

This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with Phillip Abraham. This is track number 2. And we were talking about 1944 and--

Right.

--what was happening then.

Another thing that happened-- now we come to the being Jewish. Suddenly, we have freedom and the Zionist organizations, youth Zionist organizations. And of course, everybody became a member of this or that organization. I happen to be in the Hashomer Hatzair. Most of us who went to the gymnasium chose this for whatever reasons. They decided this. But there were other organizations there--

Had you been in this organization for the few years already?

No.

The Hashomer Hatzair.

No. During the war, no.

No.

No they were not allowed to do that.

Oh, OK.

So only in '44.

What month in '44 are we talking about?

I think after August. After August, yeah. Suddenly, all this appeared with the--

--the Zionists.

All these things are-- and so people came from other towns who had been maybe underground. Continued to be Zionist and so on and organized. But in this town, I didn't know anyone. Nobody did anything there during the war. So I became very involved in that and so on. I loved it to be and so on.

And so did my friends that were there. And there was a competition between the various organizations at the time. But it was OK. So we continued to learn about what is happening and so on. And the idea of leaving Romania was, at that point, increased among all the Jews. But the situation was still so, after the war, people were not recovering yet, neither the Romanians, nor the Jews. And so there was a big problem.

So in the meantime, we continued. Now we were allowed to go to Romanian schools. So we went--

But the war is still going on. It's Spring of '45. But for you all, it's over.

It's over because the Romanian army--

But the war is still going on in other parts.

No. They were no longer-- they actually-- the king, King Michael told the army--

No. I meant the war going on in other parts of Europe was still going on.

Other parts of Europe. But we were off that. So some normality started building up. And we were allowed, in '45 or '44, I'm not sure whether it's possible, but it was too early to say that because the school starts basically like September, October, something like that. So they were disorganized. I think only in the next semester, it started, the high schools.

So I was now going into the fifth grade in the public schools. So it was much better and so on in many ways than before that in a little town, Podu Turcului, and so on. This was a real school with Romanian teachers. But there were some French teachers as well that, well, again, was a Jewish guy. And there was Romanian friends who were very much in touch. Why? Because the Romanians got their independence in 1848, and they realize, at the time-- because they had been under the Turks and the Ottoman Empire-- they realized that they were behind in so many ways.

So they decided to introduce in the Romanian language French words and for the new in sciences and technology and so on. So to this very day, they're actually-- that's the major language that they taught in those days and nowadays as well. Now, of course, English is part of it as well.

So we studied. And I was, so to speak, not the greatest student. I wasn't failing or anything like that. But in 1946, I said to my parents--

Do you remember VE Day, the end of the war in the spring of '45 and when Hitler died and--

Right. And I remember with the atomic bomb, OK.

Well, but before that. That was the summertime.

Yeah.

Do you remember when Hitler died?

No. That I don't. No. I don't think it penetrated at the time. But in 1945, when I heard about the atomic bomb--

Atomic bomb. Yeah. You had heard that.

Yeah. And nobody understood what that meant. They used the word "disaggregation," meaning that everything is coming apart. That was the word that was-- so they were worried. I mean, it's going to world now explode and so on. But nobody knew physics, and--

Did your parents or did you know about any of the other massacres taking place in Romania?

Yeah. We heard about what happened [INAUDIBLE] and many other places. And, yeah, sure. And that's why one of the things was the Jews said this country is no longer for us. They didn't leave on the spot. In fact, it was no way that they could in any case. So--

I was thinking of-- I don't know if I'm pronouncing it correctly-- Iasi.

Iasi. Yes, that's exactly the pronunciation. They call it here Jassy as so on. But it's Iasi. That was one of the first places in Romania that had an independent-- originally, 2,000 or more years ago, they had a kingdom, Dacia. And it is spelled D-A-C-I-A. And they fought. They had a king and so on. His name was Decebalus. And he was defeated by the Romans when he invaded Romania and went to the city that is Constanta. It's a name--

And that's why Romanian language has a tremendous amount of Latin, but also from the tribes and others that had been there. And I'm saying this because many people don't understand. They thought it was some place, savage place. No. They had a kingdom. They had cities with buildings and so on 2,000 years ago. And they were quite civilized. Everything was written and so on. And they left who is what in the history. But they were defeated by sheer power and

technology of the Romans.

