

**Interview with Eli Dortort**  
**August 3, 2005**

**Beginning Tape One, Side A**

Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Eli Dortort**, conducted by **Gail Schwartz** on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2005 in **Kensington, Maryland**. This is tape number one, side **A**. What is your full name?

Answer: Right now? **Eli Dortort**.

Q: Is that the name that you were born with?

A: No. I used to have a different name, and my name was **Klemfner**. But I was in the Polish army, and I deserted. So then I changed my name.

Q: When were you born?

A: Hm?

Q: When were you born?

A: I was born 1920, August, au -- au -- August the first, 1920.

Q: Oh. So your birthday was two days ago?

A: What?

Q: Your birthday was two days ago?

A: No, my birthday was not two days ago, because I -- let me tell you. My birthday was not two days ago, but my birthday will be the twenty -- the 29 -- the s -- the 30<sup>th</sup> of August.

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Q: Okay. And where were you born?

A: I was born in **Poland, Galicia**. It was a terrible country, I wish they would never be existing, but then I wouldn't be here.

Q: What was the name of your town?

A: Of the ta -- town? **Zdachov, Zdachov**. That was named after a Polish judge who was ju -- at the time, and they named it after him.

Q: And was it near a bigger town? W-Was it near a larger town?

A: No, it was a very small town. For -- was basically a -- a town where you call a little bit -- a little bit bigger, but let me give you what I want to say. The town was very small, **prob** about 6,000 people there are living, 6,000 people, and there was a big Jewish community there. I was the youngest from my family.

Q: Let's talk about your family now. How long had your family been living in this town?

A: Approximately al -- over -- let me see. I have to remember --

Q: Were your parents born in this town?

A: No, no, no, but -- no, my father, not my mother was born in there.

Q: All right, what was your father's name?

A: **Abraham Klemfner**.

Q: And what did he do?

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A: He -- when he came to **[indecipherable]** basically he came from a very rich family, but they were afraid he will be assimilated and he'll forget all the Jewish thing **[indecipherable]** they were interested my father will know. So -- and then happened, he was a cattle dealer.

Q: Wh-Where was he born, where did he grow up?

A: He was born -- the -- the mountains, **Sopwat**, they call it **Sopwat**. They were -- in the mountains that were from -- let me give you right away. He was born in the a -- the country -- on the mountains in the country there, there were a very small Jewish community.

Q: And tell me about your mother, what was her name?

A: What?

Q: Your mother, what was her name?

A: **Frieda --**

Q: What was her name?

A: **Frieda Dortort**, originally her name was **Frieda Dortort**.

Q: And where was she born?

A: She was born in another town in **Poland** called **Gliniany. Gliniany**. People ask me where it was, I would not be able to tell you.

Q: And how did your parents meet each other?

A: What?

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Q: How did your parents meet each other?

A: They were European. I must know the whole question what you ask me.

Q: I was asking how your mother and your father came to know each other?

A: Oh. My pi -- my mother was a -- a little bit an old woman already at the time. She was 70 years old. No, seve -- 74, something like this, in the 70's, and there was a **shadchen**. You know what a **shadchen** is? In to a **shadchen** they meet and liked each other.

Q: Ah, through a mat -- through a matchmaker we call --

A: [**sings**] Matchmaker, matchmaker, make me a match.

Q: Right. Okay. Then how many children did they have, your mother and your father?

A: My father have -- my mother had first of all her own children. We were eight.

Q: And where were you, were the eldest or the youngest or in the middle?

A: I was a very little boy. I was the youngest of all of them.

Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

A: I was the youngest of all of them, and when I was born, I was very young. You know I was young. You know, I -- right now I look for words.

Q: Okay. Let's talk about your childhood. What memories do you have of childhood? Were you -- was your family very religious?

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A: First of all, I have a Jewish education. I went to **chaider** when I was three -- three years old, Jewish boys used to start learn Jewish things. And then I went to the public school.

Q: And when you were in public school, did you have non-Jewish friends?

A: No, that was a mixed. Was Polish and Ukrainian and then was Jewish.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. How old were you when you went to public school?

A: Three -- no **[indecipherable]** I will tell you right away, six years old.

Q: And what -- what did you like to do? Did you have any hobbies, did you have any interests besides school?

A: You're talking about -- about a very small town, forget about hobbies, I used to like to play. But I used to go a whole day to schools, because when we used to finish one school, then I used to go to the other school, which was called **chaider** or **Talmud Torah**, whatever it was called, I don't remember exactly, but this was how it was called.

Q: And your family was a very religious family?

A: Extremely, extremely, I could not describe to you. Today, when I remind myself how they're so fanatic, I could not tell you even. They were very religious, and I will tell you, when we used to have Passover, we used to have m-matzos, **shmeary** matzos -- you know what **shmeary** matzos are? And then they used to bake them every **Pesach**, is -- exodus from **Egypt**, to remember the exodus from **Egypt**. And

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then they used to not eat all the **shmeary** matzos, my p-parents and my -- and one brother. And we were extremely, extremely religious.

Q: Uh-huh. What language did you speak at home?

A: Yiddish. Yiddish.

Q: And what were the names of your brothers and sisters?

A: My -- I have two kind of brothers. My father married the second time my mother, and th -- they ha -- he had four children, two boys and two girls. One bo -- the boys, they went away from us, they didn't stay too long with us, and I remember them both. One girl, she was run away to -- to **Vienna**, I never met her. And one g-g-girl, she got married in -- in the small town there.

Q: And what about your mother's children?

A: My mother's children, only it was -- what I was with, my a -- my mother didn't have any other children. My mother was very old maid. She was about is -- a -- 18 years old when she got married. Not 18 -- 18 years, yeah, I am right, 18 years old.

Q: And you were the only child she had?

A: And I'm the -- I was the baby.

Q: Were there -- did she have other children?

A: What?

Q: Did she have other children?

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A: No, only the children what she have with ma -- the second husband, was my father.

Q: And what were those children's names?

A: Which one you want to know first?

Q: The oldest.

A: The old -- which, my mother or my father?

Q: Your mother.

