

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Phillip Abraham
August 21, 2011
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PREFACE

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PHILLIP ABRAHAM

August 21, 2011

Gail Schwartz: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with Phillip Abraham conducted by Gail Schwartz on August 21st, 2011 in Silver Spring, Maryland. This is track number one. What is your full name.

Phillip Abraham: My full name is Phillip, with two L's mid name Ben Zion and last name Abraham.

Q: And when and where were you born?

A: I was born in a little town by the name of **Podu Turcului** in Romania in August tenth, 1931.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your family and how far back does your family go?

A: Well the Romanian Jews because this were part of that actually entered Romania from, at the invitation of, at that time a prince of a portion of Romania. It wasn't called Romania yet at the time. Invited the Jews from Poland to come to Romania with their craftsmanship, knowledge and so on and being merchants and all that. And he gave them the idea that or he said they would be under his –

Q: Protection.

A: Protection. So they came. So basically—

Q: What year was this?

A: 500 years, 1500 something. And they came and my family was there with, there were two branches, so to speak, from my mother and my father. And my grandfather on my mother's side was named Marcus. But my father on his side, he was named Avraham or Abraham. Marcus is

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a name that comes from the Jews were in Italy and Rome after the destruction of the temple and so on. So they basically moved toward the east from there into Europe and perhaps to Germany. And so for instance, one connection is that Marx the famous or infamous Communist.

Q: Karl Marx.

A: Karl Marx was based on the fact that his people were called Marcus. And but the Germans made it into Marx and so that's, so my grandfather was, his family name, last name was Marcus. So that was my connection there. This little town that I mentioned where I was born was actually a center of a lot of Romanian villages who were working the land. And they were raising crops and this town, acted -- there were 400 Jewish people there, mostly merchants who actually brought and bought from other places to give to their customers who were from the villages. So my father had a store with fabrics. In those days there were no ready-made clothes. You had to buy the, by the meter or yard and you went to a tailor and so on or to see what they call it mistress and so my father brought the stuff from other places. And sold a lot of, from silk and so on. Even British cloth that came from England. And also a variety of fabrics that were actually made in Romania itself. A lot of factories that did that.

So my father whose story is also of interest, at least to me, he had been during the First World War he was about the age of 14, 15 and had worked in the store of an uncle of his who kind of exploited him so at one point he decided to go on his own. And there was a war and the Romanians fought against the Germans, the First World War. And he decided to go with a wagon and one horse. And he went and bought from the Germans and sold it to the Romanians and bought from the Romanians and sold it to Germans, food basically and so on. And he managed to three or four years to make a lot of money, came back to this town where I was born, Podu Turcului and started a regular store on fabrics and that was his, and he became quite successful, basically the most successful among all the other merchants. And his philosophy was, if I can put that in, was to buy as cheap as possible, meaning and how did you do that. By putting the money on the spot, not on credit. And he sold to all the villagers that came there on credit, because they didn't have money every time. Only after the crops came in, they had their money to pay. And they came and they were extremely good customers. They never defaulted. They

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came and paid and so on. For many years. Even during the Second World War that something happened. This little town –

Q: We'll talk about it the Second World War. What was your father's name?

A: Isaac Abraham.

Q: Abraham. And he was born what year?

A: He was born in 1899. Yes and my, ok so that's my father yes.

Q: And your mother's name?

A: My mother's name was **Hya** or Clara Marcus. And –

Q: And do you know when she was born?

A: Yeah, she was born actually about three or four years before my father. So she was, and a little story there too. She, there were all sorts of, she was very beautiful and so on and she was educated. My father, on the other hand, had only two years of grammar school. But he was extremely good at math. And arithmetic I should say. And when he came to the town, that little town he said I want to marry Clara Marcus and she didn't want to and so on. And then one of her brothers who was older than she, said you should marry him. He is going to be a success. And not only this. He gave her, because there were my mother's who were, all the, they were orphans. And then 12 children in that. And two separate mothers. One died and then the father of her married another woman, which happened to have been the sister of the first one. Because that was the Jewish thing. She was not married. And when her sister died, there were already six children. And she gave birth to another six. But not all of them survived.