And so the Romans established themselves in the city of Constanta that they named in some actual-- one of the poets, a Roman poet, was sent there as a penalty because he spoke against Nero or something like that.

But to bring it more up-to-date, Iasi. Did your family know about what had happened there?

Yes. Yeah. That became well-known because there were some survivors of the death train at Iasi. And not many. And one nice thing that appeared from the stories told, the peasants who were along the-- living around the railroad were this were going on, and when they stopped and they heard the Jews-- water, water-- they wanted to give them. The German shot them. This is not well-known because for some reason there was bad rumors about it. All Romanians were like that. They weren't. Yeah. There were bad, and still some and-- no question about it. But you find them everywhere. But those people understood pity and human beings. So, yeah, we knew. We knew about that.

And immediately, little books appeared written by the Jews, OK, about what's happened there. And so we knew about that. Absolutely. And what happened in other places where the Bessarabia, which is called Moldavia now. There is a difference between "Moldova" and "Moldovia." I was in Moldova. This is the old kingdom. And that one, Bessarabia, because it was next to the Russians, the Russians picked it up at the end of the war. They couldn't do that before. They never succeeded to defeat the Romanians. But after the war, they took it, so.

Well, now you're a member of Hashomer Hatzair.

I'm a member of Hashomer Hatzair. And of course, we learn all about Palestine and Zionism and all this.

Were your brother and sister in the group too?

No. My brother was interested in being in the store with my father. My sister was interested in other things. She ultimately studied to become a ballerina and so on and piano and all that. And in fact, when she stayed in Romania until 1950, and she finished actually at the university, she became a-- she got a degree and being able to teach ballet. And when she came to Israel, she started a studio of her own.

But to reach that point--

Your story.

My story was I said to my parents after finishing the fifth--

You're 15 years old now.

Right. I said, I want to go to--

Palestine.

--to Palestine.

Said, how? What? Would leave us. No. And they wouldn't do that. They wouldn't let me and so on. Then I said-- I threatened them. I said then I'm not going to go to school. I'm going to stay home if you don't let me. And they believe me. And ultimately, I did leave.

And the reason they believed me was that-- I mentioned that earlier-- that they had kind of a belief that I was strong, even more so than my siblings. And they base that on the fact that when I was about six years old, that uncle of mine that gave the dowry to my mother, he was married and didn't have children.

And he visited-- at that time we were in Bucharest. That was before the war. My parents moved from the little town

Tecuci to Bucharest because my mother said at the time this is small village near our town. I want my children to grow up, and they'll go to school in Bucharest, and all this. And my father sold his business, and we got money and so on. Come to Bucharest. Enters into another business but not his expertise. Groceries.

And he had some also partners who cheated him and so on. And after a year or two, he decided that he goes back to Podu Turcului. And that's where we were before the war started. And so this uncle comes and visit us in Bucharest. And he said can I take him with me for a few weeks? He lived in another town, a big town. And so he asked me, you want to come? Yeah. Yeah. I want to come. So they let him take me. But he said if he starts crying, just bring him back.

So I was there six weeks. There was no telephone and so on at the time so they could call. Only letters. And I had a good time there. I was the only little boy there. And he had a business of-- lumber business. He bought places with the trees and so on and had people cut the trees, lumberjacks and so on. And then he would sell the-- do something to the wood and sell lumber to-- and there was a big area with all this. And I played there and so on. And they treated me so nicely, why not? I was their--

I didn't cry, I didn't do anything. So they knew that I could stand-- could be that. So they had belief that if I go, I'm going to be OK. And it was organized, of course. So I remember in 1946, it was basically July 1946 that we started from Bucharest, this organize from Bucharest, a whole train with Jews that survivors from Russia, Soviet Russia and would have been there during the war.

This is all ages, not just teenagers.

All ages. Right. And also from my old town, people that we have been together in school and so on, I was with them. So also Hashomer Hatzair. And we boarded the train one-- actually, not evening-- but from Bucharest.

What was it like to say goodbye to your parents?

Well, it was just hugging and all this. My mother was crying. And they are there. I'm already in the train. I'm at the window. The window was down, and my brother and my sister and said, get off. Come, come. Don't go. Get off. The train started moving, and they run along say, get off. And I didn't.

