that –

A: And the typewriter is gone. So –

Q: I'm sorry **Jonas**, I have to interrupt.

A: Yes.

Q: I want to clarify one thing. So you were doing this for about four years. If you start –

A: No, no, no, no.

Q: Three years.

A: Yeah, maybe yeah.

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Q: About three years.

A: Yeah, some – something maybe, yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay. And it wou – and you're –

A: Not – even so, you are taking the occupation period, but I came in into – int –
with – with – to the leaflet distribution, already after – s-some time after the Soviets
were there, yeah.

Q: That's right. I'm talking about German occupation.

A: Yeah.

Q: Which starts in 1941.

A: Yeah.

Q: And it goes til 1944. And if you start in the fall of '41, then you're there at least –

A: That – one was three –

Q: – two years, three years.

A: Yeah, yeah, something like that.

Q: Something like that.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay. So –

A: And I did only these fo – these – restricted only to that.

Q: That was your underground activity –

A: Yeah.

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Q: – to that.

A: No-Nothing else.

Q: Okay. Did that leaflet have a name? Did it have a – a title?

A: I – I don't remember. I remember once some – seeing a page with – in some wi – from some museum in **Lithuania**, with the la – like prepa – different titles, that's a – and I – I wish I would have that, and I remember seeing it there.

Q: Okay.

A: But I don't remember, no.

Q: Okay, and –

A: At the same – with – not what – I – I think it was le – **[indecipherable]** or something, I'm not –

Q: Word of the nation.

A: – it was – might be here.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: It's –

Q: So you don't remember the name of it. And was it a page, or two pages?

A: It – usually it was two pages.

Q: Okay.

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A: Two long pages.

Q: Front and back, or two pieces of paper?

A: Two – two – with texts on both –

Q: Okay.

A: – sides.

Q: So it would be one sheet –

A: Ma – like the full sheet, fu-full mattress.

Q: Okay. In other words, one sheet of paper, both sides.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, not two sheets of paper both sides?

A: No.

Q: One sheet.

A: Most – most of – some of them came in, you know, four pages, but not – not this one.

Q: So when you would type it up, and –

A: That he used to – he would tell me when he delivers, that I will be back in two days, so we agree when he will come to pick up, and picks up that ma – type, and that's it.

Q: And then they go reproduce it somewhere else.

A: Yes, yes. Yes.

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Q: Did you ever get a reproduced copy?

A: Hm?

Q: Let's say you give them the one sheet –

A: Sometimes he used to bring me to – yes, which I used then to pass, yeah.

Q: To others, okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you ever –

A: A-And stupidly some of them – and that's where, stupid, naïve. You let – li – you learn lessons, but it's gradually. Many of them I stuck in my attic in the – in the cracks, and then when the – which I bet when the Germans, they never came, but the Soviet – then when the Soviets came, they looked then into every crack. So – but that would be **[indecipherable]** and it's not against damage – against Germans.

Q: So this would have been in the attic of your uncle's barn, or –

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, no – never at home.

A: In the hou – house.

Q: In –

A: No, in the attic of his house –

Q: Of his house.

A: – which he lived in also.

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Q: Okay, okay.

A: I was endangering him too.

Q: And did you ever see these leaflets? Did anyone ever give them to you, not knowing that you had typed them up?

A: No, no, I never saw them.

Q: Okay. And I want to ask again, do you remember at least the first name of the man – of this person who you –

A: No, I do – his last name come – keeps coming. And I have written it down, I just don't [indecipherable]

Q: Don't have it right now.

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: Because I was – there – there was exactly the same name, a writer, playwright in **Chicago**. So I thought he – I did not know he moved there, is it the same person?

Telling the truth, I never asked him, I never met him, if he is that person.

Q: So you just – you just knew that later in **Chicago**, there was someone by that name?

A: Yeah, and maybe before we end the conversation, this – it will come to me.

Q: Okay. It sometimes happens.

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A: But this – quite well-known Lithuanian playwright, and he writes very **Ionesco** kind of, **Beckett** kind of plays. I'm not – I – I don't like them, but Lithuanians like them. So – huh?

A2: **Nakas**(ph)?

A: No, no, no, **Nakas**(ph) is something – no, you know, he – he's – yeah, he lived somewhere there, te – was teaching there. I don't know where it is now, he may be in **Lithuania**.

Q: Well, nevertheless, it must have been –

A: So I have – I have his name.

Q: Okay.

A: Because I – and I –

Q: You must have trusted him.

A: He trusted me, because he admired me. First he knew the reputation I had f-for a-a-a-a perfect speller, and that I, you know, was a good – I knew Lithuanian language well, so that I will be able to correct, and – because it had to, you know, put in good shape. And then he was writing short stories, himself. That's why I thought that maybe the connection is with – in **Chicago**, that guy, which he used to give me to read, because I had, you know, already, a certain reputation, you see.

Q: So he shared his shto – his stories with you?

A: With me.

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Q: Okay.

A: And they were very bad. And I – I – I – I never, you know, put him really down, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: And so he – he respected, somehow, me, and – and trusted.

Q: Cause that's a huge trust.

A: And plus – plus he wou – he – I have no doubt he was connected again to

Vitakunis(ph) and **Kavalunas(ph)**.

Q: The people who were in the anti-Soviet underground with you?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: And – and they were also the same on their ger – continued – so-some of them.

Q: Under the German.

A: Continued. And then I dis-discovered that his name does not appe – I thought maybe – later I thought that he was one of 'the six' tha – and because nobody knew who those six were, even by the time Germans came.

Q: Yeah.

A: They were – it was – but I discovered from these guy who wrote this article, who sent me the names, that he was not among those.

Q: Okay.

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A: That he was not one of ‘the six.’

Q: By the guy who wrote the article, you’re talking about **Michael Casper**.

A: Yeah, **Casper**, yes.

Q: Yeah, okay.

A: He sent me any – so, I found out from **Casper**, that he was not a-among ‘the six.’ That means he came from **Kavalunas**(ph). So, just trying to put things – figure out together, because he never talked. And there sh – rishi – the secret, you know, was coming to it, was –

Q: Sure, let’s get there now.

A: – that – so he comes to pick up, and I said no, I could not type, because the typewriter was stolen. He – he like – he immediately like panicked. I could – I – I – the change that took place on his face, his whole attitude, he – he totally panicked, because this – he had told me before that, take good care of this typewriter, that this germ – you know, the German police is looking – military police is looking for that type. So what hit him remains mystery in a way, to me because what – his first act was, he came – it was raining and they had a raincoat. He pulled out a gun – he pulled out a gun, and held it in my face. You’re not fa – it’s – it’s – it too – you know what this means, in this – it – what this means, that this – you could be end of – not end of me, it could be end of you. You know this. And then, he puts down. What that act – I could not – even today, I – I see, I see that moment, that I don’t

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understand his feel and motivation, but I think it was a – like a panic. Sudden realization that this could be in – Germans discover, and that he sells it, it's discovered. I mean, it was – it was bad, but his reaction was – why didn't – he could have just told me. Why did he take – have –

Q: Why did he pull a gun on you?

A: Why did he pull – yes. And that, I – I'm still, you know, when I remember that moment, I – and it's very vivid, and I'm still see – you know, mystery. But I think he sort of – it was panic, realization and panic. Something, some – and maybe he thought that how he – he could have thought that I'm lying, or faking that, because th – tha – that wouldn't – I mean – me – I-I-I don't know, it's a myst – mystery.

Q: Did you think that maybe your uncle could have found it?

A: No, no.

Q: Okay.

A: No, he wou – my – we had very – because I told him immediately, I had to tell this.

Q: Okay.

A: I said this, and be – becau – oh yeah, becau – and then, he pulls the gun, and even be – before, he sort of like relaxes it. You have to disappear, and immediately.

Immediately. And that's when –

Q: You left.

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A: That's when I left. But I told then – see, when I told my uncle, you know, what happened, so that he knows.

Q: And what did he say, your uncle, to –

A: He agreed. He said go, you have to go. And he gave me – but, the official – because one had to get – okay, so it's – the best would be the – like fake, that you are going to the – **Vienna, Austria**, by train, to try to get into the – to the University of **Vienna**.

Q: You were how old, at this point?

A: This was '44, I was 21.

Q: Okay.

A: So – and he said, I have contacts – I will give you contacts in **Vienna**, and I will give you contacts in – in – and he gave – I even remember ba – it was Frau **Do-Doeberry**(ph) in – in sweet – in – in **Baza**(ph) and then you can, if you go to there and there, you can just walk into **Switzerland**, there is no problem, through my friends. So, I have the names of –

Q: So, he was thinking of a way to get you to neutral territory?

A: Yes, to **Switzerland**.

Q: Okay.

A: That was the plan. But – and that's what you had – just had to have, from the **Biržai** local German police permit, to board a train to **Vienna**.

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Q: Okay.

A: And that's what he got for us.

Q: And why did you – why did he –

A: Why he got it? Because he was in **Biržai** more – mo – maybe of five people who spoke German. And Germans, when they really needed somebody, needed, went to him. Also, he managed, because of his German he ha – managed we – because I was already the age of the draft – being drafted into the army.

Q: That's right.

A: And I got the papers to go to the – to report. So he said, this is what you do. Here is a bottle of red wine. Take this and tell them that it's my – from – from me – from him, a present. And I did not know what his plan was. So I go there, and the – and that's the doctor's office, and I give it to the doctor, the present, it is from my uncle.

Q: Pastor **Jasonas**(ph), yes? Your – your uncle's last name is **Jasonas**(ph)?

A: No, no, **Jašinskas**.

Q: **Jašinskas**, that's [indecipherable]. Sorry.

A: And then the doctor writes a little piece, and then I showed this piece to my uncle [indecipherable] oh, this is – this says that you have a bad case of **TB**, and you cannot be drafted.

Q: So the doctor understood immediately?

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A: Yes, because they were craving for wine. In **Biržai** there was no wine, and my uncle had wine, church wine.

Q: Oh my, look at that.

A: It was church wine.

Q: Yeah.

A: A bottle of red church wine, that saved me from [indecipherable]

Q: Was that the same year, in '44, or earlier?

A: That was like a – six months earlier, or so –

Q: Okay.

A: – before the [indecipherable] went for [indecipherable]

Q: Okay.

A: So I – and then she said, if your – and then **Adolfas** maybe, why don't you take him with me, so we were –

Q: And why? Why would you have taken **Adolfas** with you?

A: Because he was also in **Biržai**, he had a job, working, and – and then – then one –

Q: He's 19 years old, and so on?

A: Yes. So in – in any case, I thought, he not endangered now, the danger is coming, not very far. The Soviets will be here in two, three months, and then that true, that's what happened – anyway – and we would be in danger anyway. So let's take this change, and try to do what their uncle advises, and go.

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Q: Okay.

A: And that's how – and then somewhere, we –

Q: And so, you leave?

A: – get past **Tilsit**, and we're very happy we are on our way to **[indecipherable]**
and then –

Q: Hang on a second, I want to interrupt, just for the camera here, that this is in July
1944, that's what I got from your books. It was July 12th, something like that.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's this – this is already in my book, so –

Q: Yeah. July 12th, '44, you leave.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you know, the interesting thing is that the assassination attempt on **Hitler** is
eight days later, on July 20th –

A: Yeah.

Q: – you know, in the – you know. And I wondered whether you passed near by the
area where that attempt was made.

A: Where – you know that area? Where in the –

Q: Was in – in **Prussia**, in **Prūsija**, so I don't know if, you know –

A: No, we were directed later into the **Prussia** – we were – the train to **Vienna** was
towards **Po-Poland** at first, but we were – but three hours or so later, military police
– police directed us to stop the train, and directed it towards **Hamburg**.

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Q: Okay. Now, did you –

A: So tha – that's – that's where a – a dream of **Vienna** ends.

Q: Question: Did you get on the train in **Biržai**?

A: No, in **Panevėžys**.

Q: Okay. And –

A: When – when did – is there a record when the Soviets came to **Biržai**?

Q: I don't know.

A: I-Interest –

Q: I – I don't know.

A: I think where you – we were already, I remember, month or two later, in the – in **Hamburg**, in the camp, where the newspapers, there where we saw a photograph, in which the church, our church was there, and –

Q: Your uncle's church?

A: Yes. And – and it was **[indecipherable]** and – and – and with a – with a news bor – you know, bulletin, that you know, heavy fighting is taking place, yeah. And we saw it in the German paper. So we knew that at last, at – at least two or three months until they managed to –

Q: So you –

A: – reach the point.

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Q: I want to go back to the – the train journey. You get on in **Panevėžys**, and you travel for a while.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you cross out of Lithuanian territory?

A: Yes, yes, we – we –

Q: Into –

A: – we – we passed the bridge in – in – at **Nemunas**, in **Tilsit**.