So when this older brother who, by that time, was also very successful, said I'm not going to, there is nobody. The father already died, my grandfather died. So they were kind of, there was no money to give as a dowry so he said, Clara Marcus is not going to go without a dowry. My

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father never even asked, or anything like that. So he came and gave her at the time 50,000 of the currency. So in any case it was a very successful there, and they loved each other in, throughout life and so on. And until 1973 when my mother died. So –

Q: Do you have any siblings?

A: Yes, I have I should say one elder daughter, elder, sorry. Sister who died several years ago. And I have a brother in Canada who's –

Q: What were the names of your siblings?

A: My sister was Rosa or **Varda** in Hebrew. She died in Israel. And my brother is named **Carroll** because that's the name of the chamber. And Carroll Abraham so he's been a citizen of Canada for quite a long time. But he was in Israel. It was another story ok with Israel.

Q: We'll get to that yeah.

A: And yeah he's still. We are in touch.

Q: The difference in ages.

A: He is about two and a half years older than I am.

Q: So you were the baby?

A: I was the baby, yes. So there had been four children but the first born died when he was, some epidemics when he was one year and a half. So it was something that my mother would cry when she mentioned that and so on. And –

Q: How religious was your family?

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A: Well they kept **kashrut** and they never let anything in the house or anything like that. My father was a member of a, the center synagogue and so on and they also the community, Jewish community that took in this little town care of orphans and widows and so on. And it was very, very interesting. They didn't force people to donate and so they got together, said well you should do this and they took care of everybody. Nobody died of hunger or anything like that. There was some problem in the winters and so on. People would go and cut wood for them or all these people. It was a really a civilized in that respect. There weren't, we had a rabbi for life there. His son because a rabbi and so it was very, very nice and people would meet during the summer, in the evening after all the stores were closed, they would meet and actually would have outside on the sidewalks which they put tables and so on and friends would come and drank something cold and talked and so on. So there were all sorts of things of that nature. And so it was a happy childhood until the Second World War.

Q: Did you live in a mixed neighborhood of Jews and non-Jews?

A: There were very few Romanians in this town. The majority were Jews. But there was a church and so on. And the, between the – not connections, but the relatively speaking they were good friends and so on. And I'll come to a point before the Second World War, in the 30s there was a mayor. Ordinarily the mayor was a Romanian guy. He happened to be very, very good in fact very friendly with my father and he said in the 30s, when Hitler was came to power in Germany. And he kind of was a very intelligent man. He was a lawyer as well. And he said to my father, Isaac. Why don't you, he knew that we were capable because my father was rich by the Romanians, the standard. Just go to America. Take your family and go to America and he didn't follow this. Because he said I have all my family, his siblings and so on and so he didn't want to, his parents were still alive, my grandparents on my father's side. And the sister and the sister-in-law and so on. So it was a, he didn't do it. And so we were there when the, but what I wanted to say is that there was a kind of a friendship between the Romanian people at least in this little town.

Not everywhere it was, there were some anti Semites as well in Romania. And we know that things happened during the war. But prior to the war for instance, to give you an example of the relationships is that when they said to put the yellow thing on the, to show that you are a Jew.

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You know you put on your sleeve. The police were supposed to enforce that. But they grew up with the Jews so they never did. So it was you couldn't tell who is Jewish, who is not. So that was the situation and I went to kindergarten there. And –

Q: This was a public school? Or a Jewish school.

A: No it was a public school. And they had also a grammar school or public and until the war started, when suddenly in 1940 the war that came. Romania at that time was an ally of the Germans. And too, from the point of view of the Romanians I want to be, to say something that is not bad because they saw France defeated in three weeks. And Romania had just about all their forces. They had cavalry in stacks. And so on. And they said they couldn't survive. So they were patriot, from patriotism they said we have to go, even the famous or infamous men in power at the time, General **Antonescu**. He said and he was a patriot himself. That we cannot fight the Germans. In the First World War they did. But then France was not defeated and all the others were attacking the Germans.