So from this, another story starts because we are now on the train. On this train were Russian officers and soldiers to protect us. Why? We're going to cross from Romania into Yugoslavia, and they knew there were still places in Yugoslavia, anti-Russians, they were for the Germans there. And somehow they allowed the Jews-- the Russians did that for the Jews-- because they thought ultimately that the Jews would be communists. They go to Palestine, so they'll have a foot in the Middle East. That's exactly where--

So they did that. They had no reason to bring soldiers and so on. And the officers, who were actually nice. And so we cross into Yugoslavia. We come to Belgrade. Belgrade is on the River Danube. And there we had to cross over a bridge. But during the war, that bridge has been destroyed by the Allies.

And so now the train stops. We couldn't go by train. So we are taken over by a shuttle kind of a place to cross from one side of the Danube to the other side because there was no other way. So we did. And another train waited for us because the Jewish agency organized all this.

So they brought us, little by little. We had to stop and all this. There was food there. They organized huge breads, round breads. They cut pieces. And they had very well-organized, amazingly. This is 1946, still after the war. Nobody has recovered totally, and they managed to do that.

And they brought us to a place where we waited. It was a place where it was prisoners of war place that they kept Germans or something like that. So we were there. And then they fed us. And we're waiting for the ship. The place where we were there was called Bakar, which is a city on the Mediterranean. Ultimately, we stayed there for about two weeks. And one day, they say, tomorrow, we are boarding the ship.

And what ship was this? Was an American ship that was sunk on the Cherbourg in France, on the coast-- sunk by the Germans-- and was in the water. The Jewish agency bought it. It was somehow. They lifted it up. They fixed it. They moved it. They fixed it. And they arranged inside that we could go inside and lie down horizontally because they plan to have 2,000. And in the end, there were 2,600 close to 2,700 people in that ship, the largest ever ship for this migration.

And so, basically, I said Mediterranean. But we are the Adriatic Sea. They call it this because it's next to Yugoslavia. It's part of-- And toward the evening, we're told to come on the ship and boarded there. And--

The name of the ship. What did they call it?

Haganah.

Oh, they called it Haganah.

Haganah. Yes. And it's still in existence. It was used later on for the fleet. But now it's just retired and so on. And I'll talk a little later what happened years later. And we boarded the-- it was full. But they were very well-organized.

And as we came in, they gave us a package of things like certain food in a package. Very well-organized. It was chocolate there and cheese and so on, things that we haven't seen in a long time. Most of these people-- and chocolate.

So I make the mistake of eating the chocolate. After all, I'm only 15 years old. We didn't have that-- I have no water. And my friends had gone inside the ship. And I was told to be on the deck. And the deck was full. People were sitting on the deck. And so full, they were families with children and so on.

But these people, they knew what to expect because they have been in these situations before. So they had taken also bottles of water that they were giving. I didn't know anything, and I didn't have water. So I sit there. So I was thirsty. It's all night. I sleep there on the board, on the deck.

And comes next day. And we started around 4 o'clock in the morning. From there, the ship started, and it's sunny. Very nice and so on. And I am-- I'm thirsty. So I see people there with a lot of bottles, and I asked for a drink throughout that day. None of this people, survivors, Jews from whatever, they wouldn't give to another Jew. So later on in the day, my friends were down, and they found me. Said, oh, come with us. We have a place there and so on. And there was water and all this. And so they kind of saved me.

But in the meantime, during that day, [INAUDIBLE] on this deck, I saw people. There were boats hanging on the sides of the ship. And I saw people going into-- climbing over there, because it was better to be there. So why don't I do that too? It was crazy. But I could have fallen in the water. There was no-- I just held myself by-- there were some ropes and so on, some metal, and so on.

And I reached up. And suddenly, a guy from the captain side says, all of you get out of there. Go back from the boats. So if they said that, I got down. And then later on, I was found by my friends.

So now, who are these people who are the crew on this ship? Who was the captain? I didn't know until much, much later there was a man there who was about 25 years old. Born in Palestine. Jewish, of course. He had a little training in ships or something like that. And they made him the captain of this boat.

Imagine 2,700 people on board. And the British knew of us, and they were waiting for us. And when the entered the territorial waters of Palestine, they came with a warship and told us to stop and so on. And first, they boarded with their Marines and so on, with the guns. And they said, where is the captain? Where is the captain? Trying to find the captain. but--

Did you know any English at that point?