Q: In **Tilsit**, so you get into **Prussia** there.

A: Oh – oh yeah, yeah, yeah, that's – oh yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay. And did you ever have to change trains, or was it the same train?

A: No, no, the same train, and the same – the s – the movements of trains were there controlled totally by the army at that time. There were no – no regular – so we – we – we thought that it will go nonstop, you know, in that direction. But that – and that's when they took not only us, then they went there [**indecipherable**] the police – milit – military police walked through that train. And actually, the train may have continued, because they took only us, myself, my brother, and like maybe seven or 10 other young people.

Q: All men?

A: Now – all men. The – this – becau – because they needed workers for the factories.

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Q: Okay.

A: So that's where they sent – took us to **Hamburg** and forced labor camp.

Q: So this – the trai –

A: And we told – our – our – we were trying with our minimal German, argued that no, we are students going to **Vienna** University – no, we don't need students, we need workers.

Q: Were the trains also having families in them? Did they have women and children and soldiers, and things like that?

A: Yes. Many families were – those that want – did not want to take chances.

Germans still believed that they will win, but for Lithuanians, was clear that the Soviets are coming back. So some of them are – a-are more educated intellectuals.

They had already left their own way, wherever – but these were mostly some more simple people. Workin – working people that I [**indecipherable**] in the train.

Q: Were the trains packed?

A: And – and sometimes not e – very packed, and not even clear why their – where they are going. Every train during that period, wherever, was full.

Q: And what kind of transportation were you put on to get to **Hamburg**?

A: They put us on another train.

Q: Civilian train?

A: I don't remember it. They were all the same to me, they were all the same.

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Q: Did it take long to get there?

A: I may have it in my book.

Q: Okay.

A: But several days. There was – th-there were long stops, and many of the stations were destroyed. They had the – and there were other reasons. It took several days.

Q: Were there more people who were – more young men who were added to your group?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: As you went along?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Were they all Lithuanians?

A: No, no. There were only two other Lithuanians, I remember that. And we did not come to the – get – we – we tal – we met them – we found them in the camp already.

Q: Okay.

A: And they were **Karaims**, they were not really the Lithuanians. They were from the co – from **Trakai** area, two brothers, **Tinfavichas(ph)**, **Karaiimi**. I-I remember the name very well, because they were also sort of amateur artists. They made into cartoons, and – and they – they – they made a portrait of me, and I still have it.

Q: What was their last name?

A: **Tinfavichas(ph)**.

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Q: **Tinfavichas**(ph).

A: **Tinfavichas**(ph).

Q: **T-i-n-f-i – fin – f-a –**

A: So we – we ended up in the same camp, which la – to – like one week or so, they moved somewhere else, and we don't know what happened to them.

Q: So, when you get to this camp, is it in **Hamburg** itself?

A: No, it's like a half an hour by train, and it's called **Elmshorn**. It's a small town, **Elmshorn**. They were – have a ha – a very industrial town. What – what they were making, I don't know, but maybe it was not that important, because it was never bombed. Even when they bombed, every night, **Hamburg**, they never really bombed – later it was bombed, but during our stay there, for 10 months, it was not – not –

Q: Was it a la –

A: They were always flying over our heads, so we had, every night to go to – to the cellars, to have special, you know.

Q: Was the camp itself a large camp, or a smaller one?

A: Quite large. It was combination of – of – I don't know how – how it worked. It was a forced prisoners' camp.

Q: Okay.

A: It were a – a camp, like three or 400 French, German – French, Italian
[indecipherable] prisoners.

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Q: Okay.

A: And – and mixed nationalities, another like 100, in which in our – my barracks – they were all in different – different barracks.

Q: Were there Poles there, or Russians, or –

A: There were some Poles. Many Russians.

Q: Many Russians.

A: Many Russians, yes.

Q: Also prisoners of war, or –

A: Well, some were – I don't know how they ended up there.

Q: Okay. Okay.

A: There were also Ukrainians, and they were clashing always, like that.

Q: With the Russians?

A: Y-Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: And followers of **Vlasov**, have you heard that, **Vlasov**?

Q: So there were Russian forced laborers, who were followers of **Vlasov** in this camp.

A: Sympathetic to –

Q: Sympathetic.

A: – to – they were – they were there, they could not be with – with **Vlasov**.

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Q: That's right, they – they – they –

A: But – but Russians used to – some – we know that was one time when – when one of the Russians – Russian workers went – a-at least it – it was rumored that one could believe, told to the head of the camp, that two or three Ukrainians were siding with the **Vlasov**. Next day they disappeared.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. From our stay – during our stay of 10 months in that camp, in that factory where we worked, at least 15 Russians were –

Q: Disappeared?

A: – taken away, yes. And – and – and the rumor was that the Ukrainians are slandering – telling them –

Q: But I – my history may not be that good, but I thought General **Vlasov** was somebody who was on the Germans' side. And so, if someone's –

A: Yes.

Q: – accused of being with General **Vlasov**, then why would they be taken away?

A: Oh, oh, maybe – oh, maybe the – so the – maybe they told the opposite, or some –

Q: Opposite, okay.

A: I know that it's connected somehow to –

Q: Okay.

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A: – to – to **Vlasov**.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah, yeah, **Vlasov [indecipherable]**

Q: So you – you were able to see these sorts of things going on. What are –

A: Not only to see, to live through them.

Q: Yeah, yeah. How were you treated?

A: I was always treated – okay, I will tell you this ha – another anecdote.

Q: Okay.

A: Now, the food and life was miserable there. Like our weekly portion of meat was you could cook in a spoon.

Q: Oh jeez, that's not much.

A: So – and at one point, we began to see the – they reduced like our – or my daily meal to – to cabbage soup, and to some pea soup. And – and we see the s – the soup we get, and there are those white – white things that are not peas at all. There are the peas, but there are also those white worms. Fat, white worms.

Q: Maggots.

A: Maggots. So mainly you pushed them aw-away, you know, **[indecipherable]** to the spoon, and you eat the rest, you know. But French, you know, they're more delicate, they're – they're – they're not like that. They said – they – they – they are not eating **[indecipherable]** the soup, yeah, and they – they – somehow they had –

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we had developed – we have developed a rela – I had developed a relation, my – and with my br-brother, with French prisoners, because they had – they could get packages from home. They could get books, and so they used one – when one of them discovered that I’m – you know, writing poetry, I’m interested in books, he used to bring me books fra – and I could sort of – well, I had two – like, one year and a half of French, I could manage. And – and sort of a friendship developed, and had sort of – they had certain kind of respect. Then, one day, when we had too many of those worms, they decided that the barracks should complain to the com – first to the ci – to the **Elmshorn** – to the German government of – that is in charge of the camps and prisoners.

Q: So not even to the camp itself, but to the local government in **Elmshorn**.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: That had to con – control of the barracks.

Q: Too many maggots.

A: Too many maggots.

Q: Too many maggots in the soup.

A: So – so this guy, who was a teacher in **France**, and then he was drafted, and he became a for – prisoner, and he was writing poetry, he came to me, and says that we decided in our barracks, that you should be our representative, and go and complain

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about the maggots. I said, why – why – why – why not – not you? Why am I to complain here, yeah. But hey – and with – with no second thought, I said, sure, I will do it.

Q: Okay.

A: S-So I go, I go to the – who is – and there sits this general, I was tau – told, just like that, and stares at me, and more or less, so – so what? And – and – and there I am, you know, I'm a nothing, in this little –

Q: You're a forced laborer.

A: – miserable jacket, and this – and he looks at me, and said, oh, oh, well, we – we know – lately, we have these worms in the soup, and – and the – the French **[indecipherable]**, they wa – asked me to tell. And he listened and still stares. And then he says, oh, the soup is **prima**. The – **prima** was one of the words used most during that period.

Q: So it's wonderful, the soup is wonderful.

A: Wonder – oh, you know, wa – and then he's – begins to talk more, I don't even understand. And the tone he was talking to me, was like when one talks to a child. He looked at me and he thought, this naïve kid, he does not know what he is doing, what – why he's telling **[indecipherable]** they tell, you know, there he is, and he's stupid, and some naïve boy from **Lithuania**, doesn't – and – and he oh, **prima**, **prima**. You go and tell, goodbye now, and he said goodbye.

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Q: And this was a – he was in the – he was a general?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: He was dressed in – in military clothes?

A: And then later, when I told to some of the – my others who were there before us, said, you know that you took this chance? I said, no, no chance. I just – they asked me, I did that. I did not think at all that there's anything that I would be in danger.

And –

Q: Were you?

A: No. I did not think at all. I was so naïve, and so innocent. And I think that's why – because you know, th-th-the previous two people who comp – complained, they are not here any more. Then I – then, it – it hit me that, you know. But when they were ask, and when I was doing that, it was very normal to me. I – and that's how naïve I was in – about life, even then, yeah.

Q: What kind of jobs were you doing there? What kind of work did they put – put you to?

A: To produce the – I was drilling, I was polishing some little metal piece that was fit – silently, secretly, some-somebody said, oh this is for U-boats. Try to make it to – to demi – to chip. To chip like – like one-hundredth of millimeter maybe.

Q: Wow.

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A: From some metal piece that it would fit forever, would fit forever, belongs eventually –

Q: The camp –

A: We – we – we did not know what the factory was doing.

Q: Was this a –

A: We only – we had machines and we had instructed, you know, how to do that, and the – any kid can learn that. So – no, not every kid, but you know, we were grown-ups. So –

Q: So, was this machine wi – was this factory within the camp compounds?

A: **Gebrüder Neunert Maschinenfabrik.**

Q: **Gebrüder Neunert Maschinenfabrik.** So it was a private company for – the – owned by the –

A: And that's still there.

Q: Really? **Gebrüder Neunert** are still around?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Do they know what kind of history they've got?

A: I don't know. I don't know what **[indecipherable]**

Q: Okay. And that was outside of the ter –

A: In the ci – in the city.

Q: In the city, but not in the territory of your camp?

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A: No, the camp was separately. But the camp was in the city.

Q: Okay.

A: In the [indecipherable] sort of part, like a little bit out thinner, going into [indecipherable], yeah.

Q: What kind of conditions were in that camp? What were the rooms like?

A: Everything controlled, limited time when you are in, and when you are to report, when you are out. And – and where you are to be to – to – except in – report – you – you walk from there – you are free to walk, nobody is with you to the factory, but you are to be there at certain time. If you won't be there, you will dogs on you.

Q: Okay. Were there people who tried to escape?

A: Have not heard [indecipherable] there may have been, but y-you know, you don't know everything about what's happening.

Q: Did you see people go –

A: – when you – and it's like when you have 1,000 people, and – and you don't know what's happening.

Q: And who – were there – who was your, let's say, direct authority?

A: But I managed to hide a Latvian, who had escaped from **Hamburg**, digging trenches, which were very, very dangerous at that time. And somehow ended up in our – and how, I have no idea, but some Italian, captain – **Capitano**, brings him – and later I found out he's Latvian – said, can you hide him under your bed for the

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night? Again, without thinking, I said sure, I will do that. And the check-ins were not every night. They were quite often, the check-ins. And why I did – and then, in the morning, on my way to the factory, because I could not keep him for another night, I said go – I'm walking, don't walk with me, but walk like 20 - 30 steps behind me. And I am passing the railroad station, up from there, it's up to you. And that's what I did, and I passed that station, I looked, he was not there, he was somewhere there mixed up –

Q: Okay.

A: – trying to tra – take a train. So I have no idea what happened to him. But it was possible to do things like that.

Q: Yeah.

A: When you are stupid.

Q: And you don't have a research every – that particular night, you know.

A: Yes.

Q: Now, the barracks, what did they look like?

A: Just shacks, with the – just made up and built in one week, or wer – three days.

Q: And, how many people were –

A: Double beds for –

Q: Bunkbeds?

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A: Yeah. Actually, I have a dr-drawing. **[throat clearing]** Talking too long. I have a drawing. I had nowhere to go, you can see.

Q: Mm-hm. And how many people were to a room?

A: Oh, I think – well, we have to fix it. You may need another session.

Q: Okay. Hang on just a second, let's cut for a moment. **[break]** Okay, we're going to stop for today, and conclude this interview two days from now, on Sunday, July first. We're stopping at the point where Mr. **Mekas** is in **Elmshorn** labor camp, and when we come back, we will continue talking about his experiences there. So for right now, this is a temporary pause in the interview with Mr. **Jonas Mekas**, on June 29th, 2018, in **Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, New York**. Thank you, and until next time.

And thank you for all the hours you gave us today.

A: Welcome.

Q: Okay.

End of File One

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Beginning File Two

Q: 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, and 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 – our interview the other day, was in **Germany**. You –

A: Somewhere in **Elmshorn**.