A: Mother. The oldest was name -- wait one -- I will give it to you. The oldest n -- was named **Yitzhak**. The second one was named **Mordechai**. The third one was named -- **Mordechai**, yes, I-I made a little bit confusion. You know, **Mordechai** and then was named yak -- not **Yakob**, was not from mine father.

Q: Okay, okay, we'll get back to that later. Did you -- did you play with Polish children?

A: Very little, hardly any. We didn't mix.

Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

A: Ver -- by us intermarriage would be a unbelievable thing. The whole time would have talked was one Jewish woman. She wa -- she was a lawyer, she was **[indecipherable]**. But that's the only thing what I could remember.

Q: Did you like sports when you were a young child?

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A: Yeah, I liked sports, but not sports like here. I used to like to play soccer, which this is football in **Poland**. I used to -- I used to play soccer. I used to be a good player. You know, you had to run a lot, and I used to be a good runner. I used to ye -- I -- I -- what you call a [**indecipherable**] on the front and you catch everything. I forgot --

Q: Any other sports, or just soccer?

A: Just a -- we -- we didn't have too much like here, I must tell you right away.

Q: Did you like to read books?

A: A little bit, yes, yes. I still like to read, even today, which I -- what I'm not the same person than I used to be. Even today I like to read very often, current event.

Q: Yes. Was your family a Zionist --

A: What?

Q: Was your family a Zionist family?

A: What?

Q: Zionist.

A: Zi -- yes, yes. We all believed in **Israel**. We all believed -- we didn't -- they used to believe in the Messiah will come, then we will go to **Israel**. And then the Jewish state was born, they were all still alive. And I couldn't tell you, and I remember it very well already because I was a big boy already. The joy was so big, indescribable. If I would describe -- was like Messiah came, really. The joy -- the



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Jewish e -- had such a joy that si -- I -- hard to describe, hard to describe. They started to dance. Saturday night when the -- the -- the decision in the United Nation came to us, I mean, they started to dance. Saturday night [indecipherable] a-after the -- the --

**Q: Havdalah.**

A: Havda -- after **Havdalah**, yes, good, very good, thank you. After **Havdalah**, and they start Monday morning dancing. And whatever anybody had on the roads they put out -- it was already -- Jewish people were already killed on the roads.

Q: Yeah. We'll get to that a little later. We're still in your childhood. But that's a wonderful description.

A: Okay, a -- I didn't know what to start with.

Q: No -- yeah. Did you have a lot of relatives, like grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins in your town?

A: I will be honest with you, my mother had brothers in **America**. [coughs] Excuse me. Y-You know, when I speak too much, start to come out something. On the a -- nothing [indecipherable]. One second I will come back ...

Q: How would you describe yourself? Were you a very independent child? How would -- when you were young --

A: Yeah?

Q: -- were you a -- a fa --

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A: What age, approximately, do you mean?

Q: Oh, when you were 10 - 11 - 12, wha --

A: I --that's -- I was at home, and I studied all Jewish, or going to the Polish school.

Q: Tell -- tell me about your **Bar Mitzvah**. Your **Bar Mitzvah** was at --

A: I will tell you, you will laugh. You know how much my **Bar Mitzvah** cost?

Swear to God, about 15 cents. My mother made a cake. She didn't go to the store to buy it, because was no such a store they sold cakes. But she went -- she baked a cake and my father bought one-tenth of a liter vodka. And they brought it to shul, and then they -- I ma -- I made a [indecipherable] and that's all. But -- but I studied the tal -- not the **Talmud**, the Jewish [indecipherable] right away started then, before I came **Bar Mitzvahed** because you have a lot to know in the Jewish [indecipherable] law. And that's -- I started ver -- one year almost. The best teachers they ever were there -- and we were very poor, they didn't try to save money, anything on this. This was an event where they want to treat me.

Q: So did you -- did you read from -- chant from the Torah at your **Bar Mitzvah** service?

A: What?

Q: Did you chant from the Torah at your **Bar Mitzvah** service?

A: Yeah, sure, sure. They gave us ra -- possible my **Bar Mitzvah** was [indecipherable] middle of the day I [indecipherable] to the Jewish calendar. And

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no, I didn't do much more than this, because I -- I was studying the Jewish law since childhood. Since childhood, yes, so then I started a little bit more because was more to be learned, and that's all.

Q: And di-did you get any gifts for your **Bar Mitzvah**?

A: Nobody -- who gives gifts? People are poor country. Nobody would give biz -- somebody a gift when he's going into be a **Bar Mitzvah**. Here they make a big deal from it, but not there, man.

Q: Tell me what kind of work your father did.

A: My father, first of all, he came from a village i-in the **Carpathian** mountains [indecipherable] his father -- they moved him away -- they used to live in **Lemberg**. And **Lemberg** become a very assimilated state, so my grandfather -- I did not know him -- I guess I know him for a few months -- I -- I was a little boy when he passed away.

Q: What kind of work did your father do?

A: What?

Q: What kind of work did your father do?

A: My father became a butcher. He didn't wanted to become a butcher, but that's the va -- only thing he could do, because he -- he selled cattles. And the cattle business was much bad, at one time they broke a leg. And when they broke a leg my father took a **goy**, you know what a **goy** is? The -- the **goy** was selling the meat.

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And he made a lot of money. So he say t -- able -- be able to do this all my life, and I will make a better living. And that's all what w-was to it. And he became a butcher.

Q: Did your mother work or did she stay at home the whole time?

A: My mother worked when -- before -- she was a girl. She was 24 years old when she got married. Oh, an old maid. Sh-Sh-She was 24 years old. She used to know how to make certain things which nobody -- on machines, and machine she -- you save a machine -- she used to make socks, for the ever, whatever could come to her hand.

Q: So you're now 13 years old, and now -- then you go into high school? You got --

A: What?

Q: You go into high school?

A: Who? High school, forget it. In **Poland** they didn't have high school. We couldn't afford to go to co -- in the Jewish school my parents didn't save any money. I finished the high school, and that's all it was to it.

Q: And then you started working?

A: What to do there? Was not what to do in a small town like mine.