No. I didn't. But that was other people who I knew that what they were saying. And then they were looking for the crew.

But of course, they were kind of stupid. The crew was already mixed in the 2,700 other people. So they never found them.

And they brought us to Palestine, to the port of Haifa. And they intended to take us to Cyprus. That was the very first time that they decided to do that. So what they did when they were they brought us there, there were other ships that they've caught before and arrested the people there, the Jewish immigrants, the British, I mean. And they had these three boats in the port there, in Haifa, in the Harbor.

And they divided us into those little smaller, much smaller ships because it was such an accumulation of people there. It was very difficult to keep us. And the Jewish agency still came and brought the food, not the British. So they did that. And they said they are going to take us to Cyprus. And then the Jewish agency did something. They told the people on the ships, these 2,700, it's going to be a hunger strike.

And there were a lot-- because it was such an event, 2,700 people on a ship, that they were journalists from all over the world there. And they immediately-- when they heard about, oh, this hunger strike. No. The British are going to kill these people, survivors of the-- so the British said, no. They'll be allowed to enter. And we were allowed to enter, but not into-- they put us into a prisoner of war camp. And that was Atlit.

And we were there-- at least I was there for about close to two months because what they did, those families with young children, really small children and so on, they were given like 1,500 per month that was allowed to enter. And then when these were no longer there, they took the other group like the younger people, like 16, not adults and so on.

So our turn came. And I and others my age were taken from there. The Jewish agency, again, came on buses and picked us up.

Had you had any contact with your parents during those two months?

No. No. Nothing at all they didn't know I arrived or didn't and there was no way to communicate and even a little later it was difficult. So they brought us to Mount Carmel, to a place. And it was a terrific thing for us to be there.

Were the conditions in Atlit terrible?

They were terrible because it was barbed wire [? in ?] [? a ?] [? way. ?] But the British didn't do anything bad, really. We were there simply. They counted us at night. Nevertheless, many people escaped, and it was organized. The captain and all the crew, they were among those people. But they disappeared, and they went for other ships to do.

But what happened? The conditions there could have been-- well, actually, the Jewish agency prepared everything. The food, brought in the food. They had local Jews who were dealing with that cooking and all this. And there were a lot of dining halls there. And if we come at this time and so on, fine.

The trouble was were these Jews who were from-- people who were born right there. And what did they do? They stole from the whatever, the Jewish agency. And we got very bad food and very little. The milk was-- they poured a lot of water in the milk.

Who did this? The Palestinian Jews?

The Palestinian Jews, yeah. And they would take away-- the British let them come with the food and so on from the Jewish agency. Somehow, they organized themselves that only certain things were put a little bit. So we had hunger strikes there against these people. And not only this, but there were some people among us, not I, who actually went and beat up the cooks who were responsible for that. And the British had to come in through-- but it was so surprising. Not many people know of that because it's shameful to mention that. But it was there.

So after that, the Jewish agency changed them and so on. And, well, it was like paradise for two weeks. And they continue the policy that was there. But by that time, I was after that.

So you went to Mount Carmel, to--

Right. And there, we were for a little while. Were deciding where to put us, where to send us. So who were the people who were deciding? There was a committee from the various Jewish Zionist groups. The Hashomer Hatzair, and also the fathers, Jewish-- religious groups and all that.

And they wanted to send-- to some of us, they said well, you can go to here or here or here. And I said, I want to go to Hashomer Hatzair. And so did a lot of my other-- my friends there. And otherwise, they wanted to bring us to a religious group. And I didn't want to go. Simple like that.

So they thought-- finally, we had stayed there for several days. And it was a beautiful view of the Gulf of Haifa and so on and everything. The food was terrific, and the people were nice in those places and so on. And then they took us to a kibbutz, Ein HaShofet.

Ein HaShofet is the first American kibbutz in Israel. Started in 1937. That's another story. And they brought us there. And it was like paradise. The people there behaved toward us-- and we were like forty-some-- in a way that is if we were their children.

That was all children they took to Ein HaShofet. It was all teenagers.