Q: 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 quite – in a – quite a hurry. That is, the typewriter has been discovered. You – your connection to the person who distributed these bulletins from the **BBC** is very nervous. You tell your uncle –

A: Yes, and he – and I saw it, and he indicated it by pulling out the gun, and putting –

Q: Pointing it at you.

A: – at my – into my face. So the – that moment, I did not – I clearly understood his action, but it was – later I – I thought that that indicated the – and also he said, you have to disappear, and disappear fast. So that it was stressed, and I had no cho – I

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had to – I knew that was indication that I have to follow what he is saying, no joke.

There is a gun –

Q: Okay.

A: – in my face.

Q: Did you remember the name of this person now?

A: Now I remember.

Q: What was it?

A: **Ostrauskas.**

Q: **Ostrauskas.**

A: He was about 22, maybe.

Q: Okay.

A: He had finished gym – gymnasium two years earlier, I think, than – than me.

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

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, maybe I was a year –

Q: A year, okay.

A: – or so – a year or so. He was just slightly older.

Q: Okay.

A: But definitely, clearly, he was more involved, and more connected.

Q: What was his first name, do you know?

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A: That's more difficult to –

Q: Okay. So, did you have – did you have the opportunity to go back to the farm, before you left? And sa –

A: Yes, I – we – we had a time, yes, to – to – to – to say goodbye to Mother and Father.

Q: And what about your brothers?

A: I did not see them before. I did – I-I – **Petras** was not – you see, **Povilas** was living in **Vilnius** area – area –

Q: Okay, the veterinary – yeah, veterinarian.

A: – was veterinarian, and pat – and **Petras** was living in **Pasvalys**.

Q: Okay.

A: As a agronomist.

Q: Okay.

A: He had finished the studies in the – some kind of agronomy institute.

Q: There was one in **Duchnowa**(ph), I remember, people talked about that.

A: Yeah.

Q: So, apparen – **Petras** was agronomist, **Kostas**, where was he?

A: A-And **Kostas**, ko – I – I – I may have seen **Kostas**, but then, I don't remember.

Q: Okay.

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A: But he – he was at that – that time spending most of his time working in **Neciūnai**, just across the river.

Q: And what a –

A: But a – I be – I bet that I saw him.

Q: Okay. And **Adolfas**, was he involved in this underground activity at all?

A: No, he did not even know. I could not tell him. I could not tell him.

Q: Okay.

A: And he did not know anything about it.

Q: So why did he –

A: But he – because not say – he was pointing in the – in – in the large si – in **Biržai** at that time, in – I think that's [**indecipherable**] I have to look up his diaries. He was too – to German police, he would be equally insec – incriminated, cause he also lived in the same attic with me.

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

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Now, you told me that –

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A: And then we also had to keep in mi – 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 – you cou – with – with sa – so it was combined almost, yes.

Q: Did you ever work in **Panevėžys**, in the pres –

A: And it was clear that he would be drafted, yes. **Kostas** was immediately drafted.

Q: So **Kostas** served in the army, the German army?

A: Yes – no, no, no –

Q: No.

A: – drafted b-by the Soviet army.

Q: Oh, so when the Soviets came back –

A: Yes.

Q: – he was drafted into their army.

A: Yes, yes.

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

A: Okay, he was like thirt – maybe 26, maybe.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't know when it was.

Q: Take out – let – let's go over this again, because it's a – it's a – it is a – a clarification, and more accuracy. You wrote down the date –

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A: The dates of my family –

Q: Birth.

A: – I [**indecipherable**] the tape before.

Q: Yeah. Okay.

A: It was from the head.

Q: Yeah.

A: Now I will y – **Elžbieta**, whom we used to call **Elzbunai(ph)**.

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

A: That's [**indecipherable**] – was born in 1912.

Q: Okay.

A: **Povilas** was born in 1914.

Q: Okay.

A: **Petras** was born in 1915.

Q: Okay.

A: Ko – ko – '15. **Kostas**, 1919, myself '22, and **Adolfas** in '25.

Q: Okay.

A: And my mother was born in 1987.

Q: A – 1897.

A: Ninet – 18 –

Q: 1897.

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A: 1887. And my father was born in 1868.

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

A: Twenty – they were – they married, and they were about 20 years difference.

Q: So your father was really quite old when he had you, and your brother. You know, he wasn't a young man.

A: But, you have to also keep in – in mind that my fate – the way my fate, my life went, I – I married when I was 52.

Q: You know, almost in the same wa – following the footsteps.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. Did you work at any time –

A: Everything went – and that's why I say I lost with the quo – during that period of occupations, I lost like, regular education. I really had no – well, you know, usually you have gymnasium, then university, step by step, and then gradually you become this or that. I did not have that. So I lost the normal growing, like, period. I jumped from child to – to – to 27, when I was – landed in **New York**, I was 27. So there is almost six, seven, eight, 10 years, totally messed up.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Which then, the way my story goes, I tried, you know, to grab as much as I could, and as fast, like choking, you know, life, what I missed, when I came to **New York**.

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There was no ending, no – I had no day when I did not go to theater, when I th – I missed nothing that opened in **New York**, like for three, four, five years.

Q: Did you ever go back to – for formal education anywhere?

A: No, even the universit – they were ne – after the war, you know, we're still in displaced person camp, and the camps are moving, moved around. First **Wiesbaden**, okay **Wiesbaden**. The next, **Wiesbaden, Mainz**. There is a good university, so we enlisted with **Adolfas** into university. But then a year later, they – they moved us to **Kassel**. So I had to, for like a – a year, I commuted, once or twice a week from **Kassel to Wiesbaden**.

Q: From **Kassel to Wiesbaden**.

A: Yes. And so I go for two or three days, I settle down in ka – in – in **Mainz**, and then I go about three, four days back to – the food beca – the food was delivered in **Kassel**. I had to pick up the food, and bring my food with me. An-And became eventually, impossible

Q: Okay.

A: So that type of education –

Q: What was it that you were studying in –

A: I started with philosophy, then I change it into literature, with – with – in reality, I was going to any class that was – I could – you know, co – tha – that sounded interesting.

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Q: Let's go back still to **Lithuania**. Did you ever work at another newspaper, besides **Biržų Žinios**, or **Naujosios Biržų Žinios**, in **Panevėžys**?

A: That – the last months before I left, maybe for 10 months, or – I worked at **Panevėžio – Panevėžio balsas**.

Q: Okay.

A: Which was – one step sort of more – okay, it was edit – **Biržų Žinios** were edited by like – they were an education, **Rudis(ph)**, and **Lupniūnas**, they were, you know, teachers. What their other interests were, I never, you know, def – you know, patriots, educate – educators. **Panevėžio balsas** was edited by **Jonas Narbutas(ph)**, who was a writer, and had – was very closely connected with the Lithuanian writer – artists, writers community. So, it was a more – they gave more space to – to – to – to – he gave it to his friends, and they were writers, so there was – it was more like, literary. Still the same – the same system, the same like how the fir – first page, to the w-war – to **Germany**, and war machinery, bulletins. And then the rest the same, **[indecipherable]** structure, local culture, and –

Q: And you're –

A: – but it was the – the – the atmosphere mo – was more intellectual, because it – in **Panevėžys**, there were several very – very important writers and si – and science people, like **Ivanauskas**, there – it – it was – a-and of course, the theater, and **Miltinis**. It was a different – a-and many of the **Kaunas** people, mostly about

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[**indecipherable**] etcetera, used to come to visit when they went – came to **Panevėžys** to visit their friends. Very often the – I could sort of sit in the corner, also, and listen.

Q: So what was your involvement with **Panevėžio balsas**?

A: My function was similar to – to – to all – almost identical with **Biržų Žinios**, to – to – to – to put all the pieces, **Narbutas**(ph) and his – and other sort of assistant editors that he had, prepared for th – got all the materials that they passed to me, to – to – to – to take it – to put it into the – to realizing, that means, give it to the line – we – there, we had the lineta – linotypists already.

Q: Okay.

A: To type, and then to proofread, to – to – to some of – I did not have to read already all of them, like **Biržų Žinios**, when **Lupniūnas** used to pass to me the materials. Sometimes I – mo – I tried to read them all, and tried to correct pre – paneva – **Panevėžio balsas** had already a proofreader, and they had, you know, corrector, so I – my function was to see that everything is there, every area, and everyone who's responsible for local news, for the art, or what's happening in the – in the arts in **Panevėžys**, that they delivered it on time –

Q: So –

A: – and then to put it – the – the – the term was, I guess I invented it, technical – technical, I-I would say, editor.

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Q: Okay, to me it's – it strikes me as that some of what your work was, and tell me if I'm right or wrong, some of your work was as layout –

A: Yes, yes.

Q: – you were doing layout work.

A: Yes, layout, and –

Q: And then some – and proofing. Proofing was in – more in **Biržai** than in **Panevėžys**, because you had a proofreader in **Panevėžys**?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: But then in **Panevėžys**, it was more than just layout, it was also responsibility –

A: In – oh, in **Panevėžys**, all the materials are there already, ready on the – my table, to take to the linotypist. The linotypist passes, 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, like a next day or so, 40 hours – it's a weekly – 40 hours later, all the metals are there, ready to put it into pages and places.

Q: Okay.

A: And I – and – and I did all that.

Q: So, within this – these responsibilities, did this include the political articles that were required –

A: Whatever was – whatever was there, ended up on – on my table, ready to – to – to – if i – sometimes with a note that, please read – check the language. These writers,

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sometimes, you know – I will look, we think it's okay, but maybe could you check – check again.

Q: Okay. So –

A: That's – that's about it.

Q: So –

A: But everything ended up, you know, on my table.

Q: And that's in **Panevėžys**, and in **Biržai**?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. So –

A: [**indecipherable**] that in **Biržai**, I had also sometimes to – to – I th – **Lipniūnas** or this, did not know that something took place in – there was a reading, poetry or something, but I knew – and I – I order – I knew who could review it, so I-I had right – I had right to also order and engage some writers.

Q: To assign articles to other people.

A: Assign, yes.

Q: Does that –

A: But in the – on-only in the cultural area, in – in the local cultural area.

Q: So what about – is it possible then, that if you had to proofread, and layout, could – did – were there articles that were anti-Semitic in –

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A: Not – not – not – nei – neither in **Biržų Žinios**, nor **Panevėžio balsas**, and – and I believe same for all – all other regional newspapers after the – a year after th-the – the killing of the Jews, you could really try to find with the various – you need a strong light to find anti-Semitic article in any of those papers.

Q: In the regional press, you're saying?

A: Yes. The capital, I don't know. Regional I'm talking only, and I'm – I'm quite familiar because I used to get in my little office in **Panevėžys**, some of those regional papers.

Q: But then –

A: They were all concerned for the local cultures, and they were fed up with – they knew where they are, they knew where the Germans are, and – and – and what the Germans – Germans all about. And I – I wouldn't say a hundred percent, you know, I'm not – I did not see everything. But not in **Biržų Žinios**, and not in pane – **Panevėžio balsas**. But during the first weeks, I know, because I have seen the clippings. But by the time – by the – after I ca – after the arrest of **Petronis**, that's where I really familiar those – that **[indecipherable]** that.

Q: Okay.

A: But indirectly, in – in like a kind of a rule kind of way, sent those huge articles by **Galvanauskas** about the future of, you know, his fantasies of – of the western civilization, abru – what is behind some of that thinking. I would not – I could not

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bet – I think some of that had been maybe totalitarian, I don't know, because the –
the thinking – a-and I told last time that I managed even to keep some out –

Q: Yes, you did.

A: – because I could not understand what he's talking about.

Q: So what's his first name, **Galvanauskas**?

A: **Galva** – ed – this one was **Ernestas Galvanauskas**.

Q: **Ernestas Galvanauskas**. And he –

A: There were two or three brothers.

Q: Okay. And he was –

A: And I know that one **Galvanauskas** appears in the provisional – that I discovered
now –

Q: Okay.

A: – [indecipherable] that **Galvanauskas** appears in there.

Q: But you would say that you – th-the first year, you did, or did not see –

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

Q: Okay, the person who –

A: – he did – did not believe any of it.

Q: Okay.

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A: So who am I to talk? At some point I give up, of course, you cannot talk if you – the – the – the person doesn't believe what you are saying.

Q: Okay.

A: Because a-all – yes, yes, yes.

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

A: Okay, yes.

Q: Okay. 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**?

A: I would still – I would add something t – about the local newspapers.

Q: Okay.

A: Because they felt a certain respi – responsibility to their regions. And I think that I – they have to get credit, some of the people who worked on those pe – newspapers, for helping to – to keep the local culture going.

Q: Yeah.

A: And to te – and sometimes with even a danger, you had to outsmart – outsmart. Sometimes, I mention that some major articles had to summed up briefly, very

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briefly. And there – sometimes they – they did not exactly translate

[indecipherable] wrote the way – they wrote it the way Germans would be – like.

