

Jack Fruchtengarten

Interview with: Jack Fruchtengarten

Interview by: Eric Harper

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Harper: Can we please begin by you telling us your name, the date and place of your birth, and if you can spell those things as well?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: What do you mean spell?

Harper: Spell it. How do you spell it?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Oh, my name.

Harper: Yes.

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Okay. First I'll tell you I was born August the 28th, 1924, in Opole Lubaelski, Poland. Spell the name is Fruchtengarten [spells out]. The first name is Jack.

Harper: And can you spell the name of the town you were born in?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Opole, [spells out], Lubaelski is [spells out].

Harper: Poland.

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Poland.

Harper: Can you tell us where that is roughly?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: It's located about 50 kilometers west of Lublin.

Harper: And who made up your household growing up?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, we were five children, three boys and two girls, and my father and mother.

Harper: And what was your father's name?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Zalma.

Harper: And your mother's name?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Thora.

Harper: What was your native language?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Polish and Jewish.

Harper: Do you remember anything about your grandparents?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: No. I only knew my grandmother. When I was little, she was very sick, and she died I think when I was five years old. My grandfather, one of them, was here in the

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This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word. It is not the primary source, and it has not been checked for spelling or accuracy.

United States. He was in New York. And he brought over most of the children. There was three sons and one daughter that he brought over to the United States in the early 1900's. My mother was left with my grandmother because my grandmother was sick, and also she didn't want to go to the United States. She thought the United States is traif, is not kosher enough. My mother wouldn't leave her there, so she stayed with her. So one brother of my mother's, the youngest one, he decided to stay too. So they both stayed back in Poland. Otherwise the rest of them were in the United States.

Harper: How did your grandfather get to the United States? Why did he...

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, in those years they run away at that time from the Tsar. You know, it was the pogroms and all this. So he came to the United States. In those years all you need is money to pay for your passage. You didn't need a visa or anything. And same thing when he brought over his sons and one daughter – all they need is the money for the passage.

Harper: And do you know your family's history, like how long they had been in Poland or anything like that?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Oh, for generations I guess. Yes, they have been there for generations.

Harper: What was your family's means of support?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: My father was in business. He had two butcher stores, kosher and non-kosher meat. Also he used to do business at Warsaw. He used to send the cattle and meat on the Warsaw market to get [unclear].

Harper: Was your family at all, when you were growing up, active in the Jewish community?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, my father was in the synagogue active.

Harper: But no sort of political...?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: There wasn't anything going, because it was a small town.

Harper: What would you say the population was?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: 4,000.

Harper: And how many Jews?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: 4,000 Jews.

Harper: Oh. Was it a Jewish town?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Most of it. The outskirts were mostly gentile.

Harper: So your family was religious?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: He wasn't Orthodox; he didn't have a beard or this. But he went to shul every Saturday. He used to go every Saturday and used to bring home bagels. We used to have bagels for dinner. He gave donations. He used to send food like meat to the poor families. My mother used to do the same thing. She used to bake challahs and cook fish and she'd get a few for poor families that she used to send. I was the one who had to deliver, because I was the youngest.

Harper: Did your family keep Shabbat?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes, we had a kosher house.

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Harper: And did you go to the synagogue?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: I went to synagogue only on Saturday.

Harper: And obviously the holidays?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: And the holidays of course, yes. My father went to synagogue every day.

Harper: Can you remember anything about your shul?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes. What is to remember? It was a big shul, and we had some very Orthodox, some not. Like my father, he wasn't Orthodox. He was kosher. He had to be kosher, because he had that kosher butcher shop. And also he didn't have a beard or anything like that. He always dressed in a suit, always was dressed up, because he used to travel a lot with the bank.

Harper: Do you remember the name of it or the location?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Oh, from the synagogue, you mean? Well, I don't remember. It was; we were in the main synagogue; it was a big one, and next to it was two small ones.

Harper: Would you say your family was middle class?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Middle class.

Harper: And did you live in a house or an apartment?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes, we had a big house, a two-family house. My uncle, my mother's brother because he didn't go over to United States, he lived on one floor, we lived on the other floor.

Harper: Do you remember the street it was on?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes.

Harper: What was it called?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Ojantawska Valska 3.

Harper: And who were your neighbors?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: We had some. One side we had gentile neighbors; otherwise was Jewish. The area was - that area of town was I would say 90% Jewish.

Harper: And how did you get along with your gentile neighbors?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes. No problem. We had no problem.

Harper: And as far as the relations in the town between Jews and gentiles, was it. . .

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, we had a lot of antisemitism. Like I felt it in school. I had to fight many times in school. But all you think there, we were the majority, so we used to beat them up if they start something.

Harper: Were most of the people in this town, most of the Jews, were they Orthodox?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: No. Not most. A lot.

Harper: Was it a fairly modern town? I mean, it wasn't a city.

FRUCHTENGARTEN: No. I wouldn't say it was a modern town. I mean, to me it looked like they never did anything because Russia used to be there before World War I, and I didn't think they did anything to the town after that. It was still the same, just no running water, just no, no plumbing at all.

Harper: In the streets did you speak Polish or Yiddish or. . .

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Mostly Yiddish.

Harper: That was the language

FRUCHTENGARTEN: For the Jews.

Harper: So tell me about your schooling.

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, I only finished the seventh grade in Poland, because in my town there was no higher school than the seven grades. But after when I came to England and took some schooling. Well, a little bit, and that's all.

Harper: Was it a public school or private?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Public.

Harper: And did you. . .

FRUCHTENGARTEN: I went to *cheder* there too. Know what that is? It's Hebrew School. See, I used to go to school in the morning from 8:00 'til 1:00 in the public school. After I came home, I ate lunch and went to Hebrew School 'til about 6 or 7:00 in the evening.

Harper: And the Hebrew School, was it private?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes. See, every day you go to Hebrew School 'til you are at Bar Mitzvah. You started going to Hebrew School when you were I think, I don't remember; I think three or four years old when you start going to Hebrew School.

Harper: Before we go on can you tell me the names of your brother and sisters?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Which brother?

Harper: All of them.

FRUCHTENGARTEN: All of them. Well, my brother's still alive. He left Poland in 1937. He was the oldest. He went to Paris, and it just happened that before the war he left Paris, went to Brazil, because we have cousins in Brazil. And he couldn't stay in Brazil. He couldn't get papers because he was like a tourist. So he went to Argentina, and he got the papers over there. He still lives there. My other brother, the oldest, older than I am, he was in Russia, too. I will tell you the story later how he didn't survive. And my two sisters didn't survive.

Harper: Before I go on is there anything about growing up that you'd like to share with us?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, we were a very close family, very - I mean disciplined. We never talked back to our parents. You wouldn't dare to talk back to our parents. And as I say, my mother and father, they liked to help people. We had beggars, as you know, I don't know, in Poland, Jewish beggars used to go from town to town. They used to leave after Easter and go back for Rosh Hashanah at home. So they came to our house all the time. My mother always gave them something to eat. Friday night and Saturday night we didn't sit down for dinner if there wasn't one sitting with us having dinner, because Friday nights I used to sit in shul by the door when

the people go home so each one took home one for dinner. And to us always there was one for dinner. I never remember the time that we didn't have one. And he sat with us at the same table, he sang with us, the same way and everything else. Also, one time my father didn't feel good, and I remember, I never went to shul Friday night, I used to go Saturday. So he said to me, "You go to shul, and you bring home a beggar." So I went to shul and I went home with a beggar. So the one that came Friday night and comes back Saturday for dinner. So Saturday I still remember it never went out of my mind; he was a fortune teller, and he takes my hand, he looks at my hand, and he says, "You are going to go far away. You will have to duel with the government." I still remember what he said." You will have to suffer a little bit, but after you will come out all right." And every time when I was in Siberia, I used to remind myself of him, what he told me. And as I told you before, my mother used to bake and cook, and Friday I used to deliver to poor people a piece of fish, a piece of meat. This is the way that our family was.

Harper: Before the German invasion of Poland, do you remember hearing about Hitler?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Oh, yes. I used to listen all the time. I used to read the papers since I was ten years old; I used to buy newspapers. I always was interested until now. As soon as I get up I have to have a paper. And I used to read a lot. I knew all about the United States—all about your election here. I was very interested. I remember when Roosevelt ran before the war, in the '30s, I think, or was it '34 when Roosevelt first was elected? Anyway, we all wanted Roosevelt to win the election. I don't know why, but they always were for the Democrats, anyway. Oh, yes. I used to listen to Hitler's speeches.

Harper: And what did you think?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, we were scared. Of course we were scared. If the war wouldn't start for another six months, I and the whole family would be here in the United States. We had the papers; it took us long to get the visa, but the embassy in Warsaw already wrote us a letter we should come for our medical, they need a medical checkup, because they are ready to give us the visa. But the war started.

Harper: Were you aware of what was happening in Germany?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, we knew because before the war some of the Jews were sent out from Germany into Poland. We had some coming to our town. We knew about the Kristalnacht. We knew all this, but we didn't imagine that a thing like this can happen, what did happen. Because the people like my father, he was a prisoner in World War I; he was in the Russian Army. He was taken by the German Army as a prisoner. And he had it good. Nobody bothered him, you know. The Germans were in our town, they occupied our town at that time. People thought it's going to be the same way.

Harper: Was the family concerned for its safety?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, of course. All the Jews were.

Harper: And you tried to leave?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, in the beginning, when you're a close family, especially when you are so young, it's hard to leave. I'd never been out of the town more than 50 kilometers to Lublin. I used to go, and maybe I was in my whole life twice. So you're not going to run. But when the Germans came in, and once we saw what they were doing, and they grab you to work, and they beat you up. They were hitting people. They take them to work; it's not that they work but

they used to kick them and beat them and everything that's possible. They took hostages and they gave order if we should bring them like so many letters, so many jewelry we should bring them. We should bring them money. We should bring them all kinds of food, otherwise they're going to shoot them. And when you brought them this, next time they ask for some more, for other things. And they always took hostages, and some of them didn't come back. Don't know what happened. And every day you see people go to work.

I was called once only, because I used to hide myself or run away. So my work was to shine the boots for the Germans—the police. So they didn't beat me, but they called me all kinds of names. The other kid, there was three of us. One of the kids got kicked twice. They told him, "He's not working; he's not shining too fast." But after that I told myself, "I'll never go again there." I used to hide when they used to catch the people to work. But every day they caught people to work on the roads, to work, to clean the toilets, to cut wood for them in the beginning. And also if they catch you, sometimes, you know, you are a minute late, because you have to be in about 4:00. Sometimes 'til you got home, if they caught you, they used to beat you.

So people used to come from the west into our town, Jewish people. And one of the people that came in was a man that my father used to do business [with], so he told him, "If you can get away, get away from here. There's murders. They are burning down synagogues. They are killing, they are shooting farther west," Because we more east from the German border. And my father really got scared. And one day in our synagogue they went into the small synagogue and they caught a few Jews reading the Torah or something, studying. They took them out, and they made them bring out all the [unclear] outside in the yard, and they had to put on the tallits, and after they had to put a fire to all the Torahs, and they had to dance around, and they took pictures of it. They used to cut all the beards from the Jews if they caught them in the street with a beard or something like this. So after when that businessman that my father used to do business with, told him about it, my father called me over and my brother. My mother didn't know about it yet. He said, "I think you should take off. You should leave town." He said, "It's no good; I don't know what happens." It was hard, you know, but he said, "Don't tell yet your mother. I'll tell her." Of course, my brother was the older one; he had a girlfriend. So he still didn't want to leave her. So my neighbor boy says to me, "Jack, me and you, let's go." After my mother already knew she was crying. But I had family on the other side [or the border] that the Russians occupied. I had some relatives of my uncle (He lives, he was here in Portland). His sister lived in Klusta, near the Rumanian border. So he said, "Okay. If you can get over there you stay with her." So I said, "Okay." My brother said he is not going yet. He will think about it. So and I this kid, we left. This is the first time I saw my father crying. But we had no choice. So I left with this kid, and we went to Lublin. To Lublin we walked. My father gave me the road where to go, because he used to travel there on his business. So he gave me the way I should go. We walked a lot. But we used to walk at night. In daytime we used to hide in the forest. There was a lot of forest there. The road was all forest. Because we are afraid to walk because the German cars used to come by. Also, we were afraid for the Polacks. In one forest one time I remember the two of us sat down to take a nap. We were talking and a girl comes out. She heard us talking Jewish, so she said she's Jewish. She's from a town [Kroshna]. This was about 20 or 30 kilometers from my town. And she is running away with another girl, but other girl got scared and she went back home. And doesn't want to go home. So she had an address to a farmer that he will bring us across the river. Somebody gave her, that he takes people across the river for ten zlotys. So okay. So all three of us [went].

It took us about I think three days. We got to the village, and I still remember. I had a backpack on my back and everything else, and it was right on the border of the river; the river was right below. We were on the top. While we were walking, a patrol of Germans, three Germans patrol, saw us. They stopped us. They asked us where we were going. So we said, "We're going to an uncle." So, "What is his name?" So we had the name from this guy, and we said, "So-and so. He lives here in the village." So it happened to be I had a big backpack, so he said I should open up the backpack, so I opened up the backpack. So, you know, I had food, I had sugar, I had this. So they saw I have sugar. So he said, "Can I take some sugar?" So I didn't refuse. If they wanted to take the whole, I would give him. So they take three pieces of sugar and they didn't bother us. But this was the Wehrmacht. Anyway, we got over to the farmer, and he told us that by tonight he will tell us when he will put us on the boat and we will go across the river. He knew the patrols—the way they go. The Russians patrolled other side and he used to time them. We paid him ten zlotys. So maybe 3:00 in the morning he told us, "Get ready. We're going." So he put us on a boat. He attached a rope to it, and he said, "Be quiet." With our hands to row, with our hands to go across, you come across, pull the boat, so he can pull back the boat. And we should run to the first house we see light. And that's what we did. We came across, and we saw a light. We ran in, and I remember yet, it was... In Poland before you get into the house they have a little—like you would say—a little hall before you go into the house. So we sat down there, and we were sitting, and we smelled bread. All of sudden comes out a guy, and it was a baker, happened to be a baker, a Jewish guy. He knew right away who we are. He said, "Don't move 'til daylight. When the line lines up for bread (there's a line up for bread), go out and stay in the line for bread and I'll give you bread. Then you take off to the [R_____]. And that's what we did. In the morning, after he brought us out food he gave us food to eat and everything, and that's how we did. The girl went her way, and I and the boy we traveled to a town, [Koven], that is already occupied by the Russians.

Harper: Can I interrupt you for a minute? Can you tell me the date that you left your town?
FRUCHTENGARTEN: Exactly, no. I think it was - it must have been March 1940.

Harper: Can you describe for me the German invasion?
FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well...