All teenagers. Right. And they treated us-- you know it. Tremendous. And some of us were orphans. Lost their parents. Some had one parent, but not there and so on. And I was there for 3 and 1/2 years. And it was one of the times-- the greatest time that I had. And so that's another story.

But we were there. And we worked half a day. And half a day, we studied. Yeah. So--

So you picked up-- picked up conversational Hebrew.

Right. Yeah. They taught Hebrew, and they taught-- because most of us didn't speak Hebrew. So many of us had read for the bar mitzvah. So in a short while, at least in my case, after six months, I was able to be current in Hebrew and so on. And then we studied like a regular school. Everything. History, literature, and all this. And we had some terrific teachers. One is a man, [? Josef ?] [? Vilfund ?]. And the other one was a woman, [? Reva ?] [? Meisler ?]. And she is still alive. I saw her this year, and she is 93.

Wonderful.

And when we visited, she was having exercises with another group [INAUDIBLE]. And she had-- memory, absolutely incredible. And it was so pleasant to be there and to see her. And she saw me. Oh, Ben Zion. Amazing.

Amazing.

Yeah.

Tell me about the Partition Plan in United Nations in '47.

Oh. OK. That was--

You were still on the kibbutz.

I'm still in the kibbutz. Right.

Do they do anything on the kibbutz?

Oh, yes. We celebrated a tremendous celebration. But before that, once I were in the kibbutz in 1946 and 1947, there were already trouble with the Arabs before even the United Nations decided on this. I have a little story about the day that this happened.

So we were trained. We started being trained how to use a gun-- Rifles, machine guns, what we called Sten guns, hand grenades, all this. And we learned even how to fight with bamboo sticks. Why? Because the Arabs were attacking with bamboo sticks. And you had to this day know how to use that because we had instructors that came from another kibbutz, a young man about 20. And so on he taught us how to do that. And then we had the training there. We are not in the army yet.

Mm-hmm. Right, right.

Yeah. And we were all happy about this. So then came the day of the 1947. I and a friend of mine who had some cousin, older cousin in a kibbutz near Jerusalem, Gush Etzion. And I forget the name of the group. So he said he wants to visit there. And we had a time every year we got a week off. So I said, do you want to come with me to that place and talk to them and so on that he can bring me?

So I and he went there, and we had a very nice time. They treated us very nicely too. It was a religious kibbutz. But they didn't bother us with that. So on the day that the United Nations had--

Voted.

--had voted for that, we were on our way home, to kibbutz Ein HaShofet. So we came to Jerusalem, and we were in a bus that took us to Haifa because kibbutz Ein HaShofet is in that neighborhood you have to go through, Emek Israel, to reach that.

So we come to Haifa. We had tickets. We had paid for the tickets. We had no other money though. We had been given a little bit of money and so on. And we are there. And we are in Haifa. And we don't have money. You can take a bus. There was a bus to Ein HaShofet. But you had to go to the center of town and pay the driver.

So what do we decide? This bus station, which was down in the-- not on the Carmel. And said, well, Shlomo-- that's the name of my friend-- why don't we go on foot? Exit Haifa, and we'll go to Yagur-- this is a kibbutz, Yagur, where we knew that the bus that was going to Ein HaShofet is going to stop there. So we'll wait for them. Oh, sure, we go.

We had this bags and so on. And we are in shorts and so on. And the equipment was sold or bought from the British army. And then we start walking. And how do we start walking? In the bottom of Haifa to exit. And we have to pass through a neighborhood. What kind of neighborhood? All Arabs.

And at some point, as we go there, you see them. There were coffee shops with the tables outside and on the sidewalks. And they all sit and smoke and drink coffee. And suddenly, for one of them, one guy comes out running. And it was kind of toward us. And I say, Shlomo, [NON-ENGLISH]. And then we hear another shout, and another guy comes. But he was after that guy.

And Shlomo was a bigger guy than I. I was kind of short in those days. I grew up later. And I said, Shlomo, let's go a little faster. Said, no. I'm tired. Well, I said let's go. But nothing really happened.

So we came out of Haifa. And a bus stops toward the exit-- came from the [NON-ENGLISH]. And he sees us there, two little youngsters there. He opens the door to the bus and get in. Said, we don't have money. [NON-ENGLISH] said, [NON-ENGLISH]. You're stupid. Don't you know what happened today? It's this. Arabs are attacking. They are mad. And he took us to Yagur and let us off there. And then later on, a bus came, the kibbutz bus. And we ended up in the kibbutz, safe and-- but that was the experience.