Q: So what did you do?

A: Sometimes you know, I -- I'll remember when they used to bake matzos, I used to go make th-the matzos because they took only Jewish children. And that's very

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little bi -- but my brothers became butchers too, and they used to go to the villages and buy something and sell it, you know how it wa -- but it's not a big deal.

Q: So when you were fi -- 14 - 15 - 16 and 17, what were you doing?

A: Was hardly anything to do. A small town you didn't have -- sometimes they used to bring in certain things for you have to clean it out or whatever. So I used to go do it, but not always was this a-ability to do.

Q: All right. Did --

A: Do I give you a clear a-answer?

Q: Yes, it's fine. It's fine. So now, when were you first aware of a man named **Hitler**?

A: I what?

Q: When were you first aware --

A: Of **Hitler**?

Q: Of -- of **Hitler**.

A: Oh, I -- we knew it already when he came to power. He came to power -- we knew everything. These things -- we used to have radios, we used to have papers, that's all. But we knew he's not a good man. We knew right away -- none of the p -  
- you know, when -- none of the Polacks, they were good people. I will tell you, they should have dropped dead before I knew them. They were terrible anti-

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Semites. And all the goyim, all the Gentiles, they help, I think, against the Jews, I apologize.

Q: So now, what is your memory, your first memory of the war when it began?

A: That was when the war broke out. The war break out in the first of the month, a -  
-

Q: Fir -- September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939.

A: That's exactly when the war broke out.

Q: And so you are 19 years old.

A: I was 19 years old, yeah, correct.

Q: What -- can you describe that time, please?

A: First of all, we didn't know what would come in, but then **Hitler** made that pact with the Germans and -- **Russia** make a pact, and we were glad the Russian coming in because they were not such murderers. This took approximately a few months, a year -- I would give you exactly the -- and then in June the next year, was on June something, th -- they came in, they invaded **Poland**.

Q: And -- and what are your memories of that time? Can you describe what your town was like then?

A: Which part you mean?

Q: When the Russians came into your town, what was it like? How did your life change?

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A: Right, first of all they not were so anti-Semites. They were more sympathetic Jewish people who c -- who had some intellectual, or ca-capability, they used to go to [indecipherable] offices, and so on. It was a different attitude altogether.

Q: What were you doing at the time that the Russians came in?

A: I was working in an office. I was a [indecipherable] for a [indecipherable] laboratories. I used to check [indecipherable] laboratories. This -- they first of all gave us a few months an exercise to it, or training. That what I used to do. Then came the Holocaust.

Q: Well, all right, the Russians came in and you were working in an office?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: And then what was the next change? You were still living at home?

A: What?

Q: You were still living at home when you were 19?

A: I lived -- lived in home about a few months longer than two ye -- no, they -- in June, they came in in June, I remember right now. You know, sometimes my memory is not too good.

Q: And then what's your next -- what is the next memory that you have? When the Germans came?

A: The German came in. I escaped the last minute, the last, I escape. They came in to us in a sa -- in a Saturday, June the ninth or the 10<sup>th</sup>, I don't remember exactly

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the date they came in. If I would be there another hour, two hours or even a whole day, I wouldn't be alive.

Q: How did you know to escape?

A: Here I will tell you. They was bi -- building a-air -- air drains -- air -- ai-airports, and I was working with them, and then they gave me a ride and took me to **Kiev**.

Q: Wh-Who did this?

A: The -- the people who used to work there, they were no **Hitlers**. They -- there are some people who I used to work with them, they were very pleasant to me, and I didn't have any **[indecipherable]** and they took me o-on the car, that's the **[indecipherable]**. Another Jewish boy came with the same car what I went, but otherwise they didn't have too much place to take in.

Q: Yeah. Did you know you were going to be leaving?

A: What?

Q: Did you know that you were going to be leaving so soon?

A: I-I -- I -- fact, I didn't know when I would see any more my parents and this was the last day I saw my parents.

Q: Were you able to say goodbye to them? Did you n -- did they know you were leaving?

A: What?

Q: Did your parents know you were leaving?



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A: My parents knew [indecipherable] I remember my brother have a few dollars in his pocket, he took out all the money and gave it to me because he knew I'm going away. He never would have had the feeling will be not a good trip.

Q: So you went to **Kiev**?

A: I-I -- the first stop I went to **Kiev**.

Q: And that was what, June 1941?

A: 1941 in June.

Q: Ah.

A: I don't remember exactly what day in June it was, the first of June.

Q: Okay.

A: Do you have it right?

Q: Yes.

**End of Tape One, Side A**

**Beginning Tape One, Side B**

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Eli Dortort**. This is tape number one, side **B**.

And we were talking about how in ju -- in June 1941 --

A: 1941 --

Q: -- you went -- the Russians took you to **Kiev**. How long did you stay there?

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A: In **Kiev**? In **Kiev** I stayed only two, three days, but then we went more deep because the German came already closer, so I knew there is not for me to wait, because we know we don't want to see the Germans.

Q: And so where did you go?

A: I went a little bit forward, and let me see, where was the first --

Q: But what did -- did you work? What did you do after you left **Kiev**?

A: Yeah, I used to work in a laboratory, the same thing, because there was a Jewish manager and he gave me a break, and he took me in. And he gave me a few months, but then also we run away because this didn't last too long.

Q: Who else were you **wirth** -- with, were you with somebody from your town?

A: What?

Q: Were you with another young man from your town?

A: I -- no, I didn't have nobody from my town. No, I didn't have nobody from mine town there. I have a guy which he came with me, he came til -- a -- a short time because the -- the Russian took us on a bus, me and him, and th -- you know, and they didn't have too much more places us to take.

Q: So where did you after **Kiev**?

A: Ah, after **Kiev** I went **Starobelsk**. That was a little bit more -- were some Jewish people a little bit. But all along there was Jewish people, we feeled more

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comfortable. They have that because **Russia** has a big [indecipherable] of Jewish people, I don't have to tell you, you know just as good as I do know.

Q: And do you -- and -- and what kind of work did you do there?