Harper: What happened?
FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, what happened is on September the first, I remember I was still asleep, and I heard the airplanes, you know, the aircraft. So we have a balcony. I walked out on the balcony, and I looked up, and I saw silver. They looked like silver planes. But I didn't know yet that the war is on. And it didn't take about ten minutes. My father gets up early. He always got up early in the morning. My father came in and he said there was a war; the Germans attacked Poland. It was a mobilization. So that's how I knew about the war. But after I heard the bombs, they bombed Lublin, I could hear them that far away as they bombed Lublin, and I only saw about I think a week later the refugees coming from the west, coming through. Refugees, and they told stories that the Germans bombed the highways. They came down with machine guns and machine gunned the refugees. There were so many deaths. They brought in some injured; the dead they left. They brought in some injured. And of course after that we started seeing the Polish Army pulling back. And the Germans came in I think about the middle of September (after the middle of September, Rosh Hashanah), they came into our town. As they came into the town, they took 18 people hostages. If anybody, a German, got

hurt, they're going to shoot them. They took all Jews hostages. But after three days, they let them go. And the German Army went through, and we didn't see nobody. There was no Polish police; there was no Germans, nobody. The talk was that the Russians are going to take over, they are coming to the Vistula River. If they come to the Vistula River, they would take over our town, too. But later on it changes that they are only going to the river Buch. So the Germans came back. And then everything started. When they took over, it started the whole thing, the beating, the shooting, the taking hostages and asking for money, asking for jewelry. A lot of raping. You are afraid to go out to town. You are afraid but they make you open up the businesses. You have to keep open the businesses. But they came in, they took whatever they wanted. Nobody could tell them anything.

Harper: Was there any shortages of food?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Not while I was there. It started getting short. I left before they started putting up the ghetto. They already brought in material and everything to build the ghetto just when I left. When food was short is when the ghetto was built. That I know that my two cousins, I have two cousins, they stuck it out, they went to the country to get some food. They brought in some food, and they caught them. They hanged them right away. They brought in a lot of these Jews from Austria, from Czechoslovakia. They brought in from the small towns around. By us was the ghetto. They brought in from the other towns, they brought in the Jews to our town. And after a while they started taking them out, 300 at a time, 400 at a time. Nobody knows what happened to them. They tell them they're going to work. But I left, so I didn't notice. This what I tell you now is after I read the book. But I know for a fact that the people from my town, the Jews, I'm not talking about the ones they brought in. I only can say about my town is the ones that didn't run away like I did, nobody survived. There's nobody survived. There's only a young couple, a brother and sister that I know. That they was hidden in a village, they survived. And that's all I know. And the rest of them is the ones that ran away over to the Russian side. Otherwise nobody survived.

Harper: That includes your . . .

FRUCHTENGARTEN: My parents, my whole family. I had a big family, they took. Nobody survived. I have two cousins that survived, also they ran away.

Harper: Do you know what happened to them exactly?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, they sent them to Sobibor.

Harper: What was the name of your neighbor who you ran away with?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Oh, my neighbor, you know, I'm trying to think. I remember his first name is Beryl and I think it was Levine. I think Beryl Levine, yes. I asked about him. I don't know what happened to him either. And Kovel, when I came to Kovel, a distant cousin was there. So when I came in he had a one-room place there and already people there, so he said, "There's no place where to put you here." So of course there was a school there that the Russians gave to the refugees, so another couple from my home town they were there too, they said, "We will take you, and you will have a place to sleep." And they had a kitchen there where they give you soup. But he told me there's somebody; she was a cousin by marriage from the next town of mine. She was engaged to a guy, and he was in the army, the Polish army, they mobilized it, and he was taken prisoner by the Russians. So he just happened to run into them. He was working for the Russians as a driver in Lodz; this was not far from Kovel, so he gave me the address, and I went there and I found him there. So when I found him, I stayed with

him three days. So I used to go with him. He used to go back and forth. The Russians used to clean up all the stores of the goods and send them to Russia. So he worked for them, and this is what he did. After I left and I went to my uncle's sister, near the Rumanian border. And I was there about a week. My brother came. He didn't want to go, but he told me that back home in the small town, in the barbershop people hang out, you know. So he and friends were hanging out in a barber shop. There was a [unclear] in our town. He was a painter, as a matter of fact. He used to paint our house all the time. His name was Fischer. He'd become the mayor of the town, with a swastika on his arm, and he was the leader. So he came in one day there, and he took all their names, and he said, "You are all Communists," and he is going to give it to the SS. So my brother right away he went home, he took his things, and he left; he came across. So he came to Klosver and we stayed there a few days. He said, "Let's go to the Rumanian border." It was a Schnappen. It was a dry port without a river.

Harper: Were you still with the neighbor kid?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: No, no. I left him in Kovel, and I went to Lodz. He stayed in Kovel. So my brother said, "Let's go to Schnappen." Before the war he was there for a month. He was in Beitar. Do you know what Beitar is? It is Jabotinsky's man [Zionist movement in Russia]. Like here there is the Likkud Party in Israel; He was a revisionist in Poland—the revisionist party. They wore these uniforms and Jabotinsky was their leader. So he was supposed to go to Israel, at that time Palestine. There was no Israel, just Palestine. They used to pay off the Rumanian, and they used to take a boat there. But he was sitting there for a month, and there's something in Rumania they couldn't go across. So he came back home. So he said, "Let's go now to Schnappen, and maybe we can go across, and maybe we can get that boat or go to the United States or go to Palestine." So we hired a guy (it was the winter) with the sled. They came. It wasn't very far to Schnappen. I don't remember what it was maybe 12 kilometers or 15 kilometers. Well, we came about a kilometer or two kilometers before Schnappen, there was the militia, with the red bands on the arm. They asked us where we're going. So my brother said he was going over. I think he said the same thing, to an aunt. He had the name, because he stayed there for a month in the house. So they say, "Sorry. This is a border. Nobody, only the people who live there can go. Nobody can". He wouldn't let us go. So we went back home, back to my uncle's sister. We stayed there a while. And after he tells me he wants to know what's going on on the other side. You know, he was homesick. I was homesick too. But also he wants to know what's happened to his girlfriend. No, first he said, "Let's go back." I said, "I'm not going to go back." I said, "Are you crazy? You see what's going to come the other side? You want to go back?" I knew he wanted to go back to his girlfriend. So he said, "So let's go over and see what's going on on the other side. So we took the train. You didn't have to pay for trains then. You traveled back and forth without paying anything, because they wasn't organized yet, the Russians. So we came to our town [not the same name as he gave at the beginning]. This is near the River Bund. So we came there and we waited for people to come over, and they told us horrible stories. I said, "See, you don't want to go back." And we walked out from the station one day. The Russian patrol stopped us, asked us for papers. I showed him mine. I had the paper from school. He had the document too. They took us down to the police station, and that was the end of it. Then we got out. That was 1940.

Harper: Both of you were taken to the police station?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Both, yes.

Harper: And you stayed there?

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FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well we stayed there overnight, and the next morning they took us from there to Chermish a town, to prison, a prison. It's a funny thing, when we walked, there was others, too, there was maybe 20 people, all Jews, men and woman. When we walked in Chermish, I remember it was a narrow street not far from the prison, and the Jewish people on the sidewalk used to holler at us, "Run away. Come into the car." But, you know, I was a kid, you know. And here you have soldiers with rifles behind you. So I didn't run away anyway. We went to prison. In prison we stayed about a week. Also, they did nothing. They didn't interrogate us, nothing. And from there they sent us to another prison in Lvov, in Jewish its Lemberg. In Lvov we stayed in a prison also about a week or ten days, and they put us on a train. They sent us to a prison in Russia in White Russia, near Minsk, on the river Odessa. And there they started us interrogating. They accused...first they accused me of being a German spy. I said, "What do you mean, a German spy? I cannot be German spy. I ran away for Russia. After they accuse you of all kinds of things, a Capitalist. They want to know what your father did, how many people work for you. They always accuse you [of being] a Capitalist or something like this. They always interrogate you after midnight. They wake you up after midnight and you go to the police station. It's a funny thing when they took me from prison to the police station, to the militia, so we have to go through town. We were on one side of town, the prison, and the militia and the [unclear – sounds like *encaboder*] the Secret Service. They were on the other side of town. So when I walked through town, there was me and my brother and a few other people (not by ourself) it was nighttime, but the town, the layout of the small town was just like my hometown when I looked at it, with the marketplace and everything. It was just like my hometown. It was built the same way. So when we came to the militia, the militia was upstairs and upstairs was the [unclear – sounds like *encaboder*]...That was the secret service. At that time they used to call them the [*encaboder*]. And they interrogated me. They interrogated my brother. And then when we go back to prison, they take my brother in a different cell. I cannot be together with my brother 'til after the interrogations. Well, I couldn't do nothing anyway. In the cell that I was in was 31 people. Most of them were Jews. There was gentiles, too, professional people. There was a few Polish people. They were what you call criminal. They were free from the Polish prison, and now they caught them and they put them back in prison. And there was one rabbi. The rabbi, of course you know, every morning he used to pray, you know, and of course he had no choice, he had to eat. And the warden of the prison, from the MVD, was Jewish. So it came Pesach. I remember it was just Pesach. So the rabbi didn't want to eat. He wants matzos. So those are a lot of professional people. They said, "Rabbi, you know even the Torah it says if you have no choice, you eat what you can eat." But he wouldn't eat any bread. And the main dish is bread there, you know, bread and soup. When the warden came in to see why he doesn't eat. So he said he wants matzos." Listen," he said, "You are in Russia here. We don't have any matzos. There's no matzo. I can't give you any matzo because there's no matzos." Anyway, there was a woman doctor, a young girl. She was a nurse; she was a doctor. She came over and asked him, "Tell me what you would eat so I can prescribe it for you." And he said, "I can't eat bread." He wouldn't eat any bread. So she gave him like cream of wheat and all kinds of stuff, you know, just to keep him alive over the eight days. And I went for interrogation I would say about four times.

Harper: What year are you in right now?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Huh?

Harper: What year is this right now that you're talking about?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: 1940.

Jack Fruchtengarten 5/26/1994

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This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word. It is not the primary source, and it has not been checked for spelling or accuracy.

Harper: This was right around Passover 1940?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes. 1940, yes. That was 1940. And this was going on, it was right as soon as we came there. It was right the first time we came there. The interrogation was going on 'til about... when I finished it was already I think about June or so. May or June, I don't remember. I have to go back a little. I was in prison, in the first cell that I was in, I started breaking out on my arm, something, I don't know what it was. The doctor said she doesn't know what it is. She can't give me anything; she doesn't know what it is. But I said, "There is something wrong." She was a nice girl. A young girl, a nurse. She said she is going to call the oblask. The oblask is like here would be the State. It was in Minsk. She said she'd go to talk to the doctor in charge over there. So one day they took me out and they took me into the office by the warden, and there's a doctor there, an old Jewish doctor. And he said, "Let me look." So he looked. He said right away, he said, "You have shingles." He said, "Don't worry. In a few days it will be gone. You are short of vitamins." He said from the food. So he looked at me and he said, "How many people is in your cell?" I said, "Thirty-one." He said, "Are you a juvenile?" I said, "No." So I heard him talking to the [sounds like *chernek*]. I already understood Russian. I used to read a lot in prison. There was nothing else I could do. I already understood Russian, because Polish, if you know Polish, it's not so hard to learn Russian. So I heard him ask him why I am in a regular cell. He said he had no room. He said, "You make room." He asked him, "How many juveniles do you have here?" He said, "Three." So he said, "You make a cell empty, and you put them all three in right away." That's what happened. As soon as I came in, they came and took me out and they put me in another cell with a kid also.

I think I was 15, he must have been 16, and the other one was also 16. One was from South Soviets, and one was Krakow. The one from Krakow used to go to school in London, to high school, and he came home on vacation. And then the war started, so he ran east to get out of Poland. The Russians caught him with English papers, so they thought he was a spy. So he was arrested, and we were three together in the cell. On the cell where there were three of us, it was a small cell, it was better, because, first of all the nurse or the doctor, she always brought us some candy that nobody should see. The guard shouldn't see. She used to throw it. She's say, "Take it when I walk out," see, because she used to come every day, the nurse used to come around every cell and check. And also there was one guard, an older man, he used to tell us that he had children like us, so when everybody already was locked up, he used to let us out of the corridor to look out the windows there, because the river Desne was there. We used to watch the boats going by. Also, he used to bring us some candy. So that was going until after I asked for my brother. See, over there you can ask. So I said, "I want to see the warden." So the warden came. I said to him, "They promised me at the interrogation that after the interrogation I can stay with my brother together." So he said, "Yes, but your brother is older. He cannot stay in that juvenile cell." I said, "But the food is the same. What's the difference? We have room here." So anyway, he gave me my brother. So my brother came back in. And I saw my brother anyway between because when they took me for interrogations they took him too at the same time. So I saw him every time we went for interrogation. 'Til about I think it was July. At night they asked my brother, "Take your things and come." They woke us up. So I said, "If he goes, I go, too." So he said, "You can come too." So we come over, and I heard him going in by the warden's office. He said for my brother to go in first. So my brother goes in, and I heard them read. I didn't hear what they told him, but he came out, and he showed me that he got five. He showed me five. I don't know what it is five. So I come in, he said, "You go in." So I go in there, and the warden sits there and his assistant sits there. So he read out

that the High Command of the Soviet Union sentenced me to five years hard labor, Article so-and-so, Article so-and-so. So I said, "Why? I didn't do anything." He said he doesn't know. This is what it is. He said, "You can appeal." I said, "I appeal." So he said, "Well, I want you to sign it." I said, "I'm not going to sign it," I said, "Because I didn't commit any crime." I said I wouldn't sign. So he said, "You don't have to." He tells his assistant, "You sign it for him." So when I left, they took me out to another cell, already my brother is there too, and all the people from different cells, I didn't even know them, is packed. Everybody was already sentenced. Five years was the less. Others was 15, 20, 10. There was a lot of lawyers there; there were some doctors there. There was a lot of people from the government. And they took us up after three days from there on a train, and they sent us to Hargov. That's a city in the Ukraine. There we went through our medical. It was hot. I remember it was so hot. We were so hungry and we couldn't eat meat it was so hot. Then we went to a medical checkup. The medical checkup was nothing. I mean, you walk over. There's two women doctors. They put the stethoscope to the heart. They feel the muscles, and okay. And that's what it was. From there they took us to a train again, and then the train, it was a cattle train. It was so long that you couldn't see the end, and we went to [Hangsk]. You heard about [Hangsk]. It is on the Adriatic. All the convoys used to go when they supplied Russia with help used to come there. Anyway, and there they put us on a ship. They gave us warm clothes there, and they put us on a ship. We traveled on the ship on the Adriatic about - I don't know. A few days. I can't remember how many days, 'til we came to a port, and there they put us on barges. And the barges, you know, we on the river Puchera. And we are traveling, and we didn't know where we were going, really. People are dying on the barges every day. And we traveled so far 'til the river froze, because over there it gets cold I think September or October.