What about in '48 when the state was declared?

Well, that was--

You're on the kibbutz.

I was still in the kibbutz. Right. And we were left since the army was just started and so on. We were about like 17 at the time. But they were not taking people who were in the kibbutz because they needed the food that was-- there was no other way, just to import and so on [INAUDIBLE]. So they didn't take youngsters like myself at the time. So we were still in the kibbutz.

Later on, basically, in 1949-- but for us, this was-- I must say this because the feeling that we had in those days when the-- one may say, oh, we were scared, right, and so on. Something is going to be war. We knew that that's going to happen. Didn't care. We didn't care one bit about that. What we were, this, after 2,000 years, we have our state. And this experience is something that nothing else in my life can be as that experience, to hear it. We are back after all this and being there. I'm sure many other Jews outside felt equally. But we were there. We were there in the place.

So we had been there, as I said, for about three years and so on. So in 1949, our group was getting-- we were by now 18. And [INAUDIBLE] Kibbutz Artzi, which is the organization of the Hashomer Hatzair, decided to put us-- to send this group, instead of leaving us in Ein HaShofet, they decided that they have a place to send us, to a place called Gan Shmuel kibbutz, Gan Shmuel near Hadera. And why? Because the people there were elderly. They were not even Hashomer Hatzair.

So in the past, a year or two or three years before that, another group came in from Hashomer Hatzair. So the kibbutz will survive. But there weren't enough people. So they decided-- because it was political as well to have-- so take this group, [NON-ENGLISH], that was our name, bring us there. And so they decided that. We were all sad. And later, we found out that the kibbutz was sad as well.

And we go there. So in the meantime, it is 3 and 1/2 years, we've learned all sorts of things to do. We worked. We studied. And I worked in the gardens [INAUDIBLE] fruit and all this and became an expert on that. But I learned also mechanical things to do. And we worked.

I remember carrying, on my back, a 200 pound sack of stuff over some and so on to put it on a truck and so on. And it was OK. We were proud of doing that. We learned how to be on a rope and go up and down on a rope. That was the British army way. That is the best way that ever. And they still can do it.

So we were proud of all these things. But we come to this kibbutz. We didn't know where we are going. And they were strangers to us. And they behaved not like strangers but like bitter towards us. They put us to do all sorts of things that only us to clean the bathrooms and so on.

And we had a man who was our supervisor. Madrich. We didn't know that he was really a communist-- amazing-- If he's alive. He still is probably. And at one meeting with him and so on, we started complaining. What are you doing, to us? We have [NON-ENGLISH], meaning we have learned how to do this. And you are sending us only to do only the bad work and so on. And you're not treating us properly because in the kibbutz, it wasn't like that. If we learned something, and that was that. You could do what we learned.

So they put us in some old, not buildings, barracks and so on and crowded. And everything was so-- when I was one of those complaining. And I said, that's not nice what you are doing. And said, if you don't like it, you can leave. And at that time, at the same time, I said, that's exactly what I'm going to do.

And next day or two days after, I went to Hadera, and I enlisted in the army. But the army said, you have to come a week from now. So where do I go? I have no place to sit, to stay. I have not one penny in my pocket. So I come back to the kibbutz. I don't know even how did I come? There were some buses, but sometimes you could do hitchhiking and so on.

So I came back. And he found out that I was back. And he said to me, you cannot eat in the Hadera [NON-ENGLISH]

no more. You should get out. But my friends who were still there, they came and brought me the food and so on, and survived. And it was only two of us who did that. I and another member, Ze'ev, Ze'ev [NON-ENGLISH]. They were two of them. One is small Ze'ev [NON-ENGLISH].

And we enlisted. And then a week later, we were taken from Hadera to another place where we trained in real training and so on.

How long were you in the army?

Four years. And it was supposed to be really only two years. But they said you can enter into the regular army. [? In fact, ?] you can continue if you want. And then you are a member of the [NON-ENGLISH], the regular army.