So because of that in the end, when the war came, the Germans demanded from this general that the ambassador, the German ambassador to Romania that they collect the Jews from the little towns, push them in the other centers so they will be there available for them to take until then. Of course, the Romanians at the time didn't know that. What was happening. That was quite secret, the Germans, the way they did it.

So the order came one day in the little town, this Podu Turkului. That tomorrow you have to leave and go to the larger town which was about 20 miles away. So you can, people had the stores. What to do with the stores and the merchandise. So most people took whatever they could with horses and wagons and so on. And so did my parents, with one exception. My parents, my father decided he couldn't take all that. It was a large store for fabrics and that's very voluminous and how to carry this in a horse, in a wagon with two horses or something like that. So we, they took, what my parents took whatever was most valuable and so on. And my father went and actually put all sorts of wooden kind of in the front part of the store and in the back and so on. And it was so effective that later when we come in this story, nobody was able to enter there.

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Q: Before we go on, let's go back a little bit prewar. What language did you speak at home, before –

A: We spoke Romanian. My parents of course spoke Yiddish, but on purpose because they at the time didn't know what is going to happen to us. They wanted, if you spoke Romanian then you had a chance to go have a good life and so on. Nobody would bother you. But if you didn't speak Romanian, kind of immediately you were a Jew. And so they didn't spoke Yiddish with us. I never, to this day, I don't know much Yiddish. A few things that, but ordinarily they talked with us in Romanian.

Q: You celebrated holidays, Passover and Sabbath?

A: All of that, absolutely yes.

Q: Very observant?

A: Oh yeah, yeah absolutely.

Q: With extended family and –

A: With extended family and so on. The only for instance, Yom Kippur we'd go for the children so they, we'd be out of the synagogue and play and so on and lunch came and say oh let them eat something. Take them home. Yeah, I remember that so.

Q: You were born in 1931 you said

A: 1931, yes.

Q: And Hitler came in power in 33.

A: I couldn't do anything –

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Q: Again, prewar. At what point or were you ever before the war started aware of a man named Hitler. Did you parents talk about it, did you hear?

A: Yeah sure, sure yeah they knew that it happened but the number of – there were newspapers of course as well that mentioned all this.

Q: What was happening in Germany to the Jews?

A: Not really. No, I don't think even throughout all of Europe. People were not interested. The Jews may have been interested and so on so I remember only later on when just close to the war, 1939, so in one of the newspapers there was huge headline, the war is about to start and something like that.

Q: Did your parents say, I mean you were young of course. Do you remember if your parents talked to you about what was happening and who this man Hitler was?

A: No, I don't recall. They may have done that but I was kind of –

Q: You were a young child I know.

A: A young child. In 1939 I was six, yeah I was eight. And I knew to read this headline and I remember that as if I'm looking at it right now. But what we knew earlier we had **karina kaemet** [ph], a little box where we put money and so on all the time. And we're talking about Palestine or not Israel, Palestine. And I'm telling the story that I told my wife and everybody. And it's a true story. I said at the time when I was young, about six, seven said I want to be a general in Palestine. Well I didn't become a general. I became a sergeant, first sergeant. So I was a Zionist because --

Q: I was going to ask if your family –

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A: All the family. All, all the people there were for Palestine. But they couldn't go there. It was the British wouldn't allow that. Already 1921, 1922 they put a stop basically. Just only a few people could come to, go to Palestine, Jews meaning.

Q: Were your parents politically involved in the 30s at all?