Harper: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but who were you with? Just Polish prisoners, or Russians?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: It was some Russians, too.

Harper: But mostly Polish?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Mostly Polish.

Harper: And all sorts of - Jews, gentiles, everything?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes. You had quite a... matter of fact, I will come to it later. But we are coming, you know, they feed you. People died next to you, sleeping. You're sleeping on bunks without mattresses, without anything. You, you know, like cattle. But anyway, I was young. I could sleep. You know, you're tired, you sleep. But the people in their '40s, they already had a hard time. 'Til the barge froze, so we stopped. So one day they took us out to work. So we went on the next barge, and we went to take apart the bunks. We took them apart, because they needed the barge for something else, I guess, to go back. So I worked, and I stepped on a nail, and the nail went through my foot. And so I come back, they have no iodine, they have nothing. No medicine.

I come on the barge, and my foot starts swelling. So my brother walked over there. There's a lot of doctors there. So he asked them, so two of them came over. There was one Jewish and one Polack. And they look and they look and they see I'm swelling. I told them the story: I pulled out the foot it was a nail. He said, "Well, we have to see you shouldn't get blood poisoning. We don't know what's going to happen. There's no medicine. There's nothing.

But they told my brother to put cold compresses, one after the other, cold. So we have to go upstairs to get water from the river, so my brother had to pay the guard a ruble to get that

bucket, a little bucket of water. And this was going on, he said, "We will see after three days what's going to happen." And of course nothing you can do about it. After three days, they came over and said, "Look," they said, "I think, let's wait another day but I think you made it." He said, "It doesn't get worse. The swelling is going down a little bit, and I think you'll be all right. There's no poisoning. Otherwise you would see it already. The foot would be more swollen than now." So that's what happened. The swelling started going down, but a few days later they took everybody except the sick, they built like a tent on the top of the edge of the river, a big tent, and they made a hospital there. All the sick stayed, and the rest are going away; they're going to work, because they couldn't travel any more. So that's when I separated from my brother. They took my brother, and I went to the hospital on the top. Most of the people in the hospital, most of them were very sick. Dysentery and all kinds of deals. They are dying day after day. I remember I think, I don't remember how it was in the beginning, but after I know there was 180 people, and I was the healthy one. There's a few more, but I was called the healthy one, because my foot, it doesn't mean you're sick. And another few, let's say, were healthy, so they worked. They built a shower to wash. And in the kitchen, you need a cook and you need this. We even got the job to boil water, because you couldn't drink this water from the river. So I used to go every morning at 4:00 in the morning, I used to go down to the river and make a hole in the ice. I used to bring up water, and I used to boil it. I was right by the kitchen. So this was going on. I also was the one who used to dig graves for the dead. I had to bury them. And all the time when you died they take you outside and you freeze right away, and it takes a long time to dig a grave there, because it's frozen. So every day people were dying. After, they brought two other doctors, two women doctors. They didn't help anything same thing the two women doctors. So they exchanged them; they brought another doctor, a prisoner. He was from the same area that Stalin came from. He was a prisoner, political prisoner. So they brought him. He cleaned up the whole place. He made everybody all to wash off, whoever is healthy to do it. He cleaned up. He saved about 80 something people. The rest of them, they all died. So we stayed there for a while, but that wasn't so bad. I sat next to the kitchen so I had food. As a matter of fact, not only I had food but I used to bring food. There was with me a huge guy from Lvov. I still remember his name. His name was Kahn. He was 71 years old. He had a leather factory in town. So the Russians arrested him for being a Capitalist. They took away the factory and they gave him ten years. I used to bring him soup home; every night I used to bring him back some soup for him to eat. After a while everybody was healthy so we had to go to a camp where you have to work. We walked. It took us a whole day walking. We came; all of us came to another camp.

Harper: Can I stop you here? This hospital tent that you were - was it just out in the middle of nowhere?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Middle of nowhere. There was nothing around.

Harper: Do you have any idea where it was near?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: It was on the river Puchera, but there's not a living soul there.

Harper: And how about this?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: They only had a guard, that's all. It was open because where you going to run? First of all, everybody was sick. Where are you going to run? There's no place to run. So they didn't have a fence; nothing around it. They just put up this one thing for the hospital, and one thing for the police and for the soldiers, and a little tent for the kitchen, and everything was tents, you know.

Harper: And this is still 1940?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes. It's still 1940. And after they brought us to our camp, a labor camp already.

Harper: And do you know where that was?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Also the same [Piecha]. They called [Piecha Lage]. They had maybe, who knows, hundreds or thousands of camps in that area. I can't tell you why. So when we came to that camp there, of course right away they gave you already a brigade, or a group that you're going to work with. I don't remember how many men was in that group, but I think it was twenty. Each twenty men had a brigadier. The brigadier was a Russian. And he goes out, of course, the soldier goes with you, too, and he watches you. And you work. What we were working on was building a railroad. So this is why they have so many camps. Each few kilometers they had a camp. Like we had to build the railroad to this camp. This camp built farther. And this was going on. We built the railroad from Siberia into Russia. And that's what it was. How the system over there works, they give you a quota, how much you have to make. Like I worked in a wheelbarrow, two of us. We had a wheelbarrow. One fills it up, the other one brings it where is necessary, where the railroad is, where they're building the railroad. And we had, for example, to make a quarter, we got to do it let's say a hundred times, to make a hundred percent for the two of us. One guy sits and he counts. When you go by, you give him a number and he writes it down "one, two." So on the end of the day they know how much you make. But, as I say, I was 15. But I looked younger than 15. One day there was a lot of prisoners that come from Stalin's era of 1937 when he sent away so many people to Siberia. There was an older guy there, sitting there, and he calls me over and says, "Sit down. Sit down." Just like I'm his son. He said "You are new here. You are from Poland." I said, "Yes" He said, "I am going to give you advice. I am here already an old-timer." He says, "I'm here already since 1937." He said, "If you want to live longer, don't make a 100%." He explained that to me. Good thing I spoke Russian already. He said, "If you make a 100%," he said, "They give you 900 gram bread, they give you three soups a day, and they give you an extra spoon of Kasha." You know what kasha is? Tell me what it is.

Harper: A grain?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: A grain, you know? If you make 90% of your quota, you get 500 gram bread, and you get three soups a day. If you make 30%, you get the same thing like you make 90%, but if you make 26%, you get only 300 grams bread and one soup. So I will advise you make 32%. Figure it out: 32, 33%. This way you wouldn't have to work so hard. You still will have strength to last longer." He said, "We don't know how long you guys are going to last because you came from a country where everything was easy. I am used to it because we had it tough here." So I come back and I told another guy (we were always keeping somebody close). I told him the story. He said to me (my name at that time was Kuba, they called me). He said, "Kuba, I think he's right. This is what we're going to do." So my partner, I explained to him, he said, "Okay. Let's do it." So after the first week, when I went to eat, the cook, also a Russian cook, he sees that I come with a... They had number 1, number 2, and number 3. Number 1 is what you got the soup, what I has. If you make less than the quota. The 100% is No. 2. And No. 3 was the [unclear] they call it. It is the one who did over the quota so you got better food. So he saw. I showed him my tickets; he saw my tickets. He looked at me. So he said, "Son, I would like to give you more food," He said, "But I can't give you because if I give you more food, I go out to work," he says, "They will kick me out of the kitchen. But if

you come after work and chop some wood I can give you all the food." I said, "Okay, I will come." He said, "Bring a friend because you need two." So my partner that we used to work together, also a young guy, he was a Polack, not a Jew. I say to him, "Would you like to get extra food?" He said, "Yes." I said, "You want to go out and chop wood?" He said, "I've never chopped wood." I said, "I didn't either." I said, "I don't know how to chop wood." So he said, "Okay." So after work we ate. They gave us the soup. We go over to the kitchen. He gave us saw, you know, the saw for two people, and an ax and all this. And we don't know how to saw. When you don't know how to saw, it's hard because you don't know how to keep the saw. And the guard upstairs he saw us, and he said, "Capitalists! You don't even know how to chop wood." So one of his friends walked by there, and the other said, "Why don't you show them how to chop wood?" So the other guy called another one of his and they go over it, one, two three. So he explained to me how to keep the saw. So after that we learned how to do it. And we used to chop wood, and I used to get plenty of food. But I used to bring up the same thing to this guy, this Kahn, that old man, you know. I still remember one day I couldn't move my arms. I couldn't move. I couldn't even walk out to work. You carry like a rifle; you carry a shovel or a pick. That's your instrument. I couldn't move, and I couldn't carry it. So I go to the doctor.

The doctor there was at that time (before the other doctor) was from Kiev. I don't think he was a doctor, in my opinion. So I told him that I cannot move my arms, if I can stay home. So he said, "Do you have a temperature?" I said, "I don't know." So he told me, "You don't have any temperature, you have to go to work." I said, "But I cannot work." He said, "There's nothing I can do about it." So I have nothing, so what can I do? I go back and I go over to my brigadier, and I told him the story. He was a Russian. He was a prisoner, too. Everybody was a prisoner there, everyone. Except the guard, everybody was a prisoner. The guy in charge of the camp, everything was prisoners. So I told him the story. He said, "Let's go out to work first. Let's see what we can do." So we came out on the place to work, and already he has a big idea. He has 20 people. Over him is another guy that he had the whole everybody. He is in charge of the rest of them. He makes the decision. So the other one was an older guy. I don't know if he was a political prisoner or not. I don't know. So he goes over and they talk. And he came back and he said, "Okay. You go and keep the fire going, because you have to do something. Otherwise there is a soldier, you know, he wouldn't let you stay doing nothing. We will tell him that you will keep our fire going, because we have to warm our hands, and we will give you the quota." I said, "Don't give me a full quota, because they're not used to having my full quota. I never make a quota." I said, "Just give me some." So for two days I didn't do nothing, just... they were really nice. All because I was young. This is what helped me all this time, because I was young. In a camp you have to, you see, this wasn't a German camp. In a German camp they take you or they kill you. Over there, they don't kill you 'til you die. You die. I mean, people did die, every day. But if you could last, you last. Because I could sleep on the... we didn't have any mattresses or any blanket, we didn't undress even, because they will steal your shoes. So you sleep. In the morning, you get up and you go. But the older guys, they had a tough time. A lot of them didn't make it. So this is how I survived the camp there.

Harper: I'm sorry. Before you go on, I'd like to stop here.

FRUCHTENGARTEN: You have to stop? Okay?

[Recording pauses and resumes]

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Okay. Can I go ahead?

Okay. I think we talked about the camp, the second camp. And this camp was where we worked on the railroad. One day they brought in a bunch of Russian soldiers, in uniform. A whole bunch of them. We didn't know what it was all about. After I started talking to one, he said they were prisoners in Finland. We didn't even know there was a Finnish war. We didn't know about the war in Finland. They were prisoners in Finland. I mean, they were taken prisoners by the Finnish. And after, they exchanged. After the war, they sent them to Siberia, because they're not supposed to surrender. And they kept them there, I don't know.

I left that camp later on, but I don't know what happened to them—if they got sentenced. They waited for orders from Moscow what to do with them, because they didn't go out to work, nothing. Waited for Moscow to tell them new orders. So all of them were in the camp there. And we worked there, you know, like normal. You live through it. People are dying, like normal. It didn't mean nothing if somebody died. I dug the grave. Sometimes you'd dig the grave for one, and they would come out and tell you better make it bigger because somebody else is going to die, because it's hard to dig a grave there; it was frozen. And they take off all their clothing except the underwear, and you throw them in and put a little sign on. But the sign flew at the first storm, the sign is gone. Nobody knows anybody's there. So there's no cemetery or nothing. Nobody knows what happened. This was the end of 1940. We worked seven days a week. Never a day off. Hours, I really don't know. It was only when they tell you. In the morning you got up because they rang a bell. And when they told you to go home, you went home. But you don't know hours or what because nobody had a watch. And sometimes you didn't know whether it's night or whether it's day, because in summer it's day, and in the winter gets night right away. Sometimes we had snow storms that we couldn't even get out from the tent. It was covered; the whole tent was covered with snow. So our tent, also the tent from the soldiers, and everything else. So the guy from the guard, from up the top, had to come down and dig ours out first so we can dig out the rest of them to get out of there. We couldn't get out even [because] it's so snowy. As I say, you know, it is cold. You're freezing. You come home, and you cannot even dry your... because you have racks around, you have the boots they give you, and everything is wet, but you cannot dry it, because by the fireplace, only the criminals sit there, the Russian criminals. They wouldn't let you. We were fascists, they used to call us fascists. They wouldn't let us close to the fireplace to dry out. So you just hang out and you sit and watch it, because if you took off the boots, they will steal it. So you watch it and you dry a little bit, and after you put them back on and you go to sleep.

Well, we changed to another camp after that. The same thing in the other camp, because after you finish an area, you go farther. And this was going on 'til the end of 1941, and it's already coming 1942, I think. Beginning of 1942, or the end of 1941. I remember that in camp somebody mentioned that they're going to free all the Polish prisoners. Oh, no. Before that one day, you know, in the morning before we go out to work, they told us that there's a war. The Germans attacked Russia. And they will shoot anybody if we commit any... I think, what do they call it in English?

Harper: Sabotage?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Sabotage or something, you'll be shot. And a week later they took all the foreign prisoners, Polish or Rumanians. They had Hungarians, and they put us in a special camp. Another camp, more security and everything else. I remember still the first day because they gave me a soup. It was a soup that you give the horses. It is, what you call it, that wheat

they give the horses to eat? They cook the soup from that, and I couldn't even eat it. There was no salt. They had no salt already. And I had no appetite. I was sitting on a piece of stone there and I'm eating that soup. It had no taste. A guy comes over to me and looked at me and he said, "Is your name Jack Fruchtengarten?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Is your brother's name Favel?" This is my older brother, Favel. I said, "Yes." So I said to him, "Who are you?" So he give me his name. So I said, "All right, I'm here. But why are you here?" He spent all the time in Poland in prisons because he was a Communist. When the Russians came in they freed him in Lublin from prison. He was all his life in prison for Communism. He used to go around in the villages making speeches and always was arrested. I said, "You are a Communist. What are you doing here?" He said, "Don't tell nobody that I was a Communist." he said. He told me when they freed him from prison with two boys from my home town they went right to Russia, to the Russian army. So they stayed with the Russian army, and they signed up to go to Russia to work. And they gave them the citizenship right away. That's what they did. And they worked in a factory in a small town, in a town someplace. They lived together I guess. I don't know how many years they were there, and one time the income from that came, they took all three, accused them of being counter revolutionaries, and they gave them 20 years." That guy is now in Israel. But I remember. I used to go to school with his cousin. That's why I knew about him. I remember yet when he used to come out from prison he used to walk around with a French beret he used to wear all the time. So this was when I met him. To make it short from there, after that we heard rumors that they're going to free all the Polish prisoners."