Q: Be happy with it.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: And they took chances. And it's to their credit that – that they managed to devote
ma – most of their – the body of their newspapers to that life of not only what was
happening at that period, but there is a lot of the past, always, of – from pieces on
their past cultural personalities of the period, I mean going like – going back to
[indecipherable], yes.

Q: Well, you know, two things come to mind; is that if we're talking about articles
dealing with the past, I think East **Europe**, if I – I'm going to – I'm going to kind of
bring forth a stereotype, that east Europeans live in the past a lot, for le –

A: But especially they – they – that – during that time, there was even a need. It was
positive, to live in a – to go back to the past was positive.

Q: Okay.

A: Now is no – wouldn't be positive, but under occupations, it was positive to be
reminded of – of **Varpas**(ph), and of **[indecipherable]**, etcetera, etcetera –

Q: Okay.

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A: And all their early, or, you know, other personalities that helped to – to – to become **Lithuania**, an independent –

Q: Country.

A: – country. That was stressed, that usually got a lot of the – of space.

Q: Here is another thought, though, and it also has a certain parallel into how people in the cultural sphere dealt with in Soviet times, that you have –

A: Here it's very – totally different, because there you – you could not ri – choose your own subject, could not choose your s – your own theme, and whatever you wrote was the re – everything was read, and had to be approved. In **Germany**, at that period, we don't know what would have happened later, with, you know, a familiar, and – and – and know how it was during those two plus years. Because they were in the war, they were too busy. They could – they did not have enough personnel, friends, they were all soldiers.

Q: That's right.

A: To – to control every aspect. They con – what would have happened later, I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: Nobody knows.

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Q: Yes. But when you're talking about the Soviets, ye – I assume you were meaning the Soviet presence at that time, as well. That is, that was **[indecipherable]** at that time.

A: Yes, I'm talking only about the so – but th – we know also, that it continued. That the control, total control continued near – continued until after **Khrushchev**, maybe, I don't know.

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

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: – give perfunctory play –

A: Yes.

Q: – that was political, and that was acceptable, and then they'd do what they want to, you know.

A: Yes, I began noticing that there, somewhere around '75, or something –

Q: And so that in some ways, it is saying okay, we will work within the system, because this is all that we've got, and we'll give them their **duorkle**(ph), their due, and then we'll –

A: Yeah, yeah, that's exactly what the provincial pa-papers did.

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Q: Okay.

A: They – only that that – that **duorkle(ph)** was much smaller.

Q: Okay. Let's see – how do you say –

A: A-A-And – and more or less –

Q: Yeah.

A: – page one, the [**indecipherable**] bulletins, and then information, you know, when the farmers have to deliver grain, or potatoes, you know, that – for the army.

Q: Okay.

A: Things like that. Th-Th-Th-That – that came also from the mayor, some – so, the mayor's office, and th-th-the – the [**indecipherable**] presented materials, the first page, maybe sometimes second page, that's it.

Q: Okay, **duorkle(ph)**, how do we say that in English? I can even think –

A: The – the –

Q: Jeepers. It's – it's not – it's sort of like taxes, it's sort like give to **Caesar** what is **Caesar's**, but I don't know what –

A: Yeah, but wa – give them what they want, more or less, and then forget it.

Q: Yeah.

A: That's how, I guess, the readers treated – treated those pages, also.

Q: But here, I – when you talk about that, here is another effect, and that is, perhaps, the price one pays. I mean, there have been a lot of artistic works, whether they've

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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.

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

Q: You're talking about those who were left at –

A: The – **Mi-Mieželaitis** – there are some poets. And we knew already that – we used to – we did not take them seriously, though there were no – they were good craftsmen, and good, sometimes not bad poets [**indecipherable**] **Salomėja Nėris**.

Q: Okay.

A: But they were caught in it.

Q: **Salomėja Nėris** –

A: But they knew exactly those four, five, six, and – a-and – and they kept writing, and the – the cha – the papers kept publishing them, and pushing, and building them up.

Q: During the Soviet times?

A: Yes.

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Q: During the first Soviet occupation.

A: Th-Th-The Germans knew nothing, were not interested in that aspect at all.

Q: Okay.

A: But the Soviets, they had to control the culture too, and immediately.

Q: Okay.

A: And they came prepared, with who was the mayor, who is this, who is that. They came ready with their own – yes.

Q: Okay. So when you're talking about **Miežlaitis** and **Salomėja Nėris**, they were so – pro-Soviet poets – I'm – I'm saying this for the camera, and –

A: Yes, because **Salomėja** –

Q: **Salomėja** –

A: – wrote a long poem for **Stalin**.

Q: And tell us the essence of what that poem was.

A: I don't remember. I read it, and I forgot it. I read it because I respect her as a poet, but what – we were all, you know, could not believe that she did – wrote the poem.

Q: It was about sta – **Stalin** brings the sun.

A: How great – of course, it's a poem, it's happening, kind of a panegyric, kind of praising and admiring, and oh, he is great, he is fabulous. You know, I don't remember the poem, I never read it again.

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

A: I don't remember any – I don't remember – not in that degree, not – I don't know a single – maybe somewhere ba – something that I did – never saw, but there was no such –

Q: In the world of culture.

A: In the wor – yes.

Q: Because in the world of – of politics, I have had –

A: Yeah, in politics [**indecipherable**] but I did not know what – we did not know, I did not know what was happening. But when I'm – I'm reading now, I see some confusion there.

Q: 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 –

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

Q: Yes, it did.

A: See, so I don't blame [**indecipherable**]

Q: Okay.

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A: – because i-i – like having dreams, and finally – especially because this followed the – the – the – the – the – the – th-the – one of the big, Soviet deportation, you know –

Q: Yeah, mass deportations.

A: – pe-period.

Q: Okay.

A: So I don't blame. I bet I sort of – I don't blame even those who tra – they – they were just misled, trying to play some games, even, you know. They went to **Berlin** – now I'm reading, finding.

Q: Yeah.

A: But this is all like secondhand, so I – I don't know what to – what's real there, you know.

Q: Okay, okay. One –

A: Somebody, someday will row – write the real history.

Q: They – they are doing such things, and that is where men – much information is being uncovered that often just wasn't known.

A: Yeah. I just bought a co – a few – like a month ago, a book in English came out, where I'm finding out much of this information.

Q: What did I want to – ah, there was one final thought that I wanted to kind of express, to get your views on it. And that is another, let's say, danger, or gray zone,

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that can appear. I mean, what your – what I see in your descriptions of how the regional press worked, how the – 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?

A: No, but we did not see it that way.

Q: No, you didn't –

A: We did not see it, we did not accept it there, we did not treat it that way. But we thought this **[indecipherable]** you know, this is that, that's – you know. Who cares about that? But this is our – this is our culture, this is our paper, and we don't care about that. It can be disputed, and there can be opinions, but in reality, when you are there, and when you really live in that situation, you try to out – outsmart, you – of course, you could not publish anything. You close the theaters, you cl – you do – you just give the milk, give the **[indecipherable]** whatever Germans ask. But that's not how life goes under a – the occupation. People continue try to live, not to be disturbed by it, and try to continue their lives normally, and ignore, and sort of like to fight indirectly, in – in very invisible ways, the occupation. The fight is going nonstop, all the time. A-A-An-And try to – to – to remain quo – keep your identity.

Q: Okay.

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A: That ki – that critic that you just – sort of possible, negative aspect of it, was not really real.

Q: No, I'm not saying that –

A: Yes.

Q: – I'm not saying that as something that during those times –

A: But you're talking to it we –

Q: – but have bi – reading it now, 60 years later, I see, for example –

A: Yeah, but you are now, you are free, you are in **America**, or live in **Lithuania**.

You are not there. You are from the outside, a different context. And – and – and you don't – it's like, okay, I think **Michael** said, you know, well, why did you really le-leave? Okay, this guy, **Ostrauskas** told you to go. This is not realizing how serious this situation can be, that to – 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 – you – so, okay [**indecipherable**] okay, you say that I should leave, you know, why should I leave? And also, the German military police looking specicfi – specifically for that face – typeface, was not a joke. Was no – so, it was all real. Now, it's a little more less like, look – it's like a game. It was not a game.

Q: Thank you. Okay. Okay. Let's go back to **Germany**. There – 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 –

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A: And actually, it was more serious than I thought, at that time, because I was still the – like a little bit naïve, just from the village, yeah. Cra – okay, back to

Elmshorn.

Q: Back to **Elmshorn**. So, in one of your – I – 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 –

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: You know, is th – I found that strange.

A: No, not that –

Q: That being in a labor camp, you could do it.

A: – it was – very – it – the rules were very, very, 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 office –

Q: Okay.

A: – to the **Lagerführer's** office, and get permission.

Q: Okay.

A: And he – and the permission indicated exactly where you are going, and when you are – you must return.

Q: Okay.

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A: So, you could go to a movie. There were limited, also, places that you were allowed. There were some ca – cafes, bars, where ma – we never went with **[indecipherable]** with Italians – you cannot have ita – okay, we discovered that the – it – French, not ital – no, French and Italian war prisoners, had different – th – were there under different conditions.

Q: Oh.

A: They had different condition than the forced labor workers.

Q: **[indecipherable]**

A: They could go to bars, they could go – still, I think they needed permission to leave the barracks, but they – they could – they were allowed to get – to write home, to receive packages. We were not allowed. We were a much stricter regime.

Q: Okay.

A: But we could go, you know, know that we were for a permit to go with a bookshop – and nobody asked to go to a bookshop, except myself and my brother. So they were looking – looking at us amazing – with amazement. And – and movies. That's all where we used to –

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

A: Oh, no, no, I'm talking about **Elmshorn**.

Q: **Elmshorn**, okay.

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A: But – and we were permitted, during the – some weekend days, maybe sa – we- well, the – now I can't remember, I think Sundays – all sort of – to go during certa – certain hours for – it took like 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 – luckily, it was the bookshop area. And that was not destroyed, around the station of **Altona**. So we – we – and where – very often, when we were the – we a – we – we – we tried not to go. We avoided **Hamburg**, because whenever we went **[indecipherable]** to the bookshop, it was always air raid. So we used to – and the train was always there to – to go out of town, and it – the – and – and so usually we ran to the train and – and then the train moves – moves away, like for a mile, to the suburb, and stops, because they used to bomb running trains.

Q: Were you hungry in camp?

A: If you get one meat – meat – if you have a – the ration of meat for the week is that you cook – can cook it in a spoon. So that's – or if you have soup with worms floating in it –

Q: Well, I remember you were telling me about that, you know, you were telling about – okay.

A: So you eat some, you – you –

Q: Were you able to get food on the bla – were you able to do anything on the black market?

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A: Some people – some Lithuanians in the other barracks, I know, they knew how to get some – some fish, because there was a lot fish – fish around **Hamburg**. But we did not have any – any contact, you know.

Q: About how –

A: We were not smart enough about –

Q: About – paint a picture of the barracks for me.

A: Just a shack that you can build from wood, and – and tar.

Q: Straw, you mean, or –

A: In one week, or in three days, and you can kick the, you know, with your fist, the wall, and the fist will be on the other side.

Q: And how many people were –

A: And then there were, in our room there were like 10 cot – double – double cots, so they were all – always about 15 - 20 people.

Q: Okay. And about how large do you think the entire complex was?

A: It – I think there – there were – I don't know, three, four, three, four? Four or five structures. I would guess between 300 and 400 people.

Q: People?

A: Yeah, maybe like one – 200 French. Maybe **[indecipherable]** make my guesses.

Maybe like 50 Italians, then 50 or 100 mixed. We were there where – during the

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period of the war when the Italians were already enemies of **Germany**, so there were many Italians, some Belgians, some Dutch.

Q: Mm-hm. Were there Russians?

A: Most of the Russians were in separate barracks.

Q: Were they Russian soldiers?

A: But may – they were bulgar – Bulgarians –

Q: Okay.

A: – Romanians, in – in our barracks.

Q: Do you think – do you know whether the Russians were civilians, or prisoners of war, or –

A: Mixed.

Q: Mixed.

A: Mixed, mixed.

Q: Okay. And were there Poles?

A: 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.

Q: Okay.

A: And one day when one of the Poles visited me, I stepped out for a moment, and later I discovered that my watch was missing. And the Pole managed to steal the watch. There were Poles. And n-not – not many, no, not many.

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Q: Okay.

A: There were maybe in some other areas.

Q: Tell me the – you worked, you said at a place called **Gebrüder Neunert**?

A: Yes.

Q: What was that – that factory, or what was that –

A: They're called ma – **Maschinefabrik**(ph) – **maschinen** – mi – **maschinfabrik** – **Maschinenfabrik**.

Q: Okay.