So I stayed because my parents had just arrived. It was like 1950. And I stayed in the army. I went into the Air Force, not as a pilot or anything like that. They sent me to the adjutant general of the Air Force which was in Jaffa, Yafo. And I worked on kind of-- what can I call it-- an organizer, not the community organizer. But at the time, that was-- we're work on making units of the soldiers. And the Air Force was interested to have from the reserves because there were people in the reserves to actually organize them.

We didn't have-- we had planes-- but we didn't have airports, for instance, where we could go in the Negev or other places. So the idea was if they want to bring help to our troops somewhere, we need to have that to build an airport on there. And they were very smart in doing. I was designing, at the time, just-- young as I was-- put together people and so on and in this making groups and so on that from the reserve people. The reserves, until you were 50 years old, you were still in the reserves.

So I worked like that. In the meantime, I was allowed, rather, the army put together after work schools, evening schools to get the Bagrut to finish high school, which I started in the kibbutz. But that was not-- I didn't have a-- so that actually was the way that within the last two years, I went. And I went through the exams-- external exams. But that was exactly like the ones given in the schools at the time. The same time and so on and the same questions. And I succeeded very well due to my teachers.

And at the end of that, in 1950, I started-- I went to the university. I was accepted at university, Hebrew University. And I studied there for my degree.

In what field?

I studied in physics. And that's what I did. At the time, they didn't have a bachelor's degree there. So you had-- at least in the mathematics and physics and so on and chemistry, the hard sciences, maybe others as well. I don't know. But you have to get a master's degree. A master's degree meant that you have to write a thesis as well. And so I did all that. And I got my master's degree after four years at the Hebrew University.

And that was good. In fact, later on, when I came to this country, I realized that what I have done for my master's degree was considered-- it could have been considered here as a PhD thesis because it was different standards at the time there. And in fact, some of the people who didn't do it, they didn't get their degree. If they didn't do that in Israel, they didn't get their degree. So they did something else. So that was my--

So then you finished at the university. Then what did you do?

Well, I went to the Weizmann Institute because there was somebody there who was looking for somebody like me. He was an American guy who had got his PhD at MIT in engineering, but nuclear engineering. And he was advised by the Institute. And he said he needed somebody with knowledge of what was the modern physics-- quantum mechanics, stuff like that. And he accepted me. And he was supposed to lead to a PhD given by the Weizmann Institute.

But we didn't quite see eye to eye. In what sense? I was trained in the Hebrew University, particularly in mathematics at a level that MIT didn't have it. And very few of university, the best universities in the world, we had that kind of

training. And this man really didn't.

So he gave me a topic to-- and so on-- to go into it. And I did. I studied the literature and so on and what I had. And I would come to him with my results. And so the one time that I present to him, he said, oh. What you wrote here on the blackboard, it's not true. And I say, Dr. Lipkin, it's true. And he got red in the face. And then I said, I'm going to prove it to you. And I did. So that was the end with him.

So he comes back to me a little later on, not the day, that day. Say, you know what? You should go to the US and get your PhD there. So how do I do that? I mean, I had no money. My parents don't have money to send me there or anything like that.

Well, they had advertised at the time, in 1959, they advertised that they are looking for people in physics and to apply. Universities were applying. And how come? Where did they get the money? Their money came from the armed services because if you recall the Sputnik, everybody was scared that the Russians have taken over and so on. And they really didn't have enough people in those hard sciences. So they were putting this throughout the whole world. Come over.

I applied to one of the-- it was-- one was Yale, and one was Harvard. And they said at the time, they sent me back. Yes. I'm acceptable. But not for the very first semester in September. But if I wait, I'm accepted.

And only one other university, University of Maryland, said come on over. So of course, I-- and they were going to give me a salary to live and study. Well, what other country does that? Of course, I came. And I, again, separated from my parents and my family. And I arrived here.

[? At ?] the time, the foreign currency in Israel was so tough, they would give you \$120, one at a time, if you leave and don't [? want ?] [? to ?] travel. So my parents bought a ticket and so on. And I arrived in New York. And I had a little bit of money.

Did you know English?

By that time, yes, yeah, because I used English at the Hebrew University. I also shared a room at the Weizmann Institute with a guy from South Africa, a Jewish guy who was also a student there. And so it helped. And I learned in the kibbutz. That's a little bit of another story, how I learned English there. I said there were Americans.