Harper: Well, did you get to meet up with your brother again?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: I will come to it.

Harper: Okay.

FRUCHTENGARTEN: There were rumors they were going to release all Polish prisoners. Rumors. 'Til one day I was by the fire there putting wood, because they told me to go do it. The soldier what used to watch us came over close, and he said to me, "You're a Polack?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Do you know a General Shakorski?" I still remember. I said, "No. I don't know any generals. What do I know about generals?" He said, "Yes." He said, "General Shakorski, the Russian government and the Polish government have an agreement that they're going to release all Polish prisoners. You're going to join in to help Russia fight against the Germans." So I told the other guys. They can't believe it. But they said, "There's something if you mention General Shakorski. Why would they mention General Shakorski?" So we waited a month, six weeks. All of a sudden they called us around. They said, "All the Poles, all the Polacks, step out." Because there were Hungarians and Rumanians too. So we stepped out, and they said, "Okay. Take your things. We're going to another camp." And they took us all to another camp, and they said, "You are free. You are going to go to a place where they're going to give you documents, and you will join the army, and you will fight against Germany." Okay. So they put us on the train that we built. Already there was a train going. I still remember I said to the guys, "Do you think the train's going to run good? I don't believe it. We built it." [laughs] I said, "It's true." The train, it was shaky a little bit. But we made it to [Kutlas]. I think it took a day or so. We came to [Kutlas]. This was already Russia, but it was on right on the border of Siberia. And over there they had a big barracks, and they took us in there and we stayed. And they called us and, I mean, they didn't call us, but we went in and they asked the name and everything else, and I happened to go over to a woman, and she asked me how old I am, and I told her 16 or something, I was going to be 17. And she said to me, "Well, you are free now. But you have a choice. You have a choice to join the Polish

army, you have a choice to join the Russian army, or you can stay in Russia and work.” So I said, “Well,” I said, “I am going to join the Polish army.” So she said, “Why would you want to join the Polish army? Why don't you stay in Russia and work here? At least you're going to live through the war. Otherwise, you go to them, you may get killed.” So the reason I run away, I said if I didn't die in the camps, I said maybe I will live through the war. I said, “I will join the Polish army.” So okay, so they gave me a paper, you know, and I am walking around in [Kutlas] one day waiting - we wait for our train to go . . .

Harper: Can I interrupt you? I'm sorry. Did you, did you feel a need to fight? Did you want to fight, or did you just take ...

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, I wanted to fight. I wanted to, of course. I wanted to fight. I'm not going to stay and work. I didn't want to stay in Russia anyway.

Harper: But I mean what I'm trying to get at. . .

FRUCHTENGARTEN: I wanted to fight, sure. I wanted to fight, sure. So what had happened at that time, we had to wait for a train to come to take us, because a whole bunch of us, a lot of people, there was thousands and thousands of people. So I'm working one day and a guy came over and he said, “Hey Kuba.” (My name is Kuba). We were in the same cell in prison together, the first cell we were together. He was a lawyer, a Jewish lawyer. He said, “I just saw your brother.” I said, “Where did you see my brother?” He said about kilometer from here is a camp. They're waiting to bring them in to give them the papers.” So I had nothing to carry. I carried a little sack with a... you had to have a dish to eat, so I had from a can of vegetables, a can, a big can. So this was my dish. And a spoon, a wooden spoon. I kept it from prison yet this spoon. So I said, “Hold this for me. I will run over there.” So I ran to the camp. I came in. There was nobody at the gate. I came into a barrack and I asked if anybody knows where is Fruchtengarten. So they told me right away, “He's there.” And I met my brother. And my brother was in good shape. He told me that he was in a camp, but he was working as a tailor in the camp, so he had it not bad, when he was a tailor. And so I said, “Okay.” And he said, “I have here a paper I am free, and I'm supposed to go to [Buzeluk]. [Buzeluk] was a town in the way south of Russia where they organize the Polish army. So I said, “I'd better wait for you ‘til you get your papers and we'll go together.” He was older than I am, three years older. So he said to me, “Jack” - “Kuba,” he said, “Don't stay here, because all around here are prison camps, and you know when a soldier takes out 20 people, he have to bring back 20 people. If somebody runs away and you happen to be there, he will catch you and take away your paper, and you are the one, because you have to bring back 20.” He said, “You go to [Buzeluk], and I will meet you there.” So I said, “If you think so,” I said, “Okay.” So this way I went on the train. We traveled to [Buzeluk] on a train one month. The train stops a month, then goes. And a matter of fact, we were ten... you know the trains have cabins for I don't remember how many. I think it was for six or eight. We were ten. We slept by the baggage, and we slept here. Who cares? We're used to this kind of thing. It didn't bother us. They gave us 212 rubles, or 220, I don't remember, and we had to buy food. Every station the train arrived they closed up the buffet, because they were afraid we were going to take it apart. So we had to run to the city to buy bread, to buy soup. And oh, everybody ran except one stayed to watch the cabin, because somebody should cover. We had bread, and this. So everybody went to town, and everybody brought. I used to go always; I used to go for bread. I used to go and always bring home bread because I could get in the line easy. As I say, I'd just go with a soldier, and he used to go and get me bread. And we were traveling south. We became close. In the middle there was a Jewish girl, the same thing, a Jewish girl happened to hop in on the train, and she

wanted to go too. She also was in a prison camp, because they had a lot of women camps there too. So she traveled with us on the same train. She was from [Brado]. And we became close, it took us a long time, I cannot describe everything. We came close to [Buzeluk], they told us we cannot go to [Buzeluk]. It's full. There's no room there. It's overcrowded. So they sent us to Tashkent. You heard about Tashkent? This is Southern Russia. This is closer to the Iranian border. We are already by the Caspian, close to the Caspian Sea there, in that area. That's why I lost my brother. He couldn't find me anymore. He couldn't find me, because it was disorganized. So he couldn't find me. In Tashkent there was a lot of refugees, a lot of Jews from the Ukraine, from the Belarus, but they ran away before the Germans got in. A lot of them saved themselves when they ran away there. And matter of fact, Tashkent had a Jewish population, Sephardics. I couldn't talk to them, but we spoke Russian. They didn't speak any Jewish but they spoke Russian. They had this bazaar where they had stands and they sold different things. There you could buy everything there already. As long as you had money you could buy. So we used to do a little black market too. We used to sell this, buy this, you know, to get money to be able to live. We didn't stay there too long, and over there was a lot of thieves, too. You had to watch; you take off your shoes they'll steal from you everything. A lot of thieves there too. So after that they took us and they took on a train and they brought us into the RLC. You heard about that. I think it dried out now. They took us in, and we kept together camp people. The girl in fact left; she didn't go. She stayed in Tashkent. She didn't go with us anymore. So she stayed in Tashkent. And we traveled on the boat, a small boat, up to our island. I think they called that state [Kaskaspah Republica].

Over there they didn't even know there are trains that exist. They live like you know, mostly they are Muslims. hey asked us if it's true that there is something that runs without horses. They didn't know there are trains even. They have never been there. I remember it was, this was November, I think. Yes, it was November 1942. It was November 1942, so maybe it was 1941, not 1942. It was 1941, in November. Because in 1942 I was already in England. November 1941, we came across. They gave us a place to stay there. They gave us food to eat, and we waited, and we had to wait. So one day we walked around, we were walking out, me and a friend of mine, and we ran into a woman and her daughter, a Jewish woman, from Kiev. And we got acquainted, you know, and we talked, and they told us that they had gotten away from Kiev, she and her daughter, because they worked someplace in a factory there. So one day comes the [unclear] and also the mayor of this town. They said that they're going to send us to a fish factory (they call it). So my friend said (he was an older guy). I was at that time 16, going on 17. He was about 30 or 28. He said, "Jack, let's not go. This is a stinking profession. I can't stand fish." So I said, "What are you going to do?" He said, "Let's see what we can do here." So we walked over, and he tells them that he doesn't want to go to the fish factory. So he said, "You have to go." So he said, "What do you mean, I have to go? Am I free or am I still a prisoner?" He said, "You're free." So he said, "Well, I don't want to go." He said, "If you don't want to go, you have no place to stay here, and you will have no food. You will get nothing." He said, "Okay." So we both walked out. I said the same thing, "I'm not going." So we went out and we went to look at [unclear]. We found him, and we told him the story. So they said, "You know there's a factory, a meat factory. They make sausages, they make salamis, and all this here. Why don't you go ask them for a job there?" So I said, "Okay." This was the day before the [unclear] revolution. This is November, they have the big holiday of the revolution. I didn't think of it at that time, but this happened to be. So we walked over to the factory. So you go to, a [chernek] is the guy in charge, like the manager of the factory. He's in charge of the whole factory. So I go to his office. We come into the office, and I said to

the other guy, I said, "Go in. You're older; you go in." He said, "But you speak better Russian." He said, "You better go in." So I said, "Okay, I'll go in."

So I go in, and he sits there, and he said to me, "Sit down. What do you want?" So I told him that I'm looking for a job. I have no job. If I can work in the factory. And with him sits another guy there. So he said, "Well," he said, "You know, I'm going home for holiday soon. There's a holiday tomorrow. You come after the holiday" I said, "After the holiday, for you is a holiday, but for me is not a holiday. I have no money and no food and I have no place to sleep." So he said, "Are you a Polack?" I said, "Yes, Polack," because I knew already the Polack said that. He said to me, "Tell me, do you have a tailor? I said, "My friend is a tailor. He's really a tailor. He's outside." He said, "Where is your friend?" I said, "He's outside." He said, "Call him in." So I called him in, and he asked him, "What kind of a tailor are you?" He said, "I am [a tailor for] men and women." So I said I was a tailor. We have to tell him." So he said, "Okay." He told the other guy sitting next to him, "Give him a receipt to go to the --" They had a kitchen for the whole factory. People lived there. They had rooms for the people, and they all had one restaurant, where they eat. And they had houses where they live. He said, "Give them a receipt for the kitchen and give them a place to sleep." So the first guy he went with us where to go to sleep. He took us. You know, I slept up. I never had a room, you know, already for so many years. Slept on the floor. He said, "A room with two beds." I said, "That's a pleasure!" Two beds, you know, and sheets on the bed and everything. That was good already. So after he gave us a receipt for three days to three times a day to go to the kitchen to eat. So we came, after as soon as he left we went right to the kitchen. They had a big kitchen. we came up to the kitchen. Of course the main thing there is soup. That's all they give you is soup and bread. That's all you eat. And they had kasha, they give you a little bit. But we came up, the place is full. Very few men, mostly women worked there. All the men are away in the army, and the ones that are not in the army are in training, where they train them to go into the army. So we ate there and after the holidays we came to see him. He had told us to come to see him. So he said, "Okay. I don't have a machine, a sewing machine. I wrote away." He wrote to send him a machine. I don't know where he wrote. Maybe to Moscow. Couldn't write to Moscow; he wouldn't get it, because the war was there. Maybe Tashkent or someplace to send him a machine.

Until he had a machine, we should... he'd give us work. We said "Okay." So he gave us to paste... the factory had so many windows, to paste the windows. You know, you paste around the windows on the side, that it shouldn't blow out or the wind. Okay, what's the difference? Whatever he gave us. But he gave us flour, the guy who showed us gave us flour and said, "And put in water and make it yourself." I never made the paste. What do I know? What does he know? So we made paste, you know, and we did paste the windows. Lunch hour we went 12:00 we go eat lunch. 1:00 we come back, the whole paste is on the floor. We worked there for three weeks, never pasted one window, because we didn't know how to make it. It didn't stick. But nobody came to look. Nobody paid attention. So this was it. After three weeks later he called us in and he said, "The machine is here." So he put it in his house; the wife is there too. She also wanted the office there. And he gave us a room. He put in the machine and everything else and gave us fabric from Poland, good fabric. Poland had the best fabric. I don't know how he got it, but he had good fabric. And my friend, you know, was a tailor, and I learned a little bit with him. I worked with him, so I learned. And we worked on the machine; he worked and I helped him. And the wife used to bring us in food. She was very nice. And we stayed there I think two months, 'til I think it was, I don't remember what month it was, it

could be maybe longer. Maybe longer. Maybe even three months we stayed there. We made him two suits. He had more. Made him three suits. But we didn't finish. It came orders that we have to leave. So we left, and after that they took us to a collective farm. And the collective farm there, we worked there. Well every one of us, I think there was 30 of us. There was 30 of us. There was an officer, a Polish officer. There was a Jewish assistant, a sergeant. He said he's a sergeant, but I don't think he is a sergeant, but he said that he is a sergeant. And we were the others. So every one of us stayed with one of the families, each one with a family there. The family, they all of them could speak very little Russian, and they couldn't... and alphabets. They didn't read either. All Muslim. And the collective farm gave them so much food for each of us to feed us. And we stayed with them. And they don't sleep on beds; they also sleep on the floor. I stayed with a couple, they had no children. And you know, they eat with the hands rice, they don't eat with spoons. The only thing they eat with spoon is soup. Otherwise, everything with their hands. And the food, I mean I didn't expect good food because I've never had good food for years, so it's always good if you had something to eat. And we used to get together, go out to work. So we'd go out to work, so one of the brigadiers, also there are brigadiers, took us out, you know, told us we should, we are digging a canal for water to run off, and he left us and he . . . *[Interruption]*

FRUCHTENGARTEN: So he left us, and we didn't work. We sat around days and night. Never paid attention. The same thing. We didn't do nothing. They didn't pay us anything, either, just we got food. They didn't pay us anything. I think I used to go every day, I think it was two kilometers, I used to go and get the paper. I have to have a paper, and I used to go into to town and they have a paper. So I was sitting, I'll never forget this. I was sitting and I went to town to get a paper. It was a restaurant there. So I go in and get the hamburger, they call it croquette. They were all bread, anyway, not much meat. And I'm sitting eating and reading the paper. There's a girl comes over to me, and she asked me for a piece of paper, because over there to smoke tobacco they use newspaper, they put it in paper and they roll it. This way they smoke it. So I gave her a piece of paper. So afterwards she comes over again; she wants another piece of paper. I gave it to her, because it's a page I'd already read. I gave it to her. So she said to me and, you know, we couldn't tell with each other who speaks good Russian or not. She says to me, "Are you Polack?" I said, "Yes." She said, "I'm Polish." She is also a Pole, not Jewish, but she is a Pole. She said, "Well," she said, "The Russians arrested me in Limburgh." She was a prostitute in Poland, so they sent all of them out. So she happened to be there, and she is with this guy, so she doesn't have to work. She lives with a guy. Okay. So that was that of this. So I went back to the camp, to the collective farm, and I told the guys about it. So one guy, he said he knew about it, the Russians sent out. He didn't know where they sent them. We stayed in that collective farm, I don't remember, about maybe three months more or less. Again we are leaving. So they put us on a barge and we go across – back to Russia itself. We came across. They put us on a train. We didn't know where we were going. And we got out to the Caspian Sea. I forgot the port. It was something, I don't remember the name of the...