A: They – they – th-they specialize in watched – in metal, usually small parts for machine – other machineries, sort of, and th-the rumor was going that what we were making, they were just pieces you cou – you never could guess what they – you could do with those pieces, you had to – the dig hole – di – di – drill holes in them, or – or polish them in one way or other. Where the rumor was going that they were intended to be – th-th – they were parts for U-boats.

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

A: In our factory there were like fift – 50 – between sic – 50 and 70 workers

[indecipherable]

Q: All from the forced labor camp?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay. And, were you ever assigned –

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A: From actually, different camps.

Q: Ah. But all around **Elmshorn**?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And were there any other places you were assigned to work?

A: No, only there.

Q: Only there.

A: From the beginning to the end.

Q: Okay.

A: Until – and that’s when – what leads to my – us – our leading – leaving

Elmshorn, that during last – okay, by – by January –

Q: All right, so let me sp –

A: – a part of – yes?

Q: 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?

A: I have to look up my wo – my book.

Q: No, I think it was July.

A: Somewhere there.

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

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A: January, February, somewhere there. Yeah, already by January, the factory began running out of supplies.

Q: Okay. This is the winter of '45.

A: Because the bomb [**indecipherable**] other factories. They could not get metal, they could not get thi – 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 – our spirits got – went the same speed up. We knew that oh, they're running out of stuff.

Q: Yeah.

A: But, well, that was not much better than the work, because you still had to be there, and many hours, and – and since there was no more materials to really do the work on those pieces, they – we had like to keep cleaning. Keep cleaning and cleaning, and like i-it was, we came so bor – to work, you will work, you do, automatically you begin to forget even that you are working. You begin to dream, and your future fa – fantasies. But when you just cleaning and cleaning, the boredom of it is – is – is – is suffering.

Q: Okay. And so –

A: So eventually – and that's when we concocted a – when it was reduced to like five or six hours of actual work, and the rest was cleaning, we thought, with **Adolfas** what – okay, when we came – when we left with – on the same train – not on the

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same, had later somehow, they joined – they transferred from some other train, into our train, two **Karaims**, **Tinfavichas**(ph). And then, when we arrived, already they brought us to **Elmshorn**, we found that there was one – one more Lithuanian, and he was – and I knew him from **Biržai**. He was a young graduate of medical school in **Riga**, **Kregžde**, **Jonas Kregžde**, who was very, very, very, very bright, he spoke many – **Riga** had at that time – was a university where you could study Sanskrit, you could – oriental languages and philosophies and – and he spoke them all, and he was in music. We learned really 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 **Jakubėnas** – **Jakubėnas**, prof – Professor **Jakubėnas** was a – a – a te – te-teaching in **Kaunas**, and there was some religious institute, a Protestant religion institute, and he was quite, you know, prominent in his field in **Lithuania**. And he had the top – when some of the intellectuals left the be – because they're so – so even he left a – during the first weeks, I think, or months of German occupation, and – and settled down in lud – in hoi – **Holstein** –

Q: Oh, **Schleswig-Holstein**?

A: **Schleswig-Holstein**. And **Kregžde** knew him, and the – a-a-and he was ver – **Jakubėnas** was respected by local Germans there, and they – he persuaded them to give – to crack the – to – a job in one of the local hospitals –

Q: Okay.

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A: – because he was a medical – you know, he had just graduated. So he ended up here in – in **Schleswig-Holstein**, in – in – in that area. But before he left, he said, if one day you want to try to – to – to – if you think it's realistic to run to **Sweden** to escape, I will give you some leads. He – he knew beca – from **Riga**, during his studies, he had made contacts with – with **Sweden**. So, but he said – but first if – before you go, go to **Jakubėnas** and we – and – and s-see me, and I will give you then the last, latest contacts to the boats that could take you to **Sweden** from schwa – from –

Q: **Schleswig-hol** –

A: Yes.

Q: **Schleswig-Holstein**.

A: From a – from a – a town just across, on the other side of the border.

Q: **Kiel**?

A: **Denmark**.

Q: In **Denmark**. Oh, okay.

A: No. So, we – we talked. Somehow when the – the hours became shorter, we thought, why don't we tell brothers **Neunert** that since there is no work here, you know, we could – maybe we're willing to go to – to – to – they could send us to **Kiel**.

Q: Okay.

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A: But we also, when we said this, we knew that **Kiel** was bombed almost every day, every night. So somehow, I – he did not know what to do with the workers.

Q: Because they're all cleaning, they have nothing else to do.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: So, I think the idea came first – we overheard from him, that he was with his brother, he had a brother who was a 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 o – and he, that helped me – you see, I had the machine, I was working with the machine. I all – always had little pieces of paper with German let – with German words. I was studying there, my language. So he used to come to me like a teacher, and then examine me. So, I think we overheard there was, then figured out – out what do do with the workers, and that's when we dropped this **Kiel** idea. So said, oh, yes, I think we – we will be sending some people, some of the workers, because there they still have materials.

Q: How did you know that **Kiel** was being bombed?

A: It was not very far from us.

Q: Okay.

A: All the workers knew, everybody was, don't go there, don't go there.

Q: And did – was there anybody – did you get broadcasts from anywhere?

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A: No.

Q: No.

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: Only news – local, that – the – the newspapers.

Q: Okay.

A: So – and so wa – one day, the **Neu-Neunerts** call us in, said – and give papers to us which tell – it's clearly written that we are – that please permit to travel there, and that we're going, it say, to **Kiel**, to that – to a factory so and so, and – and – and that's it. So we said okay, we go. But on our way, as we – where we crossed the riv – river, we got rid of our documents, and we continued to **Flensburg**.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: Naïvely thinking that, you know, we can very easily – but before that, we continued to **Flensburg**, and from there to – we walked to **Husum**.

Q: **Husum**, okay.

A: Where **Kregžde** lived.

Q: Lived, okay.

A: And he gave us some information where we – whom to meet on the other side of the border. So we go back to **Flensburg**, we board the train to cross – that was going towards **Denmark**. But just before we boarded the train, and the police comes and

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asks for our papers. So we had the basic papers fro – that Germans had given to all their workers. So that it – identification was there, but the fact that wet – we're supposed to report to **Kiel**, that was not there. They – that did not know. So, is it – no, you cannot – you cannot cross the border. So, they threw us out. So we – we walk around, and we took our time, we walk around, and we – we go into like two or three wagons, la – and we – and we – we walked there around, and we – we – we sort of jumped into – on a train that was already like moving out. But it – like in 15 minutes we realized that it was not going to **Denmark**, it was going back to – to **Schleswig**, or – or another town, back to where you – we came from.

Q: Someplace in – in **Schleswig-Holstein**.

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

Q: And did you?

A: And that's what we did.

Q: Okay.

A: This is all like taking chances, but it was easy to take those chances, because we noticed that even the police could not control any more.

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Q: Did you have any Lithuanian documents when you left **Lithuania**? Any passport

–

A: Yes.

Q: – **I.D.s**?

A: A – a – a **liudijimas**. Not – not a passport, but one page with the photograph and name.

Q: So it is a – sort of like a declaration.

A: Yes.

Q: A – a – an **I.D.** paper, is that what it was?

A: Yes.

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

A: I would – I still have it, so I could –

Q: You still have it? Okay.

A: Yes, yes. In – in – in **Biržai**, in the mayor's office.

Q: Okay.

A: In [**indecipherable**] then we also noticed that th – when Germans run, they run in very organized way. They – they – they knew – everybody knew in what school they can sleep. Their schools were made into – you know, they were closed by that time.

And – and where they could, if they want get – get – stay with some families – so we – we – we – we – we kept pushing and look and we discovered that there were

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– that they were sending to the school – to the school, so said, why don't we join them, very well. So we ended up sleeping in that school, together with all the others, a-and – and that's as wa – you know, what are you do? Running. We are also like – we got – said – from the **[indecipherable]**

Q: From **Prussia**, yeah.

A: Yes. And not much **[indecipherable]** but then – and then, even we were – we were still sleeping, we hear that some farmer, local farmer, walked into there, into the space, and he's asking if there any – any workers who know the farmer – farm work. We need workers. That was spring. Now it's spr –

Q: Oh, so now – so now we're coming – it's January, February, March, or something like that.

A: Now **[indecipherable]** or April, somewhere there.

Q: You're in April, okay.

A: It's in my book.

Q: Okay.

A: So, we – we meet at the **[indecipherable]** yes, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: And we the – so the farmer takes us to his farm.

Q: And what was your – conditions there?

A: And that was like a – it was like a paradise on that **[indecipherable]**

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Q: Really?

A: Yes, because the farmer, an old farmer, by himself with like 10 cows, and two, three horses there, and he cannot handle it, and he's – his wi-wife is sort of invalid. But his mother, who was pretty old, he – she was like a – she embraced all us like her children. She had the – immediately cooked a chicken, or sa – as – a-and – and we became like her children.

Q: So is this the first decent meal in **Germany**?

A: Yes, we could not believe it. And suddenly we are in the – and the closest, you know, police, or whatever, it was like five, six, seven miles away. It was just in the countryside, it's very, very remote area. It was – and that's where we stayed, until the end. We did not eve – we missed even the end of the war.

Q: Did you?

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

Q: So it was that quiet, and that remote?

A: Yes, yes.

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

A: I had it – have it – **Thiessen** was the name on the family, **Havetoft** was the village.

Q: **Havetoft**?

A: Yes.

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Q: **Thiessen** family, **Havetoft** village.

A: Yes.

Q: In **Schleswig-Holstein**?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay. And who told you that the war ended?

A: We heard from the local newspaper, we heard.

Q: And when was the first time you saw soldiers? Allied forces?

A: On our way to **Flensburg** when we – we did not see any soldiers on the way, we and – we – we read in the paper –

Q: Okay.

A: – that they are already in **Flensburg**. I live – and the farmer then – then told us, also, **Thiessen**, that – yeah, he there, for I think a day or two or three, he did not know himself, until [**indecipherable**] settled, and it was clear.

Q: Okay.

A: So then – then he told us, you know, you can stay. And we – but we stayed, we did not rush, because it was still – we believed, maybe chaotic. So we stayed another three or four days –

Q: Okay.

A: – and then he packed – we packed our books, and he gave – with his best horse, he himself took us to **Flensburg**. And that's when we saw – we met – we were drive

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– going into **Flensburg**, and from **Flensburg** there were hundreds and hundreds of soldiers, some of them even had guns, because the – they were, you know, already prisoners.

Q: German soldiers, prisoners of war.

A: Wi-With – with like hundreds of – and maybe three or four British guys guarding them, because –

Q: Is **Flensburg** – excuse me, my geography fails me here, is **Flensburg** north of **Hamburg**?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Is it –

A: On the very border of the **Denmark**.

Q: Oh, **Denmark**, okay, all right.

A: Because soldiers were – ha – they were all fed up. They – they – the British knew that they're not going to fight any more.

Q: Okay. So from there –

A: So keep your gun, who cares?

Q: Wow. Did they – so, this farmer takes you there, and where is –

A: And then we – we – for – **Kregžde** had given us name of one of his friends who lived in **Flensburg** –

Q: So this is **Kregžde**?

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A: – in a private apartment.

Q: Yeah.

A: He was also a doctor.

Q: Okay.

A: So we stayed for two or three dag – days in there with the doc – this other doctor. And then – and we found out where the – the – the – they are collecting the – all the refugees, th-the British immediately established a – you know, a – a usual a – th – the army barracks.

Q: So they –

A: And we went there.

Q: And so then you became official displaced persons?

A: Yes.

Q: Were you issued any kind of **I.D.s** by those authorities?

A: Yes, and then already there were Lithuanians – lith – or – or had their own – th – in exile, their – **Germany** had created their own centers, very fast, and issued a li – li – sort of mini passports of that, which said, I am a Lithuanian, I'm a refugee, and I – I refuse – this was the – I – I refuse to go back to **Lithuania** un-under the Soviet vic – regime that was reestablished there. And why? Because at the same time, like for – there were, you know, all those millions of Russian war prisoners, and forced laborers, and immediately the Soviets had, you know, made a deal with the

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Americans and British, that they should all go back. They shouldn't go back, and – and the – the train, after tra-train full, like immediately began –

Q: Did you see this? Did you see such trains?

A: Yes, yes, and not only seen, I have experienced stones on myself, on my head, fo – thrown by the – the Russians going back t – home. The – first they stayed in – in the same barracks, and many of them – a-and – and I – I had many conversations with many of them.

Q: With the Russians?

A: Yes. Who were like – who was desperate to decide to go, or not to go, to go, or not to go back. But then they usually ended up at, oh, it's bad, you know, and we have this – this guy, this criminal, this is our king. But **Russia** still is my home. So I – I go. I don't know what will happen to me, but I'm g – I have to go. But then, every train, every, was supervised by – in all those groups, they were – 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, that the joy of going back home, and – and may have forced them to sing – to sing, and – and not only that, when we stood and looked there, they – they – they threw stones at us.