A: Paper mec -- I was not too long there. I also went into the Polish army. I volunteered. But we had a feeling we will turn out somewhere a little bit more comfortable, to be able to survive. Survival was the first in our mind, because I never -- God forbid **Hitler** comes, forget it. And the German advanced very fast, very fast, until they came to -- now, let me see where they came first -- until they came to **Leningrad**.

Q: So where did you join -- you said you joined the Polish army? And where did you do --

A: The Polish army I was only a very short time, til we came to **Israel**. When I came to **Israel** I had there families and I knew I will not go back with them. And we looked up -- for one day it was, before the high holidays -- during the high holidays, Jewish high holidays and somebody comes over to me, **Eli**, would you like to leave them? I say, for sure, what kind of a question is it? And I, at the time deserted the Polish army.

Q: So how long were you in the Polish army?

A: A few months. Let me see how many months I was. It's a little bit hard for me to remember. Very short time.

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Q: A-And then you left the polis -- P-Polish army --

A: I deserted.

Q: Uh-huh. How did you do that?

A: Somebody came over to me, **Eli**, would you like to live in **Israel**? I said, sure I would love to. This was **Rosh Hashanah**. You know what **Rosh Hashanah** is? That was **Rosh Hashanah**. And then they rented for us a bus, and they took us a little bit far -- further away, so nobody will be able to know where we are, and that's all.

Q: So after you -- after you deserted the Polish army, you went directly to **Palestine**?

A: I was already in **Palestine**, only I transferred to the Jewish army a few months later because they didn't want me to go around in the street and somebody will g -- recognize me.

Q: This is in **Palestine**?

A: This is -- was in **Israel**. We never called this land **Palestine**.

Q: Okay.

A: We never in our life called it **Palestine**.

Q: Okay. So when you were in the Polish army, you were in **Russia**?

A: I went to the Polish army when I was in pola -- in **Poland**, the Polish army. They organized the Polish army. Do you know who p-paid for it? The American and the

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British. They knew they could not discriminate because we were pol -- Polish citizens, and that's how I got to **Israel**.

Q: What year did you get to **Israel**?

A: Maybe I -- a few months later, when I ran away.

Q: What year was that?

A: That was already '72 - '73.

Q: You mean 1942 - 1943?

A: Nine -- 1942 I was still in **Poland**.

Q: And then you went to **Russia**.

A: Then I went to **Russia**. We stayed there in the cold. I used to go to the forest, bringing wood [**indecipherable**] you know, I, by myself, used to go and bring water from the -- from our [**indecipherable**] so they could -- and they gave us soup. And they gave us so much soups I -- I was sick for a few days. Yes, yes, this is the truth.

Q: And so you were in the Polish army when you were in **Russia**, also?

A: Yeah, I was alre -- with the Polish army I went to **Israel**. Otherwise I wouldn't be able to come to **Israel**.

Q: Oh, you went as a member of the --

A: Of the Polish army that transferred into **Israel**.

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Q: Oh, I see. And so you -- you got to **Israel**, and where did you settle in **Israel**?

A: What?

Q: Where did you settle in i -- where did you live in **Israel**?

A: In **Israel** I lived in the -- in -- [indecipherable] in the **Jordan** riv -- by the **Jordan** river. I used to go bathing there almost every day. There was a little river.

Q: And -- and what -- did you work right away? What did you do?

A: I-I worked in the kibbutz.

Q: What -- what was the name of your kibbutz?

A: The kibbutz was named, let me see, I was -- I have so many names. The kibbutz name was --

Q: Okay, we'll get back to it.

A: I will give you right away.

Q: Okay. So you -- you worked in the kibbutz, and then --

A: [indecipherable]

Q: -- and then what?

A: I was a good worker.

Q: And then what did you do?

A: I used to go c-cut bananas in the heat. You know, **Israel** is not as -- so easy to go work in banana trees. This was in the sp -- in the spring.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And -- and how long did you stay on the kibbutz?

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A: I stayed approximately a year in the kibbutz, and from there I went to the army.

Q: You went --

A: I joined the army in **Israel**, was a [**indecipherable**] war. The Israeli didn't want to have just deserters, they want to have people in the war where they know is coming. They prepared for the war, believe me.

Q: Did you have any contact with your family while you were away?

A: Of the -- no, its was -- I -- my re-relatives, not family. My -- they were living there -- who was living there. I have a big family, they are living there.

Q: So you had family in **Israel** when you got there?

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Q: When you got there, yeah. What about your family back in **Poland**?

A: What? In **Poland**, yeah, from **Poland**.

Q: Di -- no, did you have contact -- any contact with the pe -- your family in **Poland** --

A: Yes, yes, yes --

Q: -- in **Poland**.

A: **Misporca, misporca**, you know what **misporca** means? Relatives. They -- I -- I -- I was treated like I couldn't describe to you.

Q: The family that st-stayed back in **Poland**, who did not leave --

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A: They already were living there for a long time. They were living there for a long time, they -- [sneezes] they emigrated there. Excuse me, I apologize.

Q: What about your mother and your father?

A: I did not know, but I had a clue, and I will tell you how I have the clue. They killed everybody. The German killed everybody and didn't let -- let even one staying alive. Only one brother, who the Russian mobilized to their war, and then the -- oh, I -- I apologize -- and then they -- and the -- and then they were er -- I was trying to say something about it.

Q: You were talking about your mother and your father and your brother in **Poland**.

A: They all was gone. [indecipherable] immediately when they come and they didn't let them live a long time. That was the Holocaust.

Q: Right, right, So d-do you know --

A: Do you know, I came to **Israel**, I was reading quite a -- Hebrew -- Hebrew newspapers, and I was seeing mine town where I was born what was going on. And then I must tell you one thing. I couldn't sleep for a long time. I could not sleep for a long time. That's what I was seeing is going on there. Was an unbelievable st -- brutal -- brutal as brutal could be to the Jewish people. Another -- I have -- today [indecipherable] I have a sister and a brother, but they tried to survive a few -- if they would stay -- able survive another few weeks, I don't know exactly how many weeks, a few weeks, they would be alive.