Harper: I'm sorry. I'm trying to understand. Who would come to get you? The NKVD or . . .

FRUCHTENGARTEN: The NKVD gave the order to get ready, yes.

Harper: And so soldiers would come and escort you?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: No, soldiers, no. Because - you know, the prisoners...

Harper: You just heard . . .

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This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word. It is not the primary source, and it has not been checked for spelling or accuracy.

FRUCHTENGARTEN: They told us that we should report here, and they took us and they put us from there, they took us on a little barge, they took us across. And we came across, other people waited for us already, and they took us to our train. The train was already, we waited. The train wasn't there yet. There was a train coming from someplace. And the whole thing was full of Polacks. It was a full train, soldiers, Polish soldiers already. We were soldiers, but we had no uniforms yet. Good thing that you know, I forgot to mention, one thing that I forgot to mention, before we went on the island, we went through...from the Polish, we went through this to accept us to the army. They have a little poster that they write you into the army. They took all our names. That's all, and that's the way. So we came back, and they put us on the train. The train was Polacks, so they didn't do nothing on the train. But when we came on the boat, they put us on a ship on the Caspian Sea, and there they had already Polish high ranking officers and everything else. They went through us again. And this way they told me after that a lot of Jewish guys tried to go to the army in Russia in [Buzeluk], where I was supposed to go, the Polacks wouldn't accept them. They didn't want them. So anyway, I didn't have that problem. So we came. I still remember they gave us herring on the boat to eat and no water. We were so thirsty 'til we came across to Iran. When we came across to Iran, the British already were there. As soon as I came off the dock, I saw the British. Everybody was so happy already. And the British right away they took us right as soon as we got off the boat they had a place there. And they said, "Take off all your clothes. Everything except your wallet goes on the fire. They burned everything, because we had lice, you know. Everybody had plenty of lice.

Harper: Can I interrupt you and ask a question?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes.

Harper: The army that you were joining

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Was the Polish.

Harper: Okay. But was this through the Polish government in exile in London?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Mm-hmm. Right.

Harper: Okay. So you weren't ... but why were the British were helping?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes. Well, the British at that time were in Iran, too. There were Polish officers from England too at that time, interpreters; because they had to have interpreters. We couldn't speak any English. Anyway, they took us; they shaved us. I didn't shave yet, as a matter of fact, but they took off all our hair and everything else, and they put special soap on us. They had a long barrack with showers. The showers were so strong that I couldn't stand on my feet, because I was weak. We all were weak. Maybe I weighed 90 pounds or less, who knows? I don't remember. Anyway, we went through the shower once. We went back again, we went through the showers again, and after we went out on the other side and they gave us uniforms, army uniforms. We all got two uniforms. We got everything, underwear, socks, shoes, everything. So we were hanging around there waiting for everybody to go through, you know, and you know, food... the Iranians used to sell this Middle East bread, you know this Middle East bread? And the hard boiled eggs. I had a few rubles. They took rubles there. I had a few rubles, and they took rubles, and I bought maybe, I think, I don't remember, half a dozen eggs or something. Because you were hungry, you wanted to eat. And my friends, we all sat down and started eating. And all of a sudden a British officer came over and grabbed everything, he said, we couldn't understand it. He said, "Hold it." He said, "No food." And he

called over somebody, the interpreter. He told us, "You cannot eat, because you won't live long if you eat this. You have to ..." because he already knew, he said, "We have to start you from liquid." To get us to understand." We will feed you, don't worry, but you have to do it easy, because you cannot eat that stuff. You won't live long."

Harper: You mean . . .

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Because your stomach is dry. So okay. So after that when everybody was through they opened up a kitchen with soup, but they didn't give you too much. They told us, "Come in an hour later, two hours later, you can get more, because the kitchen is open. But you have to take it easy." In this way they start building us up. And we didn't stay long there, maybe a week or so. They put us on buses, and we were traveling on buses to Tehran, to the capital. You know, there are mountains there. Every soldier was sitting with the driver to watch that the driver shouldn't speed, because there if you are in an accident, you go down, they will never find you. The way the road is curved, and there is nothing on the side of the road, you go right down who knows how many hundreds of feet? So, but we had to pass the Russians over again. The Russians occupied part of it. So I said, "I'm only worried to go past the Russians, they shouldn't stop us." Because when you're out of there, you don't want to go back. Anyway, we made it through the Russians. They stopped us and checked us. We came into Tehran. In Tehran, they put us up in... It used to be a German factory for machine guns. And the same thing in Tehran, they pay all, we have good food and everything else, and you already feel strong, and they start, you know, but they didn't train us, nothing, because there was no room to train. And we used to go to town, and you know, it was a little different. After that, again, you know, you always travel. We go farther on a train. I don't remember the town, the city; it is right on the Red Sea, right where the oil wells are. They took us to a town there. And it was so hot there that they had to put the double tents, and you couldn't, in the daytime you didn't go out. And we used to go through training at that time, and the training was at 4:00 in the morning, because it's cool at that time. And this is what we went through training at that time. I remember one day I went to town to buy ice, you know, a block of ice. When I came home that block was that little 'til you get home. And then we went to shul one Friday night. They told us, somebody, I don't remember how it came that the Sergeant told us that we should go to shul that somebody came to take us to shul.

Harper: Was it like an army shul?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: No, no. It was the Sephardic shul. So they took us to shul. I remember it was our shul because it was so hot there, and we ate sandwiches and they gave us lunch there, and we couldn't talk to them. There were a lot of girls there, but we couldn't talk to them because they spoke Sephardic and we spoke Yiddish or Russian or Polish. But you know, it was nice, you know. And again, we went through training there for a while, and again we go back on the boat again.

Harper: You couldn't speak enough Hebrew?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: No, we spoke with them - I couldn't speak Hebrew, but we spoke. Some of them spoke a little Russian. So we did speak a little bit, but we couldn't talk with them. From there they put us again on a ship and we went on the Red Sea, we went to Egypt, to Suez. And on the way in the travel... you know, it didn't take long. I don't know how many days. It didn't take long. Of course you watch out for submarines there and all this here. And we came to Suez. We came to Suez. They put us again on a train, and we went to Palestine. They called in a train and we arrived. I don't know how long it took. I think the same day. We arrived in

Rehovot. And in Rehovot they took us into the camp by trucks. The drivers were Jewish drivers, because we spoke with some Jewish I think girls, and in Palestine we stayed in, there were barracks there, modern. Everything was nicer. Showers you know. Organized. Good, because, you know, the British were there, you know. They had everything organized. And we got good food. We got because we were all weak. We got a lot of food, to build us up. I couldn't even carry the rifle because it was too heavy for me.

Harper: What was it like being in Palestine?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, at that time, you know, it's a funny thing, when you travel from Suez to Palestine, you travel where there's nothing, you know. You travel where there's nothing there, and you came into the Jewish section; it's beautiful, green with everything. And the stores, you know, there was a store right by the camp that I used to go in there. Everything was nice. I went to Tel Aviv, a modern city. It wasn't as modern as now, but it was modern at that time. I went to shul there and everything else. It was nice. One day, they always kept together, the Jewish guys, we always kept together. And I was with another guy.

I went to get stamps, to there's a little like you would say a candy store in Rehovot. So I went in to get candy and all this, there's a guy sits there and calls us over. He said, "You're Jewish?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Would you like to stay in Palestine?" I said, "Yes. How?" He said, "You want to stay?" I said, "Yes. He said, "How about your friend?" He said, "Okay." He said, "How many Jews are there?" I said, "I don't know exactly. We are a group of ten. There are other groups," I said, "But I don't know how many." He said, "Why don't you tell them tomorrow to come here too?" So I said, "Okay. I'll tell them." So he said, "Give me your names." So I gave him my name. I didn't know what it was he said, "I am from the Irgun." He said, "We'll take the fresh ones." We took out some of the kids. But he said, "You wait 'til we will let you know. We have to make you papers. Otherwise the British will get you right away." He said, "When we have ready two pictures, when we have ready the papers for you, we will tell you when, and we will come and pick you up." Okay. And I told the other guys, some of them went; some didn't. And it was going by a few days or so. All of a sudden - you know how it is in the army, they tell you to pack up, you pack up. And "Where are we going?" "We're going to Suez, back again to Suez." So here, maybe they came after us and they couldn't find us. They said, "We're going back to Suez." So on the train we go back to Suez. In Suez, we came over to Suez. I was attached to the artillery. The heavy artillery, this was my attachment at that time. And they told us that we are going to stay here for a while 'til we get fresh arms. We're supposed to get new arms coming in, like artillery pieces, everything new. And I didn't know at that time, what they prepared. They prepared for Alamaine at that time, for the attack from Montgomery. I was supposed to go at that time for the army but I remained at that time. But it didn't take long, a few days later as I say, every morning the Polacks they go out, you have to go out, line up and they say their prayers in the morning. They are strict Catholics. And also the evening. So when they start, by the Jewish kids, I didn't say the prayers, but I had to be in the line too. So they announced that they want all men under 21 step out. We didn't know what was happening. So I stepped out, and a whole bunch of us stepped out under 21. And they took us away, and they said, "You are going to England." They were going to ship us to England.

Harper: Can I interrupt you again?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes.

Harper: During any of this up to this point were you at all trying to make contact with your family or anything?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes. I wrote letters right away. I wrote.

Harper: When you got to Palestine?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: From Palestine, as soon as I came to Palestine. That's what I got the stamps for. I wrote to a letter to Argentina, and I wrote a letter to Portland, Oregon, because I remembered the address of Portland, Oregon because my aunt and uncle had a hotel.

Harper: Here?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes. So it was easy. Just the hotel. So in my head I had the address. So I wrote two letters, one to Argentina and one to Portland, but I didn't hear nothing. After a while I'll tell you how I got contact. So they put us on a boat, on a ship with Italian prisoners, like 2,000 prisoners. We arrived in Capetown. While we were traveling, the Germans claimed that they sank the ship with a division of troops. They didn't say what troops. And I listened on the British Broadcasting Company, and the British said that's true. They didn't say that it isn't true, and we were still on the ship, and I had the news that they sank us. They did sink a French freighter. We picked up the survivors. We got to Capetown, I think it was a Thursday.

Harper: Capetown?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Capetown, South Africa. And about Friday afternoon I saw a limousine coming over to the ship, and two men coming out with the suits and the hats. They came up on the ship and they talked to the captain. And it didn't take long to hand the orders for all the Jewish kids to come to the gate. So there's only three of us. So we come to the gate, and the captain tells us that they want... they said a representative of the Jewish community here in Capetown figured that there might be Jewish boys on this ship, and they want you to go for services. So the president of the community asked - he already spoke Polish. He said, "How many are you?" I said, "We are three." That's all, there was just three Jewish kids. So he said, "Okay. We expected a lot more, because from Poland we expected more Jewish." So my sergeant came over. He said for to me ask him if he can go, too, a Polack. So I asked him, he said, "Anybody wants to go, they can go. We prepared for more people." So three Polacks and three of us are going. We came to shul. It was a beautiful shul with a choir and everything, services. They had a place in the back where there is food, you know, the hall. They prepared even Polish vodka and everything. And after we ate they gave us each a watch, each one a watch, and they took us back to the ship. After that from there we went to Durbin. In Durbin we didn't stayed long. Stayed maybe a half a day, and from there we went to another [unclear], another town. In [unclear] they took us off. They only left people to guard the prisoners and the rest of us we went to a camp. And they feed us again. They want to get us stronger and prepare us for it. So we stayed I think there six weeks, in South Africa. People there were well off in South Africa, very well off. Of course the blacks have problems there. And to make it short, from there back on the ship and we went to England. We came to England . . .

Harper: Why don't we stop and change the tape before we go on?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: We have to change tape? Because it's still a long story to go.

[End of tape 2]

Harper: So I think we left off ...

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This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word. It is not the primary source, and it has not been checked for spelling or accuracy.

FRUCHTENGARTEN: With the ship going to England. Okay. We came on the ship, and I don't know about this, I don't remember how many days. I think it was the Mauritania, so I remember the ship. And we had the prisoners. And we came to England. I don't know what port I came in, but I know they took us on a train and we went to Scotland. And Scotland, it was a small town. It was a palace from a lord, that palace. He gave it up for servicemen. And we stayed in it. You know, they made bunks, beds there and everything else, and they put us up there. And two days, you know, we were just doing nothing. On the third day in the morning, as I say, every morning they go out and say the prayers, and we stayed in line, and a colonel came from the paratroopers, and he made a speech. He wanted us to volunteer to the paratroopers. And he said, you know, "You'll be the first in Poland," and all this stuff. Gives you a line, you know. And I listened to him, and he goes to everybody around and goes to everybody to talk, "Would you like to join the paratroopers?" He came to me, he asked me, I said, "No." He said, "Why?" I said, "Because I have a weak heart." And none of my friends were joining. The next day came the Navy. See, it's all looking for young people, because they didn't have any young people. So the Navy came and the same thing; they go around, ask everybody. So my friend said, "Jack," he said, "Let's go in the Navy." I said, "Okay. We'll go in the Navy." So we signed up with the Navy. So the Navy said, okay, they would come in a couple of days and pick us up and take us to the barracks which they have. I don't know where they had them. And the same day I think, in the afternoon, or the next, came the Air Force. And the same thing. The Air Force was mixed, British and Polish. So they go around, the Polish and the British officers with them, because they speak Polish. He goes to everybody. He came to me. It was the same thing: he asked me if I want to join the Air Force. I said, "Yes, but I already joined the Navy." So he explained it to the British officer, what I said. The British officer said [unclear]. He said, "Ask him if he wants to be in the Air Force?" So he said, "Do you want to be in the Air Force?" I said, "Yes." Okay. He took my name. He took the other names, everybody else, but they didn't wait. They came two hours later with lorries or trucks and they took us right away from there. So after the Navy came looking for us they couldn't find us. You see, each one fought for young men. Like in the Air Force, they had men flying like in the cockpit, like the tail-gunners, they were older men. They couldn't sit there. They wanted young men to put in there. So they grabbed us and that's how I got into the Air Force. But in the Air Force of course, first they go through you and see what you can do. So first they sent us to a camp, to an air base. And the air base was in Wales, England. It was terrible there, raining, windy, and everything else. But we didn't stay long. After that they took me and they sent me to a school, a gunner's school. I was supposed to be a tail-gunner on a bomber. I went through the school. I did good through school. And they attached me to a squadron, and I go and they put you in with a crew. There are six in the crew.