Q: So it was –

A: You are remaining here. We are going home to this great **Soviet Union**, and you are here. They used to throw stones at us.

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Q: So it was the guard, these sort of soldiers –

A: Yes.

Q: – not the ones who were going back, who were throwing the stones?

A: No, the guards.

Q: The guards.

A: By force. They were taken home by force.

Q: Any lithi –

A: And they were afraid that at the same time they considered that, you know,

Lithuania is part of **Soviet** una – **Union**, many Lithuanians did not sleep during that
pa – period, in the barracks at all. That they – they took them, they may take us also.

Q: Okay. So, you were esta – were you afraid of this?

A: Yes, we were very careful, yes.

Q: How long did this period last?

A: Like two months. Within two or three months, all the Russians were take – sent
back.

Q: So that was the reason for that paper, that identification for the allies –

A: Yes, yes.

Q: – that we don't want to go.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

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A: I have that too, also.

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

A: Moved – sa – we stayed in **Flensburg** for maybe a month. And then we thought, we are stuck here. I-I mean, what – and – and there was nothing there. So then, why don't we go tra – somehow, to the south, to the American zone. So we were – bought bikes, and we again – because they said, you cannot go, there are no – there are no bridges, no – how can you go, even with a bike? So we managed to reach on bikes, **Hamburg**, which is like 30 miles or so, through the center –

Q: Not exactly the south of **Germany**.

A: And then – then we got rid with – we cannot go any further on ba – our bikes. So we stayed in **Hamburg** for maybe a month or so, and then – then we had enough of **Hamburg** all – because there was nothing left of the city, you know. So we just decided to go on the train and try to go to – to – to the south, as far as we can.

Q: Did you have anything like money?

A: 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 bikes – bicycle, cigarette bought us books. We could go to movies with cigarette. Cigarettes was the money.

Q: Okay, okay.

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A: A-And because we did not smoke, and everybod-body was smoking, and you could not get by – you could not get cigarettes. But the British army, and later Americans ar – th-they – in the – every dis – family, every individual, grown-up individual, every day, or every two days, got a package of cigarettes.

Q: Ah. So that meant when you –

A: And chocolate.

Q: And chocolate.

A: That – British came, the first thing they did, gave us chocolate, on which it was – said, from the Queen of **E-England**. But the cigarettes, that every – and that – that saved – even later, when we started a magazine, and more books, cigarettes, always cigarettes paid.

Q: Common currency.

A: Yes.

Q: You know? Across all nationalities.

A: Yes.

Q: So –

A: International money.

Q: 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 could go –

A: Oh yes, you could not get food nowhere else.

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Q: Only in that place.

A: Yes. You – you were – you had to be there.

Q: Okay. But you could leave if you wanted to.

A: Yes, you – you could go to another ca – another camp.

Q: Mm-hm, and register there.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: So, did you make it to South **Germany**?

A: We managed to go and reach **Flensburg** – not **Flensburg**, I mean **Würzburg**.

Q: **Würzburg**, okay.

A: We man – it took three, four, five days. As I said, there were no bridges now.

You go b – on a train, you reach the bridge, there is no bridge. There is some temporary passing, you know, you walk to it, and then you go – there is another train that takes you to another river. But – and went in wur – **Würzburg** – by the time we reached **Würzburg**, I me – between **Flensburg** and **Würzburg** there was like a month of traveling, of no food, no water, no – every place you pass, and you – like there is a well, they said, don't touch the water, it's – it's all contagious. You know, that diseases, it was –

Q: What did the landscape look like?

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A: Landscape? Read my book. The – the – the – every roadside there is – there are tanks, and the ruins of bis – the cities – there were no more cities, but all the wartime – cluttered with the wartime weaponry all over. In [indecipherable] and the **Würzburg** was flat. There was not **Würzburg**. But we were so exhausted that wi – we cannot go any much further. We – we had to stop somehow. So, said let's take one more ch-chance. We know that there is wa – somebody said, yeah, but **Wiesbaden** was not destroyed. Says, let's go to **Wiesbaden**. So, after we regained somehow our – our – our – from our sleepless – of course, you could not sleep. Every train was cra – sta – there was nobody sitting, there was only standing. And no eating, no water, no sleep. So we – we managed – it took us another day to reach **Wiesbaden**, where we said, that's it, we stay here. We – we –

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

A: And yeah, because cas – and – and next to **Wiesbaden**, you know, on the other side of the **Rhine** is – on the **Rhine**, is **Mainz**, the University of **Mainz**. But first, you know, we did not join immediately, we just had to settle down and re-regain our – our sanity and health.

Q: And was that another **DP** camp, in **Wiesbaden**?

A: Yes. There were three or 4,000 of Lithuanians there.

Q: Uh-huh. And so –

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A: It was a lithuane – that’s why we went there, oh, there is a Lithuanian –

Q: And how – for how long did this place stay home for you?

A: For more than a year, plus.

Q: For over a year?

A: Yes.

Q: So –

A: Then they moved – they had this first st – the different camps. So we – we asked the center – they took to **Ka-Kassel**.

Q: Okay. And then how long were you in **Kassel**?

A: In **Kassel** – okay, one year in **Wiesbaden**, four years in k – three years in **Kassel**, and almost – in the last year was – again, they were dispersing, closing that camp.

They sent us south, to **Schwäbisch Gmünd**.

Q: Shma – **Schwäbisch Gmünd**.

A: **Schwäbisch Gmünd**.

Q: Yeah.

A: Which is south.

Q: Okay.

A: Near **St-Stuttgart**.

Q: And how is it that you were –

A: So that’s where we spent like six, seven month – my last months.

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Q: And what was your goal? When you were in these camps, you certainly didn't want to go back east. But where did you –

A: We did not – se – th-the – the – the way they were dispersed, was that first – these came from camps, were in – belong – controlled like this – the refugee – United Nations Refugee Organization.

Q: **UNRRA**.

A: It's – we were a part of it. So **UNRRA** used to check with the – **Canada**, **Australia**, very well, what kind of – how many refugees can you take, and what kind of professions you need? So, there were – used to be signs in the morning on the board, for everybody to see, **Canada** needs for – **Canada** needs 200 woodworkers. So every – you know, all the strong – might be healthy, strong people. So – so that was the procedure, how – how they – they – by professions. So everybody was trying, or in [**indecipherable**] or – or – or they were courses given to be – teach you in three days, how – the way become this or that, or that professional. And I have – I am – I am a woodcutter. I have one.

Q: You ha – you have a certification –

A: Yes –

Q: – to be a woodcutter?

A: Yes.

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

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A: Yeah. So, that's how – where this prac – and then at some point, we – we did not go – want to go to the woods, because we were not the types. So –

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

A: We had other dreams. For instance, we – we want –

Q: Ah, you didn't want to be a woodcutter – excuse me.

A: Yes.

Q: Yes. All right.

A: We had a dream already, somewhere around, at that time, the first dream was to go to **Israel** and start a movie industry.

Q: And why **Israel**?

A: Because we were already getting interested in film. **[indecipherable]** go to **America**, and we – we cannot get to **Hollywood**. But here – here it just country, just coming into existence, there's nothing there. Says, why don't we go to **Israel**, and we didn't, you know, we can start maybe do something to start film

[indecipherable]

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

A: Not – after the war, no.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: No, no, not **[indecipherable]** yeah. In **Germany**.

Q: Okay.

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A: So – so we go to the – **Israel**. They had already representative in **Kassel**. Said, we would like to go, you know, emigrate to **Israel**. He says – he says, no, for re – know – now for – we don't know, we have no instructions. But a-at this point we permit only the Jews of somebody – relative of – close, that – there is no quota for Lithuanians.

Q: For **Israel**.

A: To go to **Israel**.

Q: And this was in 19 – after 1948 that you did this? When **Israel** is –

A: I have to look up, it's in my diary. It's in my book.

Q: Oh. The reason why I ask is that before 1948, it would have been the British, and then after 1948, **Israel** was already independent.

A: Yeah – no, it was already independent.

Q: Okay.

A: That's why we wanted to go.

Q: Okay.

A: This was going to help the new country, see?

Q: Okay.

A: We were the naïve idealists, sort of. So – so we go back to the barracks, say okay, so what's next? And then my brother **Adolfas** jumps up, I remember. Says, oh, we can go to **Egypt**, and then we can, from **Egypt**, we can walk to **I-Israel**. You know

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how naïve we were? So, next day, good idea, and we go to the **Egypt**, and to the Egyptians. Says, we – we – we would like to –

Q: Open a film industry in **Israel**, can we cut through your country?

A: No, no, no, I don't know what we said, we just wanted to work there, to – and they must need workers or something. And then we don't tell, you know, our dreams. We don't tell that we want – want to go to **Israel**. We don't know their relation. So they look up, they – they – they look – they – 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 – and they were taken by your other friends, Lithuanians. So, back we go. Years later – years later, I – I had little correspondence with **Greimas**.

Q: Mm-hm. **Greimas** is? Who is –

A: The grayf – Professor **Greimas**, the linguist, the – the so – the – the semiologist. The – the – he was teaching at **Sorbonne** in **Paris**. Later – it was first – at first –

Q: He was also a Lithuanian.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Expatriate.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Very, very important, internationally important, became scientist.

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Q: Okay.

A: And he said – he revealed that he and his family were those three people who took that – those visas, got the last three visas for **Lithuania**.

Q: To **Egypt**.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: And that's when – when he became ma – for years, worked at the University of **Alexandria**, before **S-Sorbonne** invited him. Th-That was we – oh yeah.

Q: Cut. Cut for a second. **[break]** Okay. So we –

A: It's running?

Q: Yes, it's running.

A: Yes, I've wa – wa – a note on – on **Greimas**. I cannot, you know, ec – tell enough how – how import – what important science – scientist in the science of languages, semiotics, he – **Greimas** plays – is – how high he's been considered, internationally. Then he returned to **Lithuania**, and well, 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 –

Q: But was he a refugee?

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A: – during this – during the – these correspondence questions, answers, and – and meetings with **Michael – Michael** – oh, what is it? Are – are getting, you know, fem – a lot of information about that period.

Q: About 1941?

A: Yes, transition, and of German first, you know, months and the years. And – and I’m – this – a-and one of the – some of the odd letters, materials that I have received, are – express great anger – anger about **Greimas** –

Q: Okay.

A: – who supposedly – I do not know the details – had – has said some – made statements that could be interpreted as anti-Semitic.

Q: Okay.

A: So there are, in **Lithuania** today, there are – there are people, there are – who are still watching, researching deeper and deeper into the past, you know, who did what, who contributed to the – an – 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 train – or, on the plane, I pick up the newspaper from there, and “**Le Monde**,” and says, **Greimas** died yesterday. So, I – and I’m there, and going to **Paris** – not specifically to meet him, but on that trip, I was planning – I had – planning to meet him. But, there was a – a memorial, some event for **Greimas**, international event, I don’t know in what city or country. And

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there was this representative also from **Lithuania**, representing the linguists of **Lithuania**, linguistics in **Lithuania**. And during the conference, this – honoring **Greimas**, he stood up and denounced openly to the conference, that he was anti-se – Semite, and how do you honor him now?

Q: I see.

A: And for which he was very reprimanded, very much dis – so I don't know what documentation, what he has said, but there is this aspect there, which I want you to know.

Q: Okay. Thank you. Because I was not familiar with Professor **Greimas**. I did not know of – I know the name –

A: No, he's one of the really –

Q: Yeah.

A: – most important – **Gimbutas [indecipherable]**

Q: Yes, of course, I know her.

A: **Gimbutas** and **Greimas** are the two maybe most important Lithuanian kind of scientists in –

Q: Okay.

A: – from that generation.

Q: Okay, so let's go back to, you're stuck again in your barracks, because **Israel** is not a – a possibility, **Egypt** is not a possibility.

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A: Oh, eventually said, okay, so may as well we stay here until they – those who run camps decide where to take us.

Q: Okay.

A: Because we have no profession, and we are totally – you know, we can do anything, or nothing. So we continued staying until they moved that fr – this was in **Kassel**. So to sh – until suddenly, from the blue sky, we are – we – we – we con – were contacted in **Kassel** by the government of the – by **UNRRA**, and – and – and then we were informed that – that a certain **Variokojos(ph)**, he – who – who I discovered later was from **Biržai**, a banker, he was running a bank in **Biržai**, who had heard – you know, he had heard, because we had already published, you know, books, etcetera, in **Kassel** – that we are in **Kassel**, and we are from **Biržai**, he knew that. He made up papers, that was another way. If you wer – you're ra – if your relatives in **United States** or some other country, pay for your travel, and you have place for you to stay and a job – job was the condition, and the place, that he made – he was living, watching, had some business in **Chicago**, and he had persuaded **[indecipherable]** area there somewhere, a – a baker, to give jobs to me and my brother, and –

Q: In the bakery.