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Q: So nobody survived who stayed back in **Poland**?

A: Nobody survived. I -- also mine -- fr-from my father's side, there's children who were also there. Nobody.

Q: Do you know how they died? Did they die in their towns?

A: What?

Q: Do you know how your family died? Did they die in the town or were they taken away?

A: I know how many they are that died, this I know because [**indecipherable**]. I don't want to even talk about it.

Q: Okay.

A: Because this is very hard and [**indecipherable**]

Q: Yeah.

A: If I -- I-I wish I could tell you.

Q: So now you're in **Israel**.

A: The cruelty was so big, unbelievable what the German did, unbelievable, unbelievable. When I repeat it three times, I know it's really -- even today it's an unbelievable story.

Q: And you are in **Israel**, and you said you worked on a kibbutz.

A: I work what?

Q: You were -- you were living in **Israel** and you were working on a kibbutz.

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A: Yeah, I was working -- I was [indecipherable] on a kibbutz.

Q: Mm-hm. And -- and then you went into the Israeli army?

A: Then I went to the Israeli army.

Q: And what did you do there, where did you -- where were you placed?

A: This was not Isra-Israeli army, that's the British army. But they're all Jewish soldier from **Israel**. They were all the Jewish soldier from **Israel**, and we were th -- I don't want to [indecipherable] it's too much noise for you.

Q: So do -- di-did -- you're -- you're in the British army in **Israel**, and where did you go, where did they send you?

A: The British army sent us to -- I was in **Italy**. But after a few months, not right away. A few months I was in the British army, and I stayed there until th-the -- **Israel** was born.

Q: You stayed in the British army til 1947 -- '48?

A: No, 1945 [indecipherable] -- in the British army no, I was still when the war was on, yeah.

Q: And what did you do in **Italy**?

A: What?

Q: What did you do in **Italy**?

A: In i -- I was a soldier. I was doing -- we used to do making elect-electric installations.

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Q: Did you do any fighting? Were you involved in any fighting?

A: I wa -- I was not really in a fighting unit. But we used to do all the services what the Jewish army needed there, we used to do it.

Q: What -- what towns and cities in **Italy** were you in? What towns or cities in **Italy** were you in?

A: Main thing I was in **Naples**. But I was also [indecipherable]. I was there when they killed -- the Italian corroborators. I mean, I came in same day to **Italy**, they were jumping from joy. They killed **Mussolini**, they killed all of them.

Q: And then, we-were you in any other country besides **Italy**?

A: Yeah, I was in other countries, yes. I was in **Italy**, I was in -- i-in -- in the desert. I was in the desert. Our army went to the desert, too.

Q: Which desert?

A: Right now is a -- let me see if I'll remember. This is a problem, remembering.

Q: So you never did any fighting?

A: What?

Q: You -- did you ever -- were you ever involved in any fighting, in any combat?

A: Yes, yes, yeah.

Q: Where was that?

A: That was in **Italy**. You know, **Hitler** was -- tried to reach as much as he can, deep.

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Q: Mm-hm.

A: **Hitler** was trying to reach as much as he can, all the territories.

Q: So you say you were invol-volved in actual fighting?

A: Oh yeah, uh-huh.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And then you were sent to the desert?

A: Hm?

Q: Then you were sent into the desert, you said.

A: Oh, I went -- first of all, was summertime, and I went like this, this is the clothes we used to have. You know, I had to --

Q: Okay, and then where -- where did you go after that?

A: What?

Q: Where did you go after that?

A: Ah, th-then I was in the isra -- in **Israel**.

Q: Mm-hm. You went back to **Israel**?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Yeah. What was it like --

A: My -- my dream was **Israel**. I was there for 15 years, in **Israel**, since I came in -- since then, after I left. But you know, I wi -- must tell you the truth, **Israel** is a very hard country for a new man. Not everybody could take it.

Q: Did you ever go to **Teheran**? Did you ever --

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A: **Teheran**? Yes, I was in **Teheran**.

Q: Can you tell me about that?

A: **Te-Teheran**, when they -- th-they brought us to **Teheran**, let me see when it was. They brought us to **Teheran**. In **Teheran** we stayed -- first of all when we came, we stayed in a factory where they made ammunition, in **Teheran**. And then they made -- yes, I stayed in **Teheran** a longer time. Not too long, about two months.

Q: And -- and you worked in a factory, you said? You worked in a factory, in a munitions factory?

A: But not in **Teheran**.

Q: What did you do in **Teheran**?

A: **Teheran** I was still a soldier.

Q: So what did you do there?

A: We just did -- make [indecipherable] lines, all these things what we need. Electric.

Q: And then did you go to **Egypt**?

A: I used to go to **Egypt**, too, yes, yes, yes.

Q: And what did you do in **Egypt**?

A: In **Egypt** we were soldiers. We were eating and we were soldiers there.

Q: Where were you when the war was over? Where were you --

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A: When the war was over, that was, I think, in [indecipherable] the same thing when the war is over here, let me see, I don't remember if I --

Q: In 1945, where --

A: 1945.

Q: -- where were you at the time --

A: I couldn't describe you, 1945 was then -- when they killed **Mussolini**, and there was a joy in **Italy**, in **Rome** -- I was in **Rome** at the time, and there was a joy undescrivable when they got -- they were -- also felt they were released. And they didn't like the Germans, they used to call them **Tedesco**. **Tedesco**, the ge -- a German is **Tedesco**. And I was there a long time in -- in -- in **Italy**. I was there a long time, let me see approximately how much. A few ye -- few months.

Q: And after the war was over, you went back to **Israel**?

A: Yes, yes. And then came the Jewish state. The -- the enthusiasm what we have when the Jewish state was born is undescrivable, I will never forget it til my last moment, when I wi -- wi -- my life. You know, they started Saturday night, when from -- from here -- from the what do you call it, the -- in the United Nations they decided to create a Jewish state. I could not tell you in [indecipherable] this was Saturday night, and Sunday night already -- Sunday morning already, we have killed Jewish people on the road. But **Israel** was prepared for it. Thank God they were prepared.

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Q: And so what did you do then? Did you si -- did you --

A: We were soldiers.