Harper: What year is this?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: That was in 1942. It was in the end of 1942. No, the end of 1942 I came there, that's right. I came there October. It must have been in the end of 1942 or the beginning of 1943. I don't remember exactly. Three months training. After three months training you are flying with the crew. They attach you to a squadron, and of course, you know, if you were young, you went through so much. I wasn't scared. I think I wasn't scared at all. But you sit by yourself there, you know, on the tail, and the bomber is a Wellington that is not fast. It goes 220 miles an hour. A car now makes that fast. But I didn't fly long. I flew I think about less than six months. My eyes started bothering me. And I went to a doctor, and the doctor grounded me. He said, "You can't fly because you cannot see too far. You cannot," and I have to be able to see. Even with my glasses. He said that my eyes were damaged in the camps.

And since then, my eyes are bad. So they grounded me, and I was in the Air Force, but I was with the intelligence.

Harper: Okay. Before you go on, could you tell me, did you fly some missions?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes.

Harper: Can you tell me about them?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: We flew most of the time on France or Belgium. Only two, two missions in Germany. Otherwise most of it after I was flying looking for submarines. We had a detector for German submarines.

Harper: And your plane, you saw guns?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Oh, yes. On the aircraft was everything.

Harper: Was your plane ever damaged or...

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes. It was a little. We had a few bullets in the wings, yes, from anti-aircraft guns.

Harper: And did you shoot any planes down?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: One time only that I happened, that they attacked us. We were flying on the Biscayne. It's near Spain there. There were submarines. See, we have a detector where the submarines are at that time. And three German planes attacked us, and at that time I used the gun, but there was a squadron of spitfires, a few squadrons, not far away, and we got a message, we could send them a message, so they came to help. Otherwise, we would be shot down.

Harper: And the crew of this plane, was it Polish and English?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes.

Harper: Mixed?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: The commander of of the whole area, of the whole Air Force, was English. See, but the Polish was with them. It was a mixture. But everything was British. The system, and the payday, everything we got paid is British style. The cooks were English. Everything was English. Everything was controlled by the English.

Harper: And what did you. . . ?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: That was the Polish squadron. They called it the Polish squadron, see.

Harper: What did you bomb in France and Belgium?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Mostly factories. I don't know if we hit them or not. You never know.

Harper: Were you able to see the explosions?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: You saw the fires and everything, sure, but you know, when you bombed, you hit. In Germany we bombed railroads"

Harper: But you... only one time you encountered a fighter?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Only one time" Otherwise anti-aircraft" Only one time. On the water" After I was with intelligence 'til the end of the war. I had a jeep. I used to go different places." And in

Normandy, I was. When I went to the intelligence, I was attached to a spitfire wing; it was all spitfires” And when the invasion of Normandy, it was our wing that was the first one to go across, and they built an, you know, an airport, in a few hours” They put this airport in, and our spitfires, they could land on short runways” And the spitfires landed there. We stayed about ten miles from Caen, when the Germans were still surrounded in Caen. The ships used to fire over us, over our airport, the ships from the coast. They used to, artillery, they used to fire on Caen, because the Germans holed up a long time in Caen, one month to break through. It took one month to break through in Caen. We lived in tents. I used to build myself a bed, you know, in the day. At least you had straw for a mattress. I used to build myself a bed on cans from gas, empty cans. But when the artillery started firing, they all fell apart. It was heavy artillery. And also in Normandy, you couldn't find a place, there was not an armored car, or a tank, or so much arms there. Wherever you moved, there was arms, because they had a short strip, everybody was there. But you didn't see any German planes. At that time I started seeing the V-1 coming across. Yes. Our spitfires used to take off and shoot them down.

Harper: What is a V-1?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Huh? The V-1 rockets that the Germans used to fire on England. They used to come through us. So our spitfires used to take off after them.

Harper: So you were attached then with this squadron.

FRUCHTENGARTEN: I was with that wing until I came back to England after that. I went through from Normandy, of course, and they broke through Caen to our next depot it was in northern France, in Lille. And from Lille we went into Belgium. And from Belgium I was stationed in Brussels, I was stationed in Ghent, I was stationed in... what they call the diamond place there, where they have all the diamonds?

Harper: Antwerp?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Antwerp. And there we got some [unclear] coming in there. And from there we went into Holland. In Holland we got a couple of B-2's coming close, they tried to hit the airport, but I guess they didn't hit it. And afterward we went into Germany. We crossed into Germany.

Harper: And what did you do exactly? You weren't able to fly, right?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: No. No. What I was, was a dispatch for the intelligence. Like I had always to go to the tower when they take off, the planes, orders to the tower, orders to some that they didn't want to send by wire, to some other, this airport or something, or to headquarters. Like when I, afterward, when I was in Germany, I used to go up to headquarters every two days, and the headquarters was ten kilometers from Belsen-Bergen, the RAF headquarters. I used to be in Belsen-Bergen every second day, I used to go into Belsen-Bergen, I remember. I remember when we came into Germany, it is the first air base in Germany. We came in from Holland, was not far from the Dutch border. It was about near Oldenburg. Between Oldenburg and Bremen. It was near the Dutch border, so over there they did liberate - liberate some camps. After, ten kilometers from us was a town by the name of [Vecht]. One day somebody told me that there's some Jewish girls in a camp in [Vecht]. So I took the jeep, and I drive up there and there is a Jewish camp. So they're all girls. So I sat asking questions: where are they from, what they're from. So they said they took them out from Belsen-Bergen, they brought them to [Vecht]. So I say - they have already a list who is in the camp. So I looked over the list; is anybody from the family? But there was nobody there. And I started going to the camp

all the time. And what happened, they took them back to Belsen-Bergen. They emptied the camp and went to Belsen-Bergen. So I went to Belsen-Bergen. And also I looked over the list in Belsen-Bergen, because they have the names on all in the camp. And nobody from my town, nobody. I couldn't see nobody. So I tried to get the list from other camps, you know. But to make it short, what happened. One day somebody, you know, a Polack came to me. He said, "Jack, there is a camp from the Warsaw, for people that they took out from Warsaw. They had the Warsaw... what do you call it? When the underground was fighting. So there's a camp here for Warsaw, with girls, and they have a dance on Sunday. So they knew I have a jeep, they said, "Let's go to the dance." And I said, "Okay." So we drive up there to the dance, and mostly they're all Polacks. It's all Polish. And there are already men there, too, and there is girls. And we were dancing. And I am standing there, a girl comes over, and she asks me to dance. So I danced. So she looked at me, she said, "Are you Jewish?" I said, "Yes." She said, "I am Jewish." She said, "But nobody knows. They think I'm Polack." Because she was hiding there with the underground as a Polish girl in Warsaw. She said, "I don't know how to get away from here. I don't know where to go." So I said to her, "You have nothing to worry. Today is Sunday. Tuesday I will come, I will pick you up. Have everything ready to go." So she said okay, and that's what I did. I drove up there on Tuesday. I told her what time I'd be there. I came there close to the time. She was waiting, and she jumped in the jeep, off we went. She didn't want nobody to know that, nothing. Off she went, and we drove up. I took her to the air base, to my air base, and I took her to a farmer there that I used to wash my laundry, and I told them to give her a room for maybe a night or two. She would need to stay here. Otherwise, she used to eat with me in the dining room in the Air Force. I told them it was my cousin. So she was with me, and after that I took her to Belsen-Bergen. Then I took her over there to the office, and I left her there.

Harper: Had you - by this time did you know what - where these people had come from? I mean, did you know about the camps?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Which camps?

Harper: The death camps.

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Oh, sure. I already know at that time, sure. As soon as they liberated the first camp, we had a newspaper. I also had an English newspaper. I read. Oh, sure.

Harper: Do you remember your reaction?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, I, listen, I couldn't eat for three days, you know. Since then I never watch anything from the camps, never. It hit me right away. And I stayed in Germany, to make it short. In the meantime when I was in England, I forgot to say, I used to go out to London a lot. In London there was a Jewish club—the Balfour Club, they used to call it. And they had newspapers, you know. So when I came to Scotland, I wrote letters again to Argentina and to Portland. I didn't have nothing. So when I was stationed in Wales, I got a package from New York. The return address, I didn't know who it was, it was Macy's. I didn't know who Macy is, what it is. They had sweaters. They had warm underwear, socks, candy, chocolate, you know. All kinds of salami, all kind of things. And I don't know, so I write a letter to Macy. But I didn't get any answer, you know. But afterward, when I am in London on leave, at the Union Jack 65 [unclear], because I moved. And I'm reading the paper. I read the Jewish paper, The Forward. I read Jewish. So came to my mind, "I am going to write a letter to The Forward in Jewish." I'll write Jewish; English wouldn't come out so good. So I said, "I'll write it in Jewish." And I wrote a letter to The Forward with the names of all my uncles. I knew the

names and where they came from, from what town, and my grandfather's name and everything else that I am looking for them. And it went by. You know, it takes months, all these things. Went by a few months, I get a letter from the American Air Force address, American Air Force, P. O. Box, American Air Force. I opened the letter, and there's a letter from one of my cousins. He's stationed in England. He told me that they got my letter. The Forward, they found my uncles right away. So they, The Forward gave them my address. So they gave him the address, so he wrote me a letter that he is a cousin and he got a letter from New York from his father that I am alive, that I am in England, and he wants to meet me. So I said, "Okay," and so we made a date that I will meet him in London, but in the American Red Cross. The time and the date. I knew when, because I used to get 11 days leave every three months. So I used to go always to London. So this is what happened. I said, "You will recognize me, because you all are Americans, and I will be in a British uniform. So you will know it is me." So as soon as I opened the door and walked in, he was right by the door. He came over and said, "Jack?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Mine's Paul." And that's how he told me about all my family and everything else. That's how I contacted my family in America.

Harper: Did he tell you what happened to your family?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: They didn't know either. They didn't know. Nobody knew. I didn't find out 'til after a while I also, because of the contact of America a nice cousin came from Russia. He was in the Polish army. Two of my cousins. They were in the Polish army in Russia. And they came out. And they came to Poland. They came to Lublin, and that's when they found out that nobody is alive. And my cousin wrote me after that he was in Germany in a displaced person camp near Frankfort. So I went to Frankfort to see him. That's where I met him, in Frankfort. And he didn't go into the town, to Opole, because the Polacks used to kill any Jews who came back. So he couldn't go in there, but he knew that nobody survived. They took all of us. Little by little they took them to the camps, the death camps. The ones they didn't put them in the camp, they used to take them out in the forest and shoot them. That's all I know about my home town. Nobody else. So he is there. He and his brother, the two, they were in Russia, survived. But my brother, I think what happened to him, he joined the Polish army, and he fought with the Polish army in Russia. And he was killed while fighting. This is the only way I can think about it. Otherwise, he would contact. And now, soon they will go into Portland. As soon as the war ended I went to London. I went to the American embassy, and I made application to go to the United States. Of course, they didn't figure me as a displaced person, because a displaced person didn't need any affidavits or nothing. But I was, I go as a, what's it called? as an immigrant, so I needed a visa. So they gave me a number, but to me they said I had to wait. Well, it didn't bother me to wait, because I was free anyway. So I was still in the service.

Harper: Could you have stayed in England?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes. Oh, yes. They asked me to stay. As a matter of fact, they wanted me to stay in the service, but I didn't.

Harper: In Palestine were you.... ?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: No, not in Palestine, no.

Harper: I know. But would you have been able to go to Palestine?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: I don't think so. At that time still not. Well, at that time - in 1948 or so they had the Israel. Sure, in 1948, because I didn't leave England 'til 1949. Of course I could have

gone if I wanted to. I didn't want to go at that time, because I had family here. I have nobody in Palestine. So I waited 'til the end of 1948, from 1945. I had affidavits, too. I brought them to the embassy and everything else to get a visa. And when I got the visa, they called me to the embassy, and they told me that I have the visa. I went through a medical, and they said I will have the visa in a week or two, but I have to get a discharge before they can give me the visa. I said, "Okay." And so I go back to the camp and I tell them that I can get the visa if I get a discharge. So they said, "No, you get the visa first, then we will give you a discharge." I said, "I think that you and the American embassy should get together to see how this is going to work, because the American embassy says that I have to get a discharge. You say I have to get a visa. The thing is not going to work." So okay, so I don't know how they arranged it, they must have arranged it. I get a call that they will give me the discharge. But they have to book for me transportation, because they have to pay for it. This was the agreement when I signed up.

Harper: The British had to pay?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: The British had to pay my transportation. So I got the visa, and I came back in the camp. I was stationed in England at that time already. And they said, "Well, we cannot get transportation 'til" February. This was I think November. They said, "In February, on the Queen Mary." I said, "Well, I have no choice." So they said, "Now, if you want to stay here, you can stay in camp, or we will pay you if you want to live on your own someplace." I said, "Okay. Let me think." So I had a friend. He met a girl from Belsen-Bergen, and he got discharged and he lived in Nottingham. And he bought a house in Nottingham. I get a place to stay. So I went to see him, and I said, "How can I get some place to stay?" So the wife says she knew me from camp, because I used to come to Belsen-Bergen all the time. I knew her before he knew her. So she said, "Jack, why don't you stay with us here? We will charge you room and board, and that's all." I said, "Okay." So I went back and I said, "Okay. Now, I want a discharge, and I have a place to stay." So they say they will pay me so much a month, the Air Force will pay me for living condition and everything else. So good. So I stayed there 'til I got the visa on the Queen Mary. And on the Queen Mary I had a nice cabin, me and another guy, a soldier, a Polish soldier; we both got a cabin. And we didn't go too long on board, four-and-a-half days, I wish it would last two weeks. It was the best boat ride I ever had. The parties and dancing and all you want. It was a pleasure.

Harper: Can I interrupt you? I'm sorry.

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes.

Harper: In Nottingham was there a Jewish community?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Oh, I used to go there all the time. A Jewish community, oh, sure.

Harper: You used to go to shul there?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Only once. But Jewish community, I was there mostly every evening, because they used to have dancing. Matter of fact, they taught me dancing. Yes, and I used to like to dance anyway. And I met some Jewish girls there. I met some girls from Germany, Jewish girls. And it was a nice time. I liked it. I had nothing to do. As I said, you sit around all day in the coffee houses to kill time, wait for the boat. And when I came, when they put me on the boat and I came to New York, of course my uncles waited there too. They knew I'm coming. I had uncles. But as soon the boat landed... oh yes, on the boat I had them call my name. On the Queen Mary, they called my name and they told me I have to go to an office. They gave

me the number where to go to an office. The Queen Mary is like a city, with stores, offices, you know, like this. So I come in the office, and HIAS is there. So right on the door, HIAS. I didn't know what the HIAS was. It was a Jewish organization what they take care of the immigrants, Jewish immigrants. It's Hebrew and it was something. So a lady is there. She said, "I have the list here from the boat, and I see that you're stateless," because my passport was stateless, because I wasn't a citizen. And she said, "And the name, I see you are Jewish." I said, "Yes." She said, "I am here to see that when you get to New York, that you will have a place to stay. We take care of all the newcomers." So I said to her, "Thank you, but I have a place to stay." She said, "Where?" I said, "At my uncle's." And she said, "We didn't know. We thought that you came from the camps and you have nobody." And I said, "No, I have a place to stay. I don't need any help." So this is how they had the HIAS there.