A: In the bakery, and he paid – he arranged the whole trip, he paid, and had rented apartment for us too –

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Q: In **Chicago**.

A: – in **Chicago**, to come to **Chicago**. Like oh, **Chicago**, okay, let's go to **Chicago**.

Q: So, was he a banker in **Biržai**, or –

A: In **Biržai**.

Q: Okay.

A: What he did in **Chicago**, I have no idea.

Q: Okay. But he knew you from those days? From **Biržai** days?

A: No, I knew the name.

Q: Okay.

A: I knew the name, a-a-and [**indecipherable**] or something.

Q: And then – so it suggests that he was rather well-to-do, when he was in **Biržai**, if he had a bank.

A: Or maybe he became even wealthier in **Chicago**, who knows?

Q: You never know.

A: Yes.

Q: Question though –

A: But he would – did a good – you know – we had not **Variokojos**(ph), I wouldn't be sitting here with you.

Q: You toast **Variokojos**(ph)

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A: Oh, and while – because – in between si – this was a – one day we woke up, and we said, oh maybe it would be – be good to work on a ship, since nobody wants us. So we went to a French ship company representative, then we li – we were practically hired to work on the ship [indecipherable] bef – between the harbor and – and **Sydney**. And we were just waiting to be called, on the ship. That's when this **Variokojos(ph)** invitation from [indecipherable] now we had to decide. Oh, let's go to **America**.

Q: Okay. 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. Can you tell me, you know –

A: Stupid, those activities.

Q: Really?

A: Stupidity dragged me into – into acti – always into activities, stupidity. As soon as we –

Q: Okay, what were some of those –

A: – a-as soon as we arrived in **Wiesbaden**, like maybe a week later, there is an announcement that there is a – the – the cultural committee of the – of the camp, is meeting, all those who are interested should come. And it was, I think, run by a certain ben – Professor **Bendorius**.

Q: **Bendorius**, mm-hm.

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A: Be – jo – professor of geography.

Q: Okay.

A: So, we come there, and there are some 15 people, we don't know who they are, but there were two other people there that I had already met – met my second day.

And that was **Algirdas Landsbergis** –

Q: Oh yeah.

A: – who became later playwright.

Q: Playwright, and –

A: And **Leonas(ph) [indecipherable]** who was a – like a mase – a painter, artist.

And they're there, also. So there – the bent wa – discussion that we should do this and that and that, th-th-th – inform people, you know. But one thing is needed is some daily bulletin. So, is there somebody here who – who would – could –

Q: Put together a daily bulletin?

A: Yeah. So, he looks around, and – and looks at me. Okay, I will do it, I says, I will do it. And that's how I engaged to edit a daily bulletin for –

Q: And what was it called, this daily bulletin?

A: Oh, **Wiesbaden – Wiesbaden nolo – Wiesbaden Naujienos.**

Q: So the news of **Wiesbaden.**

A: Yeah.

Q: **Wiesbaden News.**

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A: But the information from **UNRRA**, everything. And later even, you know, had one page. Sometimes weekend only had four pages, one page for children. And like a miniature newspaper.

Q: Was there any news –

A: And then later –

Q: Okay.

A: – **Bendorius** used to laugh and tell, you know, said oh, you know, we – I had – we had this meeting, and we – and you know what one – there is nobody who will do it. Then I will see this – this shabby kid in the corner, and he says, he will do it. And I thought it's a joke.

Q: But he did it, yeah. Was there any news at all –

A: Then, if you –

Q: Whoops, okay.

A: No, that's not the end.

Q: Okay.

A: Then, that was already like five, six months later. You see, those camps were not just, you know, simple people, workers, or some like people, like mixed, kind of. They were ver – there were some in that camp, in **Wiesbaden**, there were at – at least 10 top professors, professionals from the University of **Kaunas** a-al-alone. So again, **Bendorius** was very active, had a meeting, and we said, we should have like

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people should wear – people’s kind of university. You know, 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. Then **Bendorius** over there, you pes – do you want to do it? I said, okay, I will do it.

Q: Okay. So that means you became the organizer?

A: So [**indecipherable**] a camp university, call, in **Wiesbaden**. So when we mo – they moved us to **Kassel** [**indecipherable**] but then the same, I continued in **Kassel**.

Q: Okay.

A: Continued not the university aspect, but the – the – the bulletin, the camp bulletin.

Kas – I still have, I think, what number of issues [**indecipherable**]

Q: Oh really?

A: Yes.

Q: I know th-that – that those would be very valuable.

A: And then of course, already, the literary activity were in **München**, and **Hannover**, and other places, they’re Lithuanian, you know, intellectual community, and journalists organized them – themselves, writers. Th – they – the wa – monthly magazine was – they began publishing.

Q: What was it called?

A: “**Aidai**.”

Q: “**Aidai, Aidai**” –

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A: “**Aidai.**”

Q: – which means echoes, echoes.

A: And – and one of the problems was that there were no – there were already appearing – there were books for grown-ups, you know, but nothing for children. So this guy, **Giedraitis**, in **Kassel**, said why don’t you help me to prepare some books for – fairy tales, something for children. So, as you can – I – I do – I didn’t have to tell you –

Q: You vol – you said okay.

A: I said yes.

Q: Okay.

A: So, I began, organizing and publishing. And we published, you know, with **shafirografas(ph)**, cop – multiplications –

Q: Oh, wi – how do you say it in Lithuanian?

A: **Shap – shafirografas(ph)**.

Q: **Shafirografas(ph)**? Which I – I take to mean a mideo – mimeograph machine.

You mentioned earlier –

A: Ka – kind of, kind of. You type on stencils.

Q: Okay. Okay.

A: And was li – [**indecipherable**] **Landsbergis**, those were my buddies, they – because I needed some help already. The projects were expanding.

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Q: What did I want to ask? Yes. Was there any news at all coming from **Lithuania**?

A: I had my own journal, you know, it started pa –

Q: Okay.

A: – we became very – quite controversial, “**Žvilgsniai**,” liter – literary magazine.

Q: “**Žvilgsniai**.” And how did it become controversial?

A: Because of its content. We concentrated on modern literature, not what was happening in the west.

Q: Ah, okay.

A: And the – the Lithuanian literary community thought we were too avant-garde.

Q: Okay.

A: I can show you some later, some issues.

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

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: I – you could not – the first time that we could dro – could write to the family, was when I was already published in film culture, and – and al – “**Iskusstvo Kino**,” in **Moskva** knew about the magazine, and used to visit me in **New York**, and – and asked also to write for “**Iskusstvo Kino**.”

Q: How do we translate that into English?

A: Ke – kenom – the art of ke – of – of cinema.

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Q: So, **iskusstvo** means the art of, okay, art.

A: Art. **Iskusstvo** and **kino**.

Q: And **kino**, okay.

A: And so on – the – the – the art of film.

Q: Okay. That would have been –

A: So they knew that they – and now I'm safe, maybe. Maybe I'm safe, and that's when we th – slowly we li – correspondence.

Q: Was this the 1960s?

A: Yes, in the 60s. What year, I would, you know, I ha – I had the first issue of **[indecipherable]** you know, where – with one of my report from **New York**.

Q: So you wrote for them?

A: Yes, a report on the – on cinema.

Q: Okay.

A: They ask me, and I did it.

Q: Okay.

A: It's their main film publication.

Q: For the **Soviet Union**.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. What did I want to ask now? So, we ask –

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A: And that's when I – at **Chicago [indecipherable]** Lithuanian community began calling me a communist.

Q: You never know how an – 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, you know, have images that – of a group, and sometimes they get reduced to stereotypes, and sometimes those stereotypes happen to have truth to them, you know?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: And one image that stays in my mind is what a – 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 ha – could have been –

A: No, I can tell you right now.

Q: You didn't.

A: No.

Q: You didn't.

A: No. But from **Michael – Michael – Michael** – his last name always falls – has written to me, has said that some of the people that I knew had practiced **[indecipherable]**. Like the po – and in which way? Not in crimes, in the – that the poet **Matuzevicius**(ph), who had – was in the – from gymnasium **Biržai**, two or three years earlier than me, and some of his friends – and so I understood from

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Michael that he has – 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 – their home belongings [**indecipherable**]

Q: Okay, their – their items, their assets, yeah.

A: Their assets. So that is the – so I – I knew, and – and actually admired li – like the – like the younger, budding, you know, poets cal – you know, want to be published, and want to be know – every young poet wants the – and has it – some people, close, that he – older poets that he or she admires. At that time **Matuzevicius**(ph) was the poet of [**indecipherable**]. He was the young, like [**indecipherable**]. And he was good, and very promising. It did not happen, because he was arrested, he went to **Siberia**, etcetera. He was destroyed. But we, all the younger of ones who – who were writing poetry, wanted to be poet, admired. So, it was – when I heard this from **Michael**, to me was a little bit of a shock. But he was also one of ‘the six.’ He said – so, in those six – and he wrote a poem about six with – which was pub-published in **Biržų Žinios**, at – I don’t know what – what – what month. And ‘the six’ became like heroes. People did not know that such – that they existed, when – and they found out tha-that somebody was in the underground. Whatever they did, some of them later, I – I – I don’t know, but I think they were instrumental to – to star – help others to decide that they should, you know, work underground also, like – like those six who worked against the Soviets.

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Q: Okay.

A: Now, I thought it was – when I read it, I thought I – I als-also like admired that they did it, but I also thought, why is he publishing this? Though they – he did not name the names. The poem does not name names. But I thought – I didn't know – of course, already, you see, I was in – connected to the underground, my own –

Q: So –

A: – by distributing leaflets, that is why. And then, this was already under Germans. And then, somehow it was clear that this was like wrong time to – to publish some – something like that.

Q: So what you – if I interpret what you're saying, is that **Matuzevicius**(ph) was a poet you admired –

A: Yes.

Q: – before then, with the Soviets, he works underground –

A: Underground, yes.

Q: – against the Soviets, he's one of 'the six.'

A: Yes.

Q: When the Germans come, he publishes a poem about this –

A: Six.

Q: – underground six.

A: Yes.

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Q: And you were thinking, this is not the right time to publish –

A: Yes.

Q: – your connection to ‘the six.’

A: Yes.

Q: Whatever that would have been.

A: Yes, and later on I said – it was always what – why – why did he did that?

Q: 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 un – in a Soviet trial.

A: Yeah, but you see, that – whatever is confessed to the Soviets, I never take it for real money.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. But I started this questioning for a different question. And that was about –

A: But I ended – your – your question ended up very simple, in three or four word, do I know anybody who killed, or committed criminal acts against –

Q: I didn’t finish the question, though.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Well, and I said –

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Q: No.

A: No, I did not know, cause – yeah.

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

A: Yes.

Q: – you had met some people who very – you could –

A: Whom I believed could have been.

Q: Were capable of it.

A: Yes.

Q: Were capable of it.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And – and so there's an –

A: No, there i – was another – this was in **Flensburg** – in **Flensburg**, when I was still in **Flensburg**.

Q: Okay.

A: Because that's where the la-last resistance against, I guess the divisions, German divisions that fought English army – the army came from **Denmark**.

Q: Okay.

A: So that's where they ended up, and th-that's where they were released, including those Lithuanians. And – and there was this Lithuanian general, very educated, very

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educated person, **Daukantas. Daukantas.** Whom I had never heard about, but I met him there, in the camp, though he – Germans did that, put – if one – if a Lithuanian was a general of that stature, ger – Germans, even if that Lithuanian or any other – from any other country, was of that military stature, Germans respected – 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 – a room. It's this – I ra – and I met him, and because some of those young army Lithuanians from the German army, criminals, I – really, they were criminals, introduced me to him, because they admired, because he was a general. So –

Q: Does he figure in this story? Does he – was he one of those that you would have had this –

A: No, no.

Q: No.

A: No, no, not **daukan** – no, not the general.

Q: Okay.

A: No, he was – again, he wa – we – we remained friends from us – during our stay in wen – in – in – in **Flensburg**, because he was also very much in Oriental mysticism, the general. And he used asked me to come and talk to him –

Q: About it.

A: – a-about it. He says, I have nobody to – here to talk about it. So –

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Q: But it was these – you – these were –

A: 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.**”

Q: Okay.

A: I eliminated it from the English because it was of no interest, like in the – not the –

Q: Well, that – I mean, we’re going on many topics, but let’s finish this one, just for a second –

A: Yes.

Q: – because I think it’s rather short. Is it –

A: But those fi – reme – those young, criminal types from the army, just released –

Q: German army.

A: – from the German army, some of them, they were drafted, and we came like that in the army, those ca – the army can, as – 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 – to – to – to kill, to steal, to continue their criminal activities.