Q: Then you were a member of the Israeli army? Then you became a member of the Israeli army.

A: What?

Q: Then you became a member of the Israeli army.

A: I became a member right away, when I ran away from the Polish army. I become a member right away. We were on the **Haganah**. As you know, in **Israel** was the **Haganah**, then I was a soldier in the **Haganah**, and that's all.

Q: And where were -- what were -- where were you in the War of Independence in 1948?

A: I must tell you a story. You know, I was the -- first marching in **Jerusalem**, the victory day. I was first -- among the first one, I was marching the victory day. And then was my mother's cousin, she started to holler, **Eli -- Malach** -- my Jewish name was **Malach [indecipherable]** and -- and I march in the first victory day in **Israel** in **Jerusalem**. I was in **Jerusalem**.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And where else were you during the War of Independence?

A: What?

Q: Where else were you during the War of Independence in 1948?

A: 19 four -- I was in **Israel** already.

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Q: I know, but what -- were you involved in any battles during the war?

A: Oh sure, we were soldiers --

Q: Which -- which --

A: -- we were all soldiers.

Q: -- which battles were you involved in?

A: Wait one, let me give you and a name. Do you know, you [indecipherable] so much in my head, I don't know what to take out of my head.

Q: Okay, and so then, how long did you stay in the army?

A: In the army? Four m -- year. But then they used to call us t-to -- what do you call that, to [indecipherable]. I don't know if you know what [indecipherable] means.

Q: Into the reserves.

A: Yeah. And they -- I used to go almost sometimes every week. Was not an easy life in **Israel** then -- in this time.

Q: Were you working? You were 28 years old when the state of **Israel** --

A: Right, absolute [indecipherable]

Q: What were --

A: -- you got the right number.

Q: What -- what were you doing? What kind of work were you doing?

A: I used to work in the bank. But then [indecipherable] not more work in the



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bank, they went bankruptcy. I t-took any work I could. Hey, there is not an -- a very easy life. I'm positive you know about it.

Q: And where were you living at the time?

A: What?

Q: Where were you living, what city were you living in?

A: What -- I was li-living in **Tel Aviv**. I have an apartment there. And then I came to the **United States**.

Q: What year did you come to the **United States**?

A: Let me see already. I think somewhere on the late 50's.

Q: Mm-hm. And were you married yet?

A: What?

Q: Had you gotten married yet?

A: Here, yes, in the **United States**.

Q: You were not married in **Israel**?

A: No, I was not, no.

Q: And so, you came by yourself to the **United States**?

A: Yes, I came for my -- but they send me papers, I mean, I have relatives here.

Q: So you decided to leave **Israel** and come to the **United States**?

A: Hm?

Q: You decided to leave **Israel** and come to the **United States**.

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A: It was a hard life in **Israel**, I must tell you the truth. I lived there for 15 years. The life was not easy, and I was not used to such a hard life. But I didn't have an easier life later on.

Q: And then where -- where did you settle when you came to the **United States**?

A: Where -- where I stayed?

Q: What city did you come to in the **United States**?

A: I -- I -- I stayed in **Tel Aviv**.

Q: When you came to the **United States** --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- what city did you come to?

A: **Tel Aviv**.

Q: In the **United States**.

A: Yes. **Tel Aviv**.

Q: Oh, okay. I-I-In -- in **America** --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- in **America**, did you come to **Washington** right away? Were you --

A: No, no, no, no, no. I was in **Washington** only with the army. Only with the army when I came to wa -- I came to **Washington**. We stayed there a few months, in **Washington**.

Q: Okay, and so you left **Israel**?

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A: Yeah.

Q: And you came here.

A: Yeah.

Q: And where -- wha -- where did you live when you got here?

A: I -- I lived in wa -- in **Tel Aviv**.

Q: No, no, **Tel Aviv** is in **Israel**.

A: Yeah.

Q: We-We're now in the **United States**.

A: Yeah.

Q: Where did you live when you moved to the **United States**?

A: I have an apartment right over -- I got married right away.

Q: How did you meet your wife?

A: A blind date.

Q: In what city?

A: The wa -- what city? I'm almost sure this was in **Israel**, in **Tel Aviv**.

Q: So your wife lived in **Israel** also?

A: What?

Q: Your wife also lived in **Israel**?

A: Yeah, she lived [**indecipherable**]

Q: Yeah. Okay. And did you come to **New York City**, or --

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A: I was a very short time in **New York City**.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I never liked the big sti -- cities.

Q: Uh-huh. And the -- then di -- did you come to **Washington** then?

A: No, I didn't come to **Washington** either. I was in **Tel Aviv**.

Q: So how many years have you lived in the **United States**?

A: What?

Q: How many years have you lived in the **United States**?

A: Can you excuse me, I [indecipherable] little bit, this -- this --

Q: How many years have you been here in the **United States**?

A: No, no good.

Q: How many years have you been here, in the **United States**?

A: More than 50 years.

Q: Okay. A-And what were you do -- what kind of work were you doing?

A: I used to work here.

Q: In -- in **Washington**?

A: Not in **Washington**, I -- I -- I lived in -- in **Tel Aviv**. Most of my life I lived in **Tel Aviv**.

Q: Oh, I see, uh-huh, uh-huh. Okay. Do you think about -- do you think about the --

A: Going back?

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Q: Do you -- wha-what do you think about **Poland**?

A: What?

Q: What do you think about **Poland** today?

A: Oh, they should have dropped dead before they were born. I'm telling you the truth with the way I feel about them. That's the way I feel it. First of all, I know they killed all the -- my family, all the Jews there, all my friends. I -- I couldn't tell you how cruel these people were to the Jewish people, that all their life -- you will ask me why we lived there. You know, 1922, nobody could come to **America**. So hi -- my parents stayed there because we had **misorca** here. You know what **misorca** means? That's the -- I don't want disturb you --

**End of Tape One, Side B**

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**Beginning Tape Two, Side A**

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Eli Dortort**. This is tape number two, side **A**.

You said you had gotten married, do you have any children?