And my uncles waited there, and in the meantime a colonel from the British embassy came up, a wing commander, to take me off the boat. I was the first, me and the others are the first ones to get off the boat, because people from the embassy came, so they took us right off the boat. And we came off the boat, and he gave me... as soon as we came down the boat, he told me that he is a representative of the [unclear] and he have a ticket for me to Portland, Oregon." I have a ticket to Portland, Oregon. And I have some money for you to buy, because you go from here to Chicago; you change in Chicago. You get the City of Portland." That's what I remember, it was a train." You have a bed. You have a cabin with a bed, and here, I give you money to buy food on the way 'til you get to Portland." So I said, "Okay, thank you." I didn't say nothing. And my uncles are waiting there, too. He said good-bye and he left, and my uncles were standing right by him. And I told them that I have to leave tonight. He said, "You're not leaving tonight." He took the ticket, he called up the railroad, he cancelled my reservation. And they say they will call back for another reservation. And I stayed in New York a month. I stayed in New York a month. As a matter of fact, two days after me one of my cousins came from the camps. I waited for him at the dock when the ship came in. He came from Germany, from the camps. The two brothers that are left alive—my first cousins.

Harper: What camps were they in?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, he wasn't in a concentration camp. He came from Russia. He was in the army. But he ran away from Poland after and they had a camp for displaced persons. It was already after. So he didn't have to wait for a visa. He came as a displaced person. So I waited for him, and me and him, and I used to say, "Look, come on, I will take you all over New York. I know how to ride subways. I've been on subways all over Europe, in France, and I was in England." I said, in all big cities," I said. English, broken English but English." In all the big cities. I was riding. And I spoke English, too. So we went around New York. I stayed in New York a month with the family, and I came to Portland. In Portland I had an aunt and an uncle. They had a hotel right on Broadway and Salmon, the Hilton is now there on the same spot. This was where their hotel used to be. So I stayed there. My aunt was my mother's sister. They looked alike, both of them looked alike. I came in on a Wednesday. She said, "Jack," she said, "I think you better take a rest for a while." I said, "A rest?" I said, "I've been resting all this time." I said, "I don't want to rest. I want to go to work." I said, "I think I'll rest 'til next week." And that's what I did. I took a rest the next week, after I went to work in a factory. I worked in a garment factory. Reuben Kalish, used to be Pacific Garment Company.

Harper: Were you staying at the hotel?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: I stayed, I lived in the hotel all the time. They had the apartment there, too.

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This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word. It is not the primary source, and it has not been checked for spelling or accuracy.

Harper: Did you get involved immediately in the Jewish community here?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: I used to go Jewish community all the time.

Harper: Did you belong to a synagogue here?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, I went to a synagogue, but I didn't belong to it. I used to go to the Sixth Street shul. I think is the Neveh Shalom now. They were all together at that time. I used to go that shul but I wasn't a member. I don't have any money to be a member. I have to go to work first, make money. When I started to work, I got a dollar an hour. Worked 35 hours, my paycheck used to be \$28, clear, and I saved, because I didn't pay. My uncle didn't take any room and board. So I said, "If you don't take any room and board, I'm going to help you in the hotel." That's what I did. So I helped in the hotel. And I worked in the factory. Of course, after I got paid more, you know. I started making more money. And I worked there 'til about 1954 or 1955 I think. In the meantime, you know, I went to school at night. After I had to learn more English and, you know, the history and all this stuff. After I had to go learn the history for the citizenship papers. You had to go to school, because they give you a test. See, here they give you a test to become a citizen. And I worked in the hotel. I can tell you, I worked seven days a week. Saturday and Sunday I didn't work in the factory but I worked in the hotel. It didn't bother me. I helped them because I was used to it. And I worked 'til 1955 or the end of 1954. My aunt and uncle, they got old and they couldn't handle themselves. And the hotel didn't do good enough for me to draw money, because it makes a living, but it doesn't a 50 room hotel, you know, small hotel. She said to me, "Jack" I said, I told her, I said, "I will quit and I will manage the hotel." She said, "You can't quit, because you have to make some money." I said, "It isn't important," I said. "If you cannot work," I said, "I will help you." And that's what I did. I quit, and I worked in the hotel.

I drew only expenses for myself, you know, to go out or something, but I didn't draw any wages. And I worked in the hotel. So I worked. I handled everything in the hotel. They didn't have any children, and my uncle said, you know, she didn't know and I didn't know that she had cancer on the pancreas, but I didn't know. And lucky that the Hilton came and bought out, you know? So they bought out, so we got out of the hotel. So she used to go to Hot Springs, Arkansas, for taking baths, the mineral baths there. So I said, "Okay, we'll take the car, and we'll all go there." So we took an apartment. We left everything and we took off. We went to Hot Springs, Arkansas. We drove all the way.

Laine: To Arkansas?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Arkansas. Hot Springs, Arkansas. This is his area—Clinton's. It's a beautiful small town, a lot of Jewish people there come there for the baths from Chicago, that area. And it was an open town. I guess the Mafia must have been there, all gambling, full of gambling. And I went to shul matter of fact it was Shavuot at that time, and I went to shul and there was a Jewish restaurant, a good restaurant, a Jewish restaurant where we used to eat all the time. And we stayed there I think six weeks. I only took a few baths. I didn't need them; but they took the bath. And the bath helped her. We took an apartment. They knew already the area. They went there often, so they knew the Hot Springs area. So we stayed in an apartment where they stayed before. It was next to a Jewish hospital. Right next door was a Jewish hospital. I forgot what that's called that hospital. It may have been the City of Hope Hospital, or something like this. A lot of Jewish people from New York came there. All your people without money, this is free. As far as I know, they didn't charge. But you have to have a letter

from somebody from the community or something. So they didn't charge. Maybe they took some... But they did charge the people who had money. But the people that didn't have any money didn't pay anything.

After from there we went to New York to see the family, the three uncles, cousins, and everything else. And we stayed in Far Rockaway, Long Island. We took an apartment, and we stayed there a whole summer on the beach. And after Labor Day I saw when we drove that they cannot take it anymore. They wouldn't take a plane. I said, "You take the train, but I will go back by car." And I went back by car by myself to Portland. And of course they stayed in the apartment, but I had to go do something and cannot stay. And my aunt got sicker and sicker, you know, after a while. She had pain and this. She had so much pain that they told us that we have to move from the apartment, because at night, the neighbors complained. So they gave us another apartment.

So I went to the doctor, and I told him the story. The doctor was a good friend of my aunt. He knew her for years. I said, "Doctor, maybe we should go buy a house so nobody would bother us." So he said, "No, don't buy the house." I guess he knew already that she wouldn't last long. But he said, go get a duplex or something. So I went out, and I found a place, a duplex. And I took it. And she didn't last long. A couple weeks later she died; she passed away. So we had to take her to New York because they had a plot in New York. My home town had a cemetery there, in New York. All the people that are members in the society they are buried there. My aunt and uncle had a plot over there. So I took her to New York, and me and my uncle went with her. And after the funeral, my uncle goes into the bathroom there, and he cannot pass water. So from the cemetery we take him right away to the hospital. He had to have surgery, prostate surgery. So after the surgery, he had to stay there in New York, but I had to go back. So I went back. He stayed in New York I think a month, and after he came.

And after that I got a job in a store. What was the name? Cooper. I still remember. It was on Morrison Street. It was a clothing store, a good clothing store, and I was alteration man. I did both because I worked as a tailor for a while. And I worked there for a while. And you know, when you go to work, you go in a restaurant there. I used to go for coffee in the morning, and you meet other salesmen from other stores, and you all talk. And I met some. And the store of mine, the owner, he liked to drink. And also he didn't pay the bills.[laughs] So he didn't last long after that. They went after him, and he had to file bankruptcy. So he went and filed bankruptcy, so I was the receiver. They made me the receiver, that whatever is sold, I should give the money... I know where every time he give me check, I had to go to the bank and I deposit it, so the girl says, "There's so many checks waiting, but I'll pay you first." So this way I got paid. [laughs] Anyway, it went through bankruptcy. I was the receiver, and after they closed up the store.

One of the guys that I used to have coffee with in the morning became a manager of a discount house on 82nd and Division, GSC. It was a membership discount house. It was owned by the Goldbergs here from Portland, the three brothers. And the men's department had a license department from Chicago, Erie Clothes. So they hired him as a manager. He heard that I had no job, so he calls me up and he said, "Jack, how about coming to work here?" I said, "Okay." So I started working for him. And I was the same thing. I was a salesman, did a little alterations. You didn't alter much, because it was a discount house; people took it with them. And I worked there about a year. A little over a year comes a guy from the headquarters, from

Chicago, and he fired the manager. I don't know why. He fired him. And he was a good friend of mine, the manager. So he asked me to take over as manager. I said, "I'm sorry. He is my best friend. I am not going to take over as manager." I didn't want to take the job. He said, "But this has nothing to do with it. I fired him anyway." I said, "I'm sorry. I cannot take over his job." I still work the way I work. The way I was. I wouldn't take it over. So he interviews people. He interviews and interviews and he nothing he likes. He comes back to me. He said, "Why don't you go ask him?" His name was Hart, the other guy. He said, "Why don't you ask him and tell him the whole story?" So I went to him and I said, "Listen, let's have lunch." He came down to the store that they had the lunch counter there. So I told him the story. I said, "He wants me to take over, and I don't want to take over, because, you know, you're my best friend. They fired you." He said, "Jack, you take it. If you don't take it, somebody else will take it. So what is the difference? I don't mind," He said. "I'm fine." So I said, "Okay." So I took over the discount place. I ran it. It was I think 1962. It was 1962 or 1963, 'til 1965.

And that time somebody here, my friend's brother-in-law, came to Portland from Israel, and he also worked in a clothes store in a place that used to be a wholesale house for clothing. And he came every day there, and he said, "Jack, let's go in business. Let's go in business." I said, "I'm making good money here." You know, I was making good money, and I said, "Why do I need to go in business?" I didn't say that I was in business before. I opened up a store with somebody here, and I stayed only a few months, and I couldn't get along. It was terrible. So I already had a lesson. So I said, "No, no. I'm making good money." And my uncle also was still alive, but he was always sick. He had cancer on the lung. He didn't know it, but I knew. The doctor told me. And he was suffering and everything else. I used to take care of him. He used to go to a place that he played cards. After work I used to come and pick him up and take him home. And once he sat down with me, he said, "Jack," he said, "You know, I know you mean good," he said, "but it's too hard for you." He said, "Why don't I go to the Robison Home?" I said "If you want to go, go. But you don't have to go. Don't worry about me. I don't mind. I'll take care of you. You don't have to worry about it." And I said, "Tell you what." One of his friends was there, in Robison Home. I said, "I will take you down on Friday night for services, and you look over there and see if you like it, you can stay there if you want to. I will pick you up and take you to town, take you this. Anyway. But go have a look yourself." He said, "Okay. Let's go." So we went there on Friday night to services there. And he looked around, and he sees the other people. He said, "No, Jack. I don't think I can stay here." He said, "No, I better stay home." So I said, "Okay." He stayed home.

And in 1965 I told him that a guy asked me to go in business with him. He said, "What do you need business?" He said, "You're making good money, you're this, and everything else." I said, "Let me tell you something. I'm getting older, too. In business I am here. Over here he can fire me. If I were my own boss, I said, nobody would fire me." He said, "But business is tough." I said, "If it won't work, I'll go back tailoring." I said, "Or go back and do something." I said, "I can always make a living," I said. But I said, "I'm going to take a chance." And I told the guy, I said, "Okay, we'll go in business." I said, "Only one thing." I said, "I know where you work; I know what you carry. This is not what I want to go into. I want to go into the best." I said, "Quality clothes only." He said, "Why?" I said, "Because this kind of clothing, you have every store in town." I said, "You have a lot of competition. Quality clothing, you only have a few stores." So, and I am at this time, I know a lot of people. I've been in this town already over about fifteen years or more. I said, "I know a lot of people, and also when my uncle goes gambling, I go with him too. These are people who buy clothes. And I go

sometimes to a nightclub, too, that I know people, and I say we'll go the best. There's no competition." He had no choice, because otherwise I wouldn't go, and he wanted to go bad. Now we had to look for a location. So he came one day, he tells me there's a location on Morrison Street. I said, "You're telling me about Morrison, I worked in that store. It's empty now. That store has no traffic. That isn't a good location." I said, "No. Wait 'til we find a good location."

New Year, this was New Year 1965. I remember. It was in the afternoon, I knew downtown well, because I lived there for ten years in the hotel. So I knew there was a restaurant open 24 hours a day. Used to be called the Jolly John. So I went there to have a coffee, and they had two entrances. And I parked on Washington. I sat there and didn't pay attention. But when I left I went to the entrance, the other entrance out, and I see an empty store that used to be a drug store, an all-night drug store. It is empty. It was small, and I liked it. So I called him up and I said, "Now we have to stop, right here, Broadway and Washington, downtown, is a good place, a good location." He said okay. He didn't know much, because he came from Portland, he worked in the place, never went anyplace. So we opened.

I went right away Monday, the first day after the New Year, I don't remember if it was Monday or what day it was. I went upstairs to the office and, "I want to rent the store." So I remember, I took a lease for three years to take a chance. I didn't want to take a chance for longer. Three years, \$270 a month rent. Okay. So now we have to buy merchandise, and money, you know. So both of us don't have enough money just to pay for the fix-up. Imagine, you know. But we have to fix up the store. So I am the architect. I had the idea already, the layout of the store. And I went and I told them what we will paint it here. We will put a red carpet, I still remember, put a red carpet and put a chandelier in the middle. The lighting, I got help from my friends who used to have a big place here of lighting and plumbing. The Gilberts, Gilbert brothers. I knew them well, so they helped me a little with the lighting. But the Gilberts sent me to a guy, a special guy who makes the lightings, and he sent down the girl, a good designer, and she fixed me up nice lighting on the top. I painted the store dark, black, with a red carpet, a lot of light. The fixtures I had also a German Jew, this carpenter, I told him how I wanted the fixtures, and he fixed up the fixtures that we didn't have to spend too much money. As a matter of fact, after I fixed up that store, when people came by there, they couldn't recognize it, because it was drug store before. The architect from upstairs came downstairs and said, "Who's your architect?" I said, "You're looking at him." I said, "I'm not going to spend any money." So the money what we had, we didn't have to spend too much. We went to Los Angeles. Both of us, we drove to Los Angeles to buy merchandise. But again, first we went to. . what you call it? For credit. We went to take out a credit reference from... what do you call the company here? I can't think of it.