A: Only my father was a member of the Romanian party that was actually a party of the people living in the agriculture in the villages and so on. And that was not against Jews or anything like that. They were quite good for Romania at the time, but later on they lost the elections and other people came in and so on, so anti-Semitic and so on. And at that point my father of course was no longer and nobody was interested in supporting them. And they knew that there was a danger. But nobody believed. If Jews in Germany didn't believe that. And in Romania yes there were anti Semites. But –

Q: Did you yourself as a child ever experience –

A: Yeah one thing I remember very, I may have been seven years old, something like that. I was in my, on, one of my uncle's garden in the back of the building where he had fruit trees. And I was getting some plums or something like that and there was a gate and I was just about, I wasn't exiting through the back gate. And there passes a Romanian little boy like about me. And she shouts **Zhid**, zhid. So my reaction I remember it as if it was today, I picked up a stone and threw it and I didn't hit him ok. He was running by that time. That was my reaction.

Q: Did you talk this over with your parents?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: What did they say? To a child? What do you say to a –

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A: They said don't do that. Don't do that because then you put everybody else in jeopardy and then they said this boy if he were hit by the stone he would go and cry and so on. His parents, oh the damned Jews or something like that. So –

Q: How would you characterize yourself? Were you an independent child or --

A: History it will appear that I was really more independent than my siblings when I come to that point. And one other thing that happened. I want to show that basically the people in the town and that were in power, so the mayor and so on.

Q: The mayor's name do you remember the mayor's name.

A: I don't, no. Romania man yes. One day he came and told the community, Jewish community, meaning the people who are kind of in charge of it. Said look I heard the news that they anti-Semites and there was a group –

Q: In the town?

A: It could have been in the area. They intend to have a massacre, to come and attack the Jews. So he said you better go and prepare yourself to fight. And I remember that evening particularly we went to one of the relatives' that had a bigger store and so on and all the family there and the other people did the same thing with axes and sticks and whatever, ready to fight. It didn't happen. So but I remember it exactly and so on. One of my cousins was, as we were waiting there kind of you know. Suddenly we hear a noise, some (sound effect) a big noise. Something fell on the ground or in the store. This cousin was a little bit retarded and he was sleeping on a bench. So that was about all that happened. Will always remember that. But it didn't happen so until we had to move.

Q: Let's get to that point, because up to that point you were going to school

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A: I was going to school, Romanian school and so on.

Q: Were the teachers –

A: They were not anti-Semitic, no. they actually were harsh, much harsher when the children of the villagers and so on who were Romanians and so on.

Q: So in a sense you had a safe childhood.

A: I had a safe childhood, yes. I cannot at all complain.

Q: Except for that one incident you said. So now things started to change.

A: Right and so we sent, were sent to another town, much larger than this. It was a real town.

Q: The name of that town.

A: **Tecuci**, T-E-C-U-C-I and that's pronounced Tecuci. And that all this, all these still exist. Actually you could look them on the internet to see their locations. We did it here. And they increased a little bit in population, all these places. Not that much but. And so we moved there.

Q: Do you remember when this was?

A: It was, I think in the summer of 1940.

Q: War broke out September first 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. Did you, ok you're eight years old. Were you aware of that?

A: I wasn't, no. My parents. And we had a problem there with radios. For instance, not everybody had a radio because there was no power, electrical power. So the only, I had some older cousins who were kind of smart and they put together a radio with batteries, not the little

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batteries, but the battery like a car battery nowadays and we heard the news. I mean they heard the news. But so –

Q: So 1940 comes and you –

A: 1940 comes and then this is happening that we have to move. I remember that –

Q: What season --

A: It was in the summer, in the summer. And the reason I know exactly that it was the summer. I remember we went with these horses and the wagon and I was thirsty and we didn't even take water with us. And we stopped at a fountain. And what happened, that fountain actually the water was polluted and I, nobody else got sick but I did. When we reached the place and we were put in this, we found a place to live there. One day I had some fever. They didn't know what it was at the time. So and they thought malaria, something like that. And but you know aspirin, something like this. And one day my mother, my father wasn't there at the time. What happened. They took the Jews who came from this little town and other little towns that were brought in, were told to move. They took those men to labor camps and they didn't take the men that were the residents. Jewish residents in this Tecuci. None of the men there were taken, but those Jews who –

Q: The refugee Jews from the other towns.