A: If I have children? I have one daughter, you know her, and I have two grandchildren. And that's all what I have.

Q: And where was your daughter born?

A: What? My wife?

Q: Where was your daughter born?

A: Here, in the **United States**, in **New York**.

Q: So you lived in **New York City**?

A: She lived all of them. She was a wanderer. Excuse me. She used to wander a lot.

I-I -- the only thing is, when I saw she wants to settle here back, I was in heaven, because I know in **Israel** she said I -- if I could find a husband there, I would stay there. But you know, you don't find a husband overnight.

Q: So you lived in **New York City**?

A: What?

Q: You and your wife lived in **New York City**?

A: My wife, yes.

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Q: And what kind of work did you do in **New York**? What kind of work did you do?

A: May I keep it like this? I will hear a little bit better.

Q: What kind of work did you do in **New York City**?

A: **New York** I was work, anything I [indecipherable]. I was not particular on anything, because you need a really -- a big profession to -- to get settled in is -- in **Israel**, and this I did not have.

Q: Tell me what you think of **Germany** today?

A: **Germany**? [speaks foreign language here]. Do you know what I said? They should burn wherever they are. I don't have to tell you w-what we know what we -- they did. They're unbelievable, one human being will do s-such a thing. But they were not [indecipherable] for the **Ukraine** and th -- all the -- who were not Jews, they did it. And the **United States** didn't let in the Jews here, when they needed a home, but they let in the all -- the murderers and all of these things here. You know it, I don't have to tell you this. I could not tell you this because you know just as much as I do know.

Q: Do you think about the war years a lot now? Do you think about the war years, the time of World War II? Do you think about that a lot now?

A: What war?

Q: D-Do you think about the war time, now?

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A: Oh sure I think. They were horrible years, absolutely horrible. Nobody opened a door to us. They all let us die where we were there. If I would tell you what I used to eat sometimes.

Q: You can tell me. What did you used to eat?

A: We used to eat the thing what they make [**indecipherable**], the -- the **mark**, they called it **mark**. I don't know if you know what it is. And I used to -- if I used to have a piece, I used to eat it. But I didn't got poisoned with it. I used to go walk, bringing water from the g -- from the river there only for a meal, only to get a meal. When I used to take the meal they gave me a -- more, a little bit more to eat. I used to [**indecipherable**] diarrhea, o-oh, the diarrhea was undescrivable what it was. You know, with this kind of food what you eat. They used to give us a -- a -- a -- a bread. This was the whole thing what they used to give us to eat in the Polish army already. Bread only, 70 grams of bread and a little bit kwi -- kwi -- hot water. When I came back here, I was not too well. I'm not too well right now either, maybe because whatever I went through.

Q: What were the sleeping arrangements like?

A: We used to sleep ever -- we used to be about eight, nine people in our -- i-in our -- what you call it?

Q: A -- a barracks?

A: What?



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Q: A barracks?

A: It's not a barrack, was a --

Q: A tent? A tent?

A: A tent. In a tent, and we used to make the heat, we used to go pick up the food in the forest. And when they used to give us a -- a loaf of bread, we used to have i -- have to keep it until the next day, but we were so hungry we didn't wait til the next day. Was not an easy life.

Q: How was your health? Were you as strong? Did you have a strong body?

A: I was a strong boy all my life, but when I came here I was not too well. Since I came here, I got better medicines and so on, I improved a lot.

Q: When did you learn to speak English?

A: I knew a little bit before I came here, but then a few weeks later I already spoke a good English. I don't speak a good English today, but --

Q: Do y -- do you speak Polish?

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes. That's was the language, but it -- mostly my mother tongue was Yiddish. I speaked already a good Russian. I spoke Ukrainian, but most of them I forgot.

Q: Are you very religious today?

A: No.

Q: Why not? Cause you were -- you said your family was very religious.

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A: I'm very much Jewish minded. I will not lie to you, I'm very much Jewish minded. I -- nobody could take me away from my Jew -- become high holidays I go, but not because I believe. I remember I -- one time when I was home even, I say to my mother [**speaks foreign language here**]. I felt so guilty all my life what I say to my mother. I already then not believe, and I was 15 - 14 -15. And you know, I grew up in a Jewish organization, they did not believe too much, they influenced me.

Q: What -- what Jewish organization was that?

A: What?

Q: What Jewish organization was that?

A: I used to belong to **Hashomer Hatzair**. But they were leftists, not too [**indecipherable**] about it. They were leftists. Not because I hated Jewish things, I loved what -- mine Jewish tradition until this day, no less when I was born in my home. But as far as Jewish tradition, I would never give it up, never.

Q: Are there any songs that you remember singing --

A: Songs?

Q: -- singing from **Hashomer Hatzair**? Any songs?

A: I-I don't have any more a good voice, so I don't want to show you what [**indecipherable**]

Q: Why don't you sing just a little bit?

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A: What?

Q: Why don't you sing just a little bit then?

A: **[speaks foreign language]**. All my life I love you. Oh my daughter, oh my daughter, I love her so much. She's the only one what I have left. I cou -- I -- I know I don't have a -- right now a good voice.

Q: Mm-hm, okay.

A: I used to have a better voice, but not like my father used to have a voice unbelievable. They killed him oh -- for no reason at all. Only reason because they were Jews. No reason at all. And among the goyim even today when I hear, where I am right now, they hate us all, even today. Even today they hate us.

Q: How do you know that?

A: What?

Q: How do you know that? How do you know that? How do you know that they hate the Jews to --

A: How I know? I could see it every day. If I will tell you -- I live right now where -- in a place which is mostly they're not Jewish people, mostly. Hardly any of them -- if you would see how they hate, you wouldn't believe it in the **United States of America**. I tried to figure them out a little bit. It's unbelievable **[indecipherable]** they hate, no reason at all. To hate Jews you don't need a reason. They were Jews,

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that's all we -- Jews have money, Jews have good business, Jews have this, Jews have this. Like they don't have anything.

Q: Well, is there anything else you wanted to talk about on the t -- on the tape that you haven't --

A: If I remember, I don't remember too well. I told you right away I don't remember too much. I could re -- tell you a whole book. Oh, I'm sorry. I could tell you a whole book, but I don't remember.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: My memory is gone, completely. You could see it.