And particularly my professor, teacher, [? Josef ?] [? Vilfund ?], he got his degree here in the United States. Himself was born in Russia. Came with his widowed mother here. And he managed to go and study and so on. Got his master's degree in literature. And so I said, I want to learn. So he said OK. He gave me some things to do and so on and ultimately said, oh, here is the Encyclopedia Britannica Junior, and here is an article about coal. And translate it into Hebrew.

So I did. So he would check, do these things. And that's how I learned English. So I wasn't-- but I became really very easily here too.

So you went to Maryland.

I went to Maryland.

For how long?

Well, I was there 1960. And I was there until 1964. So I got my degree and PhD. And my advisor was a guy named George Weiss. He was Jewish and religious Jewish too. And he lives not far away from here. It's an amazing situation. And at the time when I finished, it was quite a different-- a difficult time with jobs for physicists. It's amazing. In a short time, the situation had changed because with the ride to the moon and so on suddenly they said, [? we've ?] reached out. That's no more money.

So whatever you try to get a job, they said, we were firing people. And indeed, there was a disaster, 1966. So I got all sorts of little jobs in-between 1964 and '66. Finally, I managed to get a job with a company in-- Raytheon Company-- way back on-- what is the name? Rhode Island. And I worked for them. And I was doing work. And what they were interested [? which ?] [? was ?] actually was supported by the Navy. I didn't know that at the time, that the Navy. But it dealt with problems of the Navy.

And I was there for about-- but actually, before that, actually, I had the benefit of working after I got my PhD, the National Research Council awarded me a two-year salary to work at NASA. And actually, I have all this stuff here that-- my documents, OK, I'm not saying. So I worked at NASA, Greenbelt, Maryland. And that was very interesting. And actually, this was basically before-- a little bit before I got my PhD.

And I finished my PhD and submitted a thesis at Maryland. And I was working at the time at NASA. And among the people on the committee that-- the final thing, you know, you give a talk about-- you show them your PhD thesis and so on. And they ask questions and so on.

And there is one guy from the committee that was part of the faculty at Maryland in the physics-- nuclear physics. And said to some people there, wait a minute. In front of me, this is not physics. This is what you did is mathematics. Why? Because my advisor was a mathematician, applied mathematician. So actually, he did work on areas that were connected with physical things.

And what I've done, where I worked for NASA. And I worked on things that dealt with what are called solar flares from the sun and things that hadn't been done before except in my work at the time. So as I'm there and he is talking like that. And then my advisor gives a talk to my boss at NASA, Dr. McDonald. And that guy hears about that. Comes immediately from Greenbelt, and comes to this meeting. He enters and he talks. What do you mean? Mathematics. This man has worked here for this and so on. He's a physicist. Indeed. And so the committee decided that I deserved the PhD.

Was kosher.

Yeah.

And then you worked for how long for Raytheon? And then what did you do?

OK. Then at that point, I forgot to mention the order of the-- I worked for NASA. Now, I have my PhD. So because they liked what I was doing, they said, OK. You can stay with us for two years. They couldn't hire. I wasn't a citizen. So they said, you can work because the National Research Council will give you a two year. They'll pay my salary, which was not a few dollars, all right. And I said, OK, that's fine with me.

And I stayed there two years, and I did some more work and published and all that. And at some point, I decided that I really didn't want to continue because the reason is that I, as a physicist, when I look at astrophysics that is called today like what NASA was involved-- but we actually were NASA was involved really in real problems that had an impact by the so-called astrophysics. It was not something realistic. I liked my work to be applied to something. And it wasn't with the exception of these things that were really important to study those because communications is actually affected by the solar flares. These things that happen every 11 years or something like that.

And it was important for the Air Force, for the military, and even for NASA to know what is going to happen in such a case. If you send a signal, for instance, it can be affected by-- and really ruin it. And that is not something that you want to have when you are in, say, water or whatever.

So I decided I want to go and apply to a place that would let me do things that are applicable. And I looked around. And one of my friends at school, from the school, said, oh, why don't you come over here to this company in Rhode Island and Connecticut and so on? We did. [INAUDIBLE], he was working for the Navy at the time and said, well, Raytheon may. And indeed, they hire me, and I was with them. And I worked on problems and so on. I have even here my work that I did for them. And then that particular one collapsed.

OK.