A: Yes, right. They were sent to some labor camps and that could have been a bad for some people, may have been bad. But if you had money, you could bribe the guards there and they would say mister and so on, treated you with respect because they were getting money. And that's one characteristic of the Romanian people. They like bribes but they actually produce what they take the money for. Other places, Hungary and so on, the Ukraine, they took the money and actually in many instances they were going to move them over the border and so on. They killed them and took everything they had left. Or they, even if they didn't kill them, they take anything they had and left them there. Didn't move them. That was –

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Q: What did your parents tell you why you had to move. What do you tell an eight year old child you've got to leave your home and go to another town.

A: Orders came from above. They, that's there was no time even to talk.

Q: Were you frightened?

A: I don't know if I was frightened.

Q: You were going with your family. So –

A: Yeah I was with my family and so on. I wasn't frightened because I had my parents with me and so on and my siblings.

Q: Were you able to take things special to you as a child, with you?

A: I don't recall now. Because we had to do it fast and so on. They worked all night long and so on to do all this and it was difficult to find a wagon and horses because it was a small town so they had to go to the villagers and say ok for money you know they would, so they came and my father had friends in all these villages because they liked him and the way they dealt with him. So –

Q: So now you're in the new town?

A: We're in the new town. We found a place to rent actually and because we had money at the time. That was for us the beginning and so on. Later on it became more difficult. And so my father was taken. So my mother had the money and so on and we lived in a – what really happened to everybody in the population there at that point and they were, food became scarce because they were giving to the Germans. They were giving and so on. And the Germans cross to Romania to attach the Russians.

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So everything was like you got what this

Q: Ration.

A: Yeah rations and so on and they, beef wasn't, and you didn't want to buy beef. It wasn't kosher and so on. So but we survived and so on. And mother was a very good cook. She, during the time that in Podu Turkului, we had two servants, one to cook, one that took care of the children. Because my mother was in the store with my father and so on. And so but she was a good cook in any case, so she managed to do for us and to survive throughout the war. You know.

Q: You stayed in that town throughout the war.

A: We stayed in that town throughout the war.

Q: Let's talk about your life during that time. Did you go to school in that town?

A: Right, but another thing happened. The government said the Jewish children cannot go to the public schools. So they did us a favor. Why? Because the Jews said well they started a high school, a gymnasium. The Jews started –

Q: A Jewish school.

A: Right, a Jewish school and they allowed us. They didn't care about that. And who were the professors. One was a pharmacist. One was an engineer. One was actually studied in France and so on. So he was the French teacher. And so we had a much better school, education that until the end of the war, ok. And we studied of course, the religion, being Jewish and stuff like that. I mean they –

Q: Was there a synagogue in the town?

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A: Yeah there were several synagogues. Oh yeah so –

Q: You felt free enough to go to services?

A: Yes, yeah there was no problem ok with that. So that's why I'm saying we didn't suffer that terribly. Also after I said my, all this, men were taken. Their families stayed behind. After two years there, 1942, something like that, they allowed them to come home. And they came home. That was that.

Q: Had you had any contact with your father on those two years?

A: Yeah, because in letters. They allowed him to send letters and so on and they –

Q: Where was he taken? Do you know?

A: I don't remember now the, I think there is information because somebody in, from Podu Turkului they put together a book which and they actually sent to me one copy with all the, about the names and so on. So I could answer this. The only problem is I sent it to my brother in Canada. And he still has it. So if I, I'll ask him to send it back to me so I can come with more detail that actual details, because they did a search of in all these little towns, they had the people who, all the information about the births and so on, in the towns.

Q: Records.

A: Records and so on. So they could go and when they were, since there were so many survivors. People remembered. So they put together this book. I'm not sure that there is a copy of it. Maybe even Micheline may be able to. And I had it in my hands at the time and I looked through it and my father appears there and so on. And many other Jews.

Q: During this time, how aware were the adults of what was happening in the countries and even in Romania?