Q: Wa -- how long has your wife been gone? When did your wife pass away?

A: My va -- wi -- my first wife?

Q: Yes.

A: My first wife. I would say 25 - 26 years. I never remarried. I didn't want to remarry. I have it once, I had enough.

Q: And what was your wife's name?

A: **Ruth.**

Q: And tell me more about why you changed your name.

A: What?

Q: Tell me why -- again, why you changed your name to **Dortort**.

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A: Because I deserted the Polish army, and I didn't want them they find me, and then they still have the English army, so I didn't want to have this name, because I was a deserter at this time. Not only me, the greatest part of the Jews, see, people who were in the Polish army, they deserved it, too. I'm positive you know something about it. A bunch of haters. Could you imagine I was sleeping with them in one -- in one t -- tent, and all the time they were reading how many Jews they killed. Is this a civilized ki -- people? Even today they tell you about hating Jews, and they're not afraid. In this **United States** I have the last couple of weeks such experience with American about hating. Hating open, open, not hi -- hi -- they don't hide it.

Q: Wha-What was that experience?

A: What is the exper -- this is the experience. They hate you. They hate you because Jews. They don't do it for any other -- do you know, one guy, he came over to me, and he said -- one guy to me he came over and he said, tha-that I -- I could not remember everything, that is my problem right now. If my problem would be what I could remember a little bit more, I could tell you a book. Because I was one time telling this story, and he said, you know, with your vocabulary and your what - - with your stories, you should write a book. I loved it all.

Q: Oh.

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A: I loved it. You see, I make an effort to tell you whatever I told you, but I don't remember everything. My memory is not too good any more. But --

Q: Well, I'm sure your daughter remember -- knows your story.

A: What?

Q: I'm sure your daughter knows your story.

A: No, no, she doesn't ru -- I told her many stories at the time I remember I used to go over to her for dinner somewhere and I used to tell them the stories. So that they used to wait for me to come and -- all the time for dinner, and I would tell them again the stories, but it's all gone with the wind.

Q: Well, your daughter knows it, so it's not gone.

A: What?

Q: Your daughter knows your stories, so it's not gone.

A: I told her a lot of stories, yeah. I told her the truth. And everything what I say, I swear, every word is true what I say. I never told a lie. I'm not a bra -- a -- what you call it, a bre-breaking about it. Bra --

Q: Bragging.

A: Bragging about it. I never -- I never were a bragger. Even when I was something -- my father was the same way. That's -- I inherited from my father.

Q: Well, some of your stories are on this tape, and that's good.

A: What?

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Q: Some of your stories are on this tape recording, and that is good.

A: Here?

Q: Yes. On this tape that you just made.

A: If I will remember I could tell you, but I don't remember.

Q: Okay. Is there anything you wanted to say, any more -- did you want to sa -- any message to your grandchildren?

A: Yeah, you are a very lovely lady. You behave very nice. You don't try to press me too much because you want the story.

Q: Is there any -- any message or advice to give to your grandchildren? You said you have two grandchildren.

A: Th-This -- this is a good message what I have, but I couldn't remem -- I told them all of them, they already have something from me, these message, when I was clear. You know, all of a sudden, I got old. The memory started to go. I have a son - - a brother-in-law, he was a multi-millionaire. He was a multi-millionaire and he's a multi-millionaire today, too. But he also lost his memory.

Q: Yeah. Tell me the name of your daughter.

A: **Alisa.**

Q: And your son-in-law?

A: Hm?

Q: Your daughter's husband, your son-in-law.

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A: Son-in-law, his name -- his name is **Jay. Jay -- Jay** -- I will give. This I remember.

Q: And your grandchildren's names?

A: My grandchildren, the first one is **Aaron**, and the other one is **Rebecca**. They're both named after my parents.

Q: That's beautiful, that's beautiful. Is there anything you want to say to **Aaron** and **Rebecca** before we close?

A: I'm very proud of them. They very smart kids, both of them. And they [indecipherable] but they very shy, they never give me a kiss. But what could I tell you, I'm happy th-that she have two kids. My daughter gives me a kiss already, all the time, with a [indecipherable] not without a [indecipherable]. And that's what all it is.

Q: Well, that's a nice note to end the interview on. That's a ver --

A: I -- I hope you got out something from me.

Q: Very much so. Thank you very, very much.

A: If I would be able to tell you, you wouldn't be able to finish up by tomorrow morning.

Q: Heh heh heh, okay --

A: I remember I used to go with my daughter to a place for high holidays, and there used to be ladies, and when I still have a clear mind and a clear memory -- mostly I



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don't have a clear memory, they used to come only to -- I would tell them the stories. Today it was an interesting story how Jewish people got killed.

Q: Right. Well, that's an important story too, to tell.

A: Hm?

Q: That was an important story that you told.

A: It is an important story. I had hope and think we will be able to -- but I don't believe this, we will be able to do because I see it here, I live here already over 50 years. What I see right now in this place, forget it. Anti-Semitic unbelievable.

**[indecipherable]**. And I say to myself, but what reason? I don't talk too much and I don't mix too much, but I don't let the abuse also.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: If you think I will be quiet when somebody will start something against me or my people, I will not quiet, I will be answer with the full thing, but I tried to do it this way. I will not insult them so they will have to **[indecipherable]** say for us. This I don't want it to happened. Do you know what I mean? I will not let them do this. They will be able to **[indecipherable]** something, but this is an insulting thing, degrading and so on and so on. Nobody could do this to me. I'm so nice you listen to me. I couldn't tell you how much I enjoyed it to talk. But I hope you got out something from it.

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Q: It was a very important story that you told, and thank you very, very much for doing it.

A: But I could tell you, you have your people, Polish people, Polish people, what they suffered from **Hitler** just the [indecipherable] they so anti-Semitic, unbelievable in the **United States of America**.

Q: Thank you, and this concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Eli Dortort**.

**End of Tape Two, Side A**

**Conclusion of Interview**