We took the car and we drive to Los Angeles. We go to one company that we want to buy. He said, because we were buying better merchandise that time, if somebody carried the line they wouldn't sell it here. So we go to one company and they told us they cannot sell us because there is already a store in Portland carries this line. At that time it was this one. Now it isn't this one. Now they sell everybody. So I had names of companies. So I go to another company; I knew the names of the salesmen. And we sat down, he said, "Yes, you can buy." So we started getting a lot of clothing, suits and other things. And we gave him the credit references and all this here and everything else. But we still have to buy more. We have to buy shirts. We have to buy others. And of course they gave us orders. After that they checked the credit, but

the main thing is suits. So we go to another company, and the company had the factory in San Diego. It was an Italian company. And the owner, we came down to see him, and we told him straight. I said, "We'd like to buy your merchandise, but we don't have any money. We don't have too much money." This is the way we told him." But you will get paid. I know you're going to get paid." And he was asking questions and this and this. He said, "Okay. Let's go for lunch." Okay. So we go for lunch; he took us for lunch. We eat lunch, and we're talking different things. He said, "You know something? I'm going to give you merchandise. I'm sure you're going to pay." That's the way he told us. And, "You just tell me what you need." We told him we need for an opening an eye-opener, you know. Like the best, the first thing is when people see the first time what kind of merchandise you have, this opens their eyes. You have to have an eye-opener for the window. He said, "I will send you eye-openers." And after we left him he sent me to another company for shirts. He said, "Tell them they should talk to me." And I went there and they took an order. And do you know, everybody shipped us. In the beginning, of course, it takes time to build up inventory, but when I got in the first shipment of the merchandise from this guy in San Diego, the most beautiful things you can see. The window, everybody stopped at the window, because nobody in town had it. But at that time, you know, the most expensive suit at that time was \$120. That was a lot of money. Imagine that I opened up the store, my suits ran \$120. When I retired, my suits run \$1000, \$990, my suits. My shirts run over a hundred dollars when I closed the store, because you improve your merchandise and everything else.

And so we started off, but you have to look for customers. I went around. I was a hustler, because I knew a lot of people. In the beginning I got people from the gambling place there where my uncle used to gamble. They had money. They bought good merchandise. I went to the nightclubs. And I got the owners, and we built up. It took us two years 'til we were in the black. I mean, we paid off our bills and we were in good shape. We didn't draw any money, for ourself—very little—'til we paid off the bills. And I built up a good business with good merchandise, high quality. I had one of the best stores in town. And we stayed downtown from 1965. In 1975 we opened up another store in Washington Square, and I stayed in Washington Square. Ours was one of the best stores over there. And we did good. Worked out.

But I didn't finish with my uncle, of course. My uncle got worse. He couldn't breathe. And I took him to the hospital. They took out the fluid all the time. I begged him. I told him, "Don't go to the card games because they smoke." But you couldn't tell him. He said he didn't want to live anyway. He told me when my aunt died he didn't want to live. One time in the hospital he tried to jump out the window. But they caught him. He didn't want to live. But he didn't listen to me 'til one day... I always used to tell the neighbor (she lived in the other duplex, the other side) she should check on him once in a while. I gave her a key. So one day she calls me and she said, "I went in to check your uncle, and he is in the bathroom locked up, he doesn't want to open up the door. And I think he did something to himself." So I called the police, and the police went there and they broke open the door. He put a knife in his stomach. He tried to commit suicide. So the ambulance came and took him to the hospital and he had surgery. He was in the hospital and he came out of it after a while. He still went gambling, 'til over there they had to take him from there to the hospital, and he passed away. I also had to take him to New York the same way [as I did for my aunt]. And I already moved from there. I couldn't stay there anymore. So I moved to another apartment.

And as I say, after I had the store, I was busy with the store day and night. Also six days I was working and the seventh day, Sunday, I used to do the book work, you know, paperwork. But it didn't bother me. I was used to it. I always worked seven days a week. So when I opened up the shopping center and I had to work seven days, it didn't bother me either. I am used to it. We worked, built up a nice business in Washington Square with our nice store, 'til last July. This was in 1993 in July I closed it, retired, sold it.

Harper: What was the name of the store?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: The Golden Beau.

Harper: And all this time you were involved in the Jewish community?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, I wasn't too much involved going there. I belonged to the Jewish [Community Center] few years I didn't because I didn't go. I was in the synagogue community 'til the last there; my son didn't go there either. After that he became -[unclear, sounds like Yankee]. I didn't tell you. I got married in 1971. I couldn't get married before. I didn't get married, because I had to take care of my aunt and uncle, and I couldn't at that time support a wife. And I figured if I get married, a wife is not going to stand that I have to take care, you know, of things, because you know how it is. I said so I didn't get married 'til late. I got married in 1971. And my son was born in 1974. And I got divorced in 1988, I think.

Harper: Was your wife Jewish?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes. She wanted the divorce.

Harper: And did you raise your son Jewish?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Oh, sure. What are you talking about? You should see his Bar Mitzvah. He had a Bar Mitzvah. I had a lot of my customers, and they never saw a Bar Mitzvah like this. As a matter of fact, he used to read the Torah for them. Not only at the Bar Mitzvah. He started all the full service. He started in the morning service, he read the Torah; he did the Shacharit, the Musaf. He did the whole service on his Bar Mitzvah. The chazzan didn't do nothing. Oh yes, he went to Hillel. He went to Hillel with Mrs. Franklin's daughter, at the same time. 'Til the second grade he went to Hillel. [interruption]

I think I got most of it. I couldn't give everything exactly. Things you forget. As I say, I didn't have it easy in the beginning here. I worked hard. But, as I say, nothing bothered me. I didn't feel sorry for myself, nothing. Because some people say, "You have to go on your own and start thinking of yourself." I said, "Let me tell you something. It was nice of my aunt and uncle to bring me here and not to want to take a penny from me. Even I helped them, because they didn't want me to help them, but I volunteered to help them. But I cannot leave them. They have nobody here. Who's going to take care of them? There's nobody to take care of them. I have to do it." And I did it. After that, after that I married. I was married 18 years.

Harper: I know we talked a little bit about this, but what do you attribute to your survival back in the camps in Russia?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, what survival is, you have to take - as I say, in the camp you have to take care of yourself, to see the best you can do to survive. And to survive is to have food. That's number one. Number two, is to keep warm. It was very cold there. It was so cold that your face used to freeze all the time, that we used to watch each other, and as soon as we got white we used to tell each other, so we used to rub in snow. You see, because if you stay

outside from the morning 'til, I don't know, 'til the evening. You don't know how many hours because, I figured at least eight hours, or maybe more. But at least eight. So you are outside in Siberia. Lucky there's no wind over there. Otherwise, I don't think nobody could survive. Lucky I didn't get sick there. I once wanted to get sick. I wanted to get a temperature. I walked out in my underwear to catch a cold so I can stay home that day and rest. I couldn't catch a cold. I couldn't get any temperature. But I wanted to get temperature to stay, because I was so tired. You worked seven days a week. You know, you slept a few hours like a log, because you had no mattress, anyway, but who cares? You lay down and you sleep. I was young, so I could do these things. But I looked at people. Every day I had to bury people you know. You know, it gets you, you know, it gets you. And you know that they died natural. They're not killed. But it gets you, you see people that you, you talked to them yesterday, and today they are dead. And today you are digging their grave.

As a matter of fact, one of the guys, they carried him out, because I guess he passed out, and when they carried him out, he woke up. It was so cold outside, he woke up. So he says to the guy, "What are you carrying me out for?" He said, "You're dead." He said, "What do you mean I'm dead?" He said, "The doctor said you were dead." [laughs] He said the doctor said he was dead. So he came back in the barracks. You know, I always used to kid him, because he was with me in the army after. He was still in the army with me after. I used to kid him, I'd say, "You know, you were dead." That's right. But you know, it was the way things were there, it was, you don't imagine things. You don't think. All you think of is today, to survive.

And I survived, as I say, by chopping wood. I was trying to work as a tailor. I didn't last long, because to stay in, you see. To stay off the cold. And if you work as a tailor, you stay underground. They had underground, little cabins that you stayed there. And you worked only at night. In daytime you sleep, because when they came home from work, you fixed things for them. You didn't have to be a tailor, just put together things. So I got myself in for a while, but it didn't last long. Too bad. But you lied. You'd tell them you are a tailor; they believe you. That's all. Survive, this is the main thing. And I survived because of my age. Nothing else. Because everybody, the guys, even the criminal ones, the older ones, felt sorry for me. They told me straight, "You're not supposed to be here. You're supposed to be in a juvenile camp. Why would they send you here?" I said, "I don't know." I said, "All the doctor did is look at my muscles. Maybe I had muscles." And they checked my heart, and that's all. I said, "I don't know why they sent me here." What did I know? And that's how you survive. And to survive even the train from Siberia, not from Siberia to [Kutlas] where they gave me the paper isn't so bad. But from [Kutlas] going to Tashkent where we traveled, to survive the train is dangerous, too, because we did a little black market. We didn't realize if they would catch us, you go right back to the camp for ten years. See, you think you take a chance, you know? But when you are hungry, you don't think about it, because you have to get food. And since I left home I was always... well, I had food when I was by my uncle's sister, but after, since I got arrested, I was hungry all the time. They give you, but you never get enough food, because the food they give you is nothing. It's water. And you try to survive however you can.

Harper: Have you been back to Poland?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: No. I am thinking and thinking to take myself, but I don't know if I want to go back to my home town. It reminds you of things, you see? It is hard to go back, especially for me. I take it very hard.

Harper: Do you hold any bitterness or resentment against the Germans or the Russians?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, you see, for the Germans, of course you do feel, you know. You do. You cannot say you don't. You do feel. They killed my parents. They killed my whole family. You know, but as I say, things now, you have to forget. There's a new generation there, like anyplace else. And you have to forget. You have to live with them. You have to do business with them. You have to live with them. I have now here some German friends. I do have some German friends, yes. About the Russians, no, because this was done by the government. See, the people didn't support them on that, on the camp. The German people supported the Nazis. They never... there was nothing happening in Germany against the Nazis. They talk there was an underground. They had a few people. I don't know how big of an underground. But the Russian people suffered themselves. It's not the Jews. They had more Russians than Jews there, I mean in the camps. More Russians than Polacks even. I think there was about 800,000 Polacks in the camps. There was millions of Russians. As a matter of fact, in one camp, when you go from one camp to the other sometimes you pass another camp, and so they gave us a shower in one camp. So who was working in the laundry? Is our marshal from... his wife. He was shot, and she got 20 years. That's Stalin. You see, she worked in the laundry. She got 20 years. See, it wasn't the Russians. It was the government, the system. They didn't just persecute Jews or Polacks, they persecuted their own people, more than us. But the Germans persecuted mostly 90% Jews.

Harper: Have you been to Israel?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: No. I tell you, I'd like to go, but you see I have a brother with family in South America. All up in age. Now I may go, because I have more time. When I was in business, I couldn't go, because if I took off to go, I went to Argentina to see my brother, to see my cousins and others. But now I'm planning to go take my son and go to Israel. Yes, I will go to Israel now, but I couldn't go.

Harper: When did you first tell your son about your experiences?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, I tell him little by little all the time. I tell him all the time little by little. As a matter of fact, "Schindler's List," I told him, I said, "I cannot go. But you go see it." And he went to see it. But now, when you called, I was preparing to make a tape for him. So now I don't have to make a tape, because we'll have this, which is better than a tape. But he knows a lot of it, yes. He knows most of it. I told him, yes. Because I always taught him. The only time I can talk to him now good is when I tell him, "Let's go for dinner." He has no choice. He sits down to eat, he has to listen.

Harper: When was the first time you started talking about what happened to you?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: To who?

Harper: Well, to anybody.

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, I never gave anybody the whole story, no.

Harper: But you told people that.

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Yes, people knew - well, yes, people knew some of it, yes.

Harper: When did you start doing that? Was it a conscious decision? Was it difficult for you?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: No, I only talk little by little if people asked me. I didn't come and tell them. If somebody asked me about the camp, about this, or what I did, I told them. But I never went and told them by myself a story. I never told anybody, no.

Harper: Did you know other survivors living here in Portland?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Oh, yes. Sure. I met the [unclear]. You know them all. You have the names. I met - the first time I met is the Langfords, you know at Carpet City. After that was Kryszek, you know Kryszek? She is active here [at the Holocaust Resource Center. He is talking about Chella Kryszek], the second wife. I know his first wife; she was like a sister to me. We all, the Kreischech, the Langforths, and the brother Sarna [?] used to be my friends. We used to run around together. We all came the same year here. And all the holidays, I used to eat together with them. All the holidays when I was single I used to eat with them, after my aunt and uncle passed away. See, all of us. All of us together. And still now we are very close friends. I had some others, too, who are not in the group. Survivors, oh yes.

Because the Langfords I met... it was a funny thing. I was staying at the front of the hotel one evening on Broadway. It was summer. And two guys walked by and they talked Jewish. So I said, "If they talk Jewish they must be survivors because Americans don't talk Jewish." So I stopped them. I said, "I heard you talking Jewish. Where are you from?" They said, "From Poland." I said, "So am I." So we started talking. They are survivors. That's how I met them. After that I met the Langfords and I met the Blacks. I met the Winklers and all, everybody. We used to be a group of survivors. We used to play poker, a friendly poker, every Sunday for over 20 years. Every Sunday we used to get together. A friendly poker. You couldn't lose more than \$3 or \$4, or win that much. But we used to meet every Sunday in another home. We used to have coffee and cake, you know. For over 20 years, 'til they started passing away. You didn't have nobody to play with.

Harper: Is there anything that you left out of your story that you want in?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Not that I can think of now.

Harper: Do you have - do you have a message for future generations that may be watching this tape?

FRUCHTENGARTEN: Well, what message can I give? I say first of all nobody should deny that he is Jewish. I say, you are Jewish, you are born Jewish, and we should be proud that we are Jewish. I know that some people try to deny they're Jewish. They're afraid of this. The Jewish people, we have a state of Israel, and we see how the state of Israel is behaving. I mean, they fought for it, and they have a good country, one of the best countries of the small countries, I think. They have a lot of scientists there. And I think they will never be ashamed of what they did for Israel. And also they have one of the best armies there, plus the best air force, I think. Better than anyplace in the world. And that's why they keep Israel safe. Otherwise there wouldn't be any Israel. And I tell this to my son, too. I say, "Listen, I am not racist. I have nothing against blacks, against Catholics, against anything." I say, "But one thing you should know: if you're going to get married, marry a Jewish girl. For one reason," I say, "You have the same customs; the children will go to synagogue. And we need to build up our family," I say. I lost a whole family. I say, "We still have to build up our family." So but you know, you tell them, he said he will do it, but you know--. You never know. I hope he does.

Harper: Thank you very much.

FRUCHTENGARTEN: You're welcome.

Jack Fruchtengarten 5/26/1994

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This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word. It is not the primary source, and it has not been checked for spelling or accuracy.

[End of Interview]