Q: And so, were they still spewing a kind of anti-Semitic hate –

A: No, no, no, no, they did not talk about the Jews, or anti-Semitic. This i – this is my assumption –

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Q: Okay.

A: – that criminals of that kind of personalities, of that kind of criminal personalities, are – would be capable.

Q: I see.

A: I can't sort of assume.

Q: I see.

A: I-If the very – and now we know there were some, you know –

Q: Yeah.

A: – Lithuanians who co-op – who collaborated, and were killers, it's that type –

Q: Of person.

A: – particularly –

Q: Yeah.

A: – in every country. That doesn't mean that it throws bad light on **Lithuania**. It's just that category, that segment of population, you find in every city, every village, every –

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

A: Well, no, I di –

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Q: Yeah.

A: – I – I assumed that.

Q: You assumed that.

A: I did not hear about it.

Q: Yes. I understand now.

A: I assume it.

Q: I assume. But it's also not really about the **DPs**, it's about – about people who – about young Lithuanians who had been in the German army. And then –

A: But [**indecipherable**] people –

Q: Yeah.

A: – any country, in – in – in general, that there are – there is a sick segment that is criminal.

Q: Do you think amongst the – yes. Do you think that amongst the **DPs**, you heard any such sentiments? You know, when they came from **Lithuania**?

A: Sentiments?

Q: Sentiments about – that had been very popular in **Lithuania** for a time, for – that Jews are responsible for our misfortune, the Jews helped the Soviets. You know, this sort of –

A: Only – the only thing that I heard was again not in the camps, but when in **Lithuania**, you know, those who that some of them were accusing Jews for th –

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working with the – bringing – helping – bringing in – into **Lithuania** as communism, the Soviets.

Q: Okay. Okay.

A: No, because the – the farmers, they were much working with the Jews. The – the – the all – in **Biržai**, in **Papilys**, we depended on them. And I know from our neighbor, from my mother, fro – they were very **[indecipherable]** you know, like part of the family. It was not so – and that kind of the communist rumor, I did not hear from my farmers, actually, I heard that when I went beg – in the fall, when I went to the – to th – already back to the studies, in **Biržai**.

Q: Yeah. I think that –

A: And farmers were very open in – in the – at least northern **Lithuania** to the – and there were Jews in every smaller town. And that's why, you know, when – when **[indecipherable]** all 5,000 people in **Biržai**, and then I hear from **Michael** that there were 2,200.

Q: Four hundred.

A: How could it be? Not half of the city I haven't seen **[indecipherable]** hundred. But in the – they were brought from those other little town, that are smaller, like – like **Papilys**, and – and they were, you know, sometimes maybe it's three families. But sometimes, in some of those small – smaller towns, maybe there were 100. Because how else can you make up 2,200?

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Q: Two thousand four hundred.

A: Or four hundred.

Q: Four hundred. I think that –

A: That when farmers, I think, there was a working – s-some of them, of course, were not happy that some maybe – I mean, there are all kinds of business sharks in every r – in every race, in every group. So some – there were Jews, like – like others, who wanted maybe to make some profit, more profit than they should. But in general, that was not in the air. It was a **[indecipherable]** and that in – I would say **Lithi-Lithuania** in general, now that's why we had an – this renaissance of the Jewish cult – culture, literature, arts, in – in – in **Vilnius**, in – in **Lithuania**, and a century earlier – earlier.

Q: Okay, let's proceed back to **Germany**, back to the **DP** camps, and where you are about to leave for the united –

A: E-Even in the camps, I was not so involved with was going the camp. We were, three or four or five of us, interested only in literature, in 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 they were just interested in to go somewhere, and be – make money, and become successful, and – a-and they were boring to – all of them. We kept ourselves apart. So, I'm not authority even to – I'm sure not even talk about it, the rest.

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Q: Okay. Okay, okay. So, you find a way, through this Mr. **Vertakoyas**(ph), who –

A: **Vara – Variokojos**(ph).

Q: **Variokojos**(ph).

A: Silver legged.

Q: Silver legged, yes, **Variokojos**. Or copper legged.

A: Copper, maybe copper.

Q: Copper leg, yeah.

A: Vai – **vario**, yeah.

Q: Who – who arranges for these affidavits to come for you and your brother, to work –

A: And we – and we come.

Q: Okay. And you land where?

A: On the 20 – here, on the **23rd** Street.

Q: In **New York City**?

A: In **New York City**, on **Hudson** river.

Q: When?

A: At night in the – on the 30th of – twen – 29th of October, 1949.

Q: Wow. Of all the – you say you don't remember dates, but you remember that one.

A: That's a very, very, very important date, because that's where my life begins.

Q: Yeah.

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A: I was 27, and I – on the 29th of October, I began my real life.

Q: Did you ever make it to **Chicago**?

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

Q: The playwright, mm-hm, **Algirdas**.

A: And – and – and **Williamsburg**, number one **Meserole** Street, his – so he comes to greet us, and he said, I will take you to the station, to **Chicago** – train to **Chicago**, and we – I say, oh before we go – take us, let's go on the upper floor at the – at – at the – on the – at the pier.

Q: Okay.

A: And let's have a view from higher – we had to see **Manhattan**. So we go, we climb up there, and a – open, big windows.

Q: This is on **Meserole** Street?

A: No, this is still on pier 23.

Q: Okay.

A: We are still there, with our bags, with our stuff.

Q: Okay.

A: And we look at **Manhattan**, from that big window, at the 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

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New York. We never went to **Chicago**. 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 a job.

Q: And what was your first job?

A: In some – very similar to **Neunert**, what I did at **Neunert**. I went to the – on **Warren** Street, the – there were several wi – job kind of agencies offering jobs on **Warren** Street in **Manhattan** –

Q: Okay.

A: – Lower **Manhattan**. So we went there – I went there, and they said, what profession do you – you have some profession? Well, I – I says, I can work with some machines, you know. Oh, oh, here – so they found me a job for two weeks in some very similar drilling, working with some machines. I had the profession. And the – and then they let me go, and then the – the – the list continues.

Q: Okay.

A: I – I was not choosy, I took any job that anybody could give me.

Q: I'm going to –

A: Now that was how fa – our life –

Q: Here –

A: – began.

Q: – began.

Q: I'm going to stip – stick –

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A: But the very first – second evening, we went already to a loc – to a film society in **Manhattan**, and we saw two avant-garde film classics.

Q: What were they?

A: One was known as doc – “**Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.**”

Q: Oh yeah.

A: The other was known as “**The Fall of the House of Usher,**” based on **Edgar Allen Poe** –

Q: Poem. Or story, I don’t remember which it was.

A: Because we read in “**New York Times,**” we bought [**indecipherable**] and – and we saw the announcement. I said, we have to see.

Q: Well, our interview, of course, doesn’t cover this part of your life, which is the major part.

A: Yeah, that’s okay, that’s – that –

Q: 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 reestablishes a tie to what then is Soviet **Lithuania.**

A: Yes.

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

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A: Yeah, when I visited in 1971.

Q: Seventy-one. She said that you – they had been looking for you for a year.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Why?

A: Because I th – first because I was not there, that means I may be in the woods, joined partisans; myself, **Adolfas**, were not there, where are they?

Q: Yeah. You're of the age, you're of the age, yeah.

A: You ask – you ask – yes. You ask a mother – a mother doesn't know. I don't know where they are.

Q: So explain for the camera what that means –

A: Yeah, and then – and –

Q: Excuse me. Explain for the camera what that means, to be in the woods, at that time.

A: In the woods may – means that you joined anti-Soviet – Lithuanian anti-Soviet partisans.

Q: Okay.

A: So, they figured that I may have joined the partisans, but there may be other – another reason, because I had also somewhere in – in the maybe fall or winter of – of '41, you know, published in the **Biržų Žinios**, a stupid – a stupid little, you know,

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poems, sort of banal. But it was anti-**Stalin**, anti-Soviet. Anti-Sta – the anthi – and the – “**Stalin’s Anthem**,” I think I called it.

Q: Okay.

A: And it was, you know, ah – very openly against **Stalin**.

Q: Okay.

A: So, I don’t think they liked that.

Q: Okay. Did you ev – well, when you went back in 1971, that also suggests of having some special treatment on the part of the Soviets –

A: Yes, as an – as an editor – “**Film Culture**” magazine – I have to tell you that, right now, when I’m talking to you, I should be in **Berlin**.

Q: Ooh.

A: Where th – a huge conference is be – opening tomorrow –

Q: Okay.

A: – 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 **United States**, became very important of – for the – for the **United States**, and – and the world. It was international.

Q: And this is a magazine you founded.

A: A magazine that I started in December, 1954.

Q: Okay.

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A: So it became very fast, the leading world publication. I mean, this conference is just a reminder, and that what – what – and that magazine had contri – contributed to the – to the American film community, and the world. So, in **Moscow**, of course, they wanted to know – to have contact with anybody li – ist – ist – “**Iskusstvo Kino**,” had to go to “**Film Culture**.”

Q: And therefore, to you.

A: Came to me, and they kept inviting – inviting me to film festival, because they want – need coverage. So one time I decided to go, and that’s, of course, another story. In 1971, that’s when I went. Because I already, by that time, I was cle-clever enough, and learned enough of a – how the world works, that I thought I can use this maybe, to visit my mother.

Q: And could you?

A: And I did. But that’s a long story.

Q: Okay.

A: That’s another story. But you can read it, because it’s very funny.

Q: Okay.

A: I will give you this book. You should read it.

Q: Okay. Oh, thank you. “**A Dance with Fred Astaire**.” I will, thank you.

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

Q: Then, I have one last question.

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A: But that's a – that's another chapter.

Q: Yes. It's another chapter. Do you ha – did you ever discover if you had a **KGB** file?

A: How could I discover it?

Q: A-After independence –

A: But I bet there was.

Q: But you've never seen one?

A: No, no.

Q: Okay.

A: How could I see?

Q: Today one could. Today one could ask for one's file from the –

A: Ask whom?

Q: The Lithuanian Special Archives, in **Vilnius**, and a search could be made to see if there is one. It could be done.

A: I – I bet, I bet.

Q: Okay. But th – my question is, did you know of one, and had you seen it?

A: No, no.

Q: You had not. Okay.

A: No, no.

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Q: Well, I think we've come to the end, and I thank you for your time, for your generosity –

A: Welcome.

Q: – of the time.

A: If, as you work on this, sort of – if you feel that on some aspect, you need some additional – additional elucidation –

Q: Okay.

A: I will – I will give you all the time that you need.

Q: Thank you. Thank you very much. And I will say that this concludes the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with Mr. **Jonas Mekas – Jonas Mekas**, on July 1st, 2018, in **Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, New York**. Thank you.

A: And I thank you, because nobody asks me about th-th-th – that period of my life. And – and as time goes, you know, I begin to forget some as – so this forced me – forces me – even **Michael**, that's why I'm grateful to **Michael** – he – he asked some questions that – that forced me to think, try to figure out, to tr – not have – as much as one still can. And because I'm preparing slo-slowly also, I'm collecting these materials, I will sort of have my own book.

Q: Okay.

A: About that period.

Q: Thank you. Thank you again.

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A: So it's – nothing is lost. That's why it's – there is always a reason behind it, and it's – nothing is just – there is nothing really negative, and nothing really po – it's all part of – depends what you do with it, how you look at it, and if you do everything right in your life, you are not afraid of anything. You just t-take it all as you are – you're somewhere else. You look at it, oh. And I consider that – I remember what our friend, **Ken Jacobs**, he has a son, **Aza**. Says, oh, **Aza**, you know, I mentioned to you before, he must feel very guilty. I says, guilty, I don't feel guilty, because all the bad that I have done in my life, I know **[indecipherable]** those frogs that –

Q: I know, I know. Well, let's get –

A: **[indecipherable]** and also crows **[speaks Lithuanian]**

Q: Nest.

A: **[speaks Lithuanian]**

Q: Okay. I'm going to just summarize that, as that you're talking now, at the end, of what you do feel about, if you feel guilty about anything, it is of having killed frogs, and –

A: To catch crayfish.

Q: Fish, right.

A: **[indecipherable]** crayfish. I call them lobsters, because crayfish, supposedly, are much smaller variety of lobster, but our – in my river, the lobsters – those crayfish, you could not make any difference between what you call lobster, and crayfish.

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Q: They were that big.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. So I'm going to go back to the – the original sentiment, where you say that if you feel guilty about something, it is for having killed the frogs, to be able to catch the crayfish, and for having taken the eggs out of crow's nests and thrown them away.

A: To protect the gard –

Q: And to protect the garden.

A: – the vegetables, and –

Q: Right.

A: – the – and the fields.

Q: From the crows, and their children.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Thank you very much. Let's go.

End of File Two

Conclusion of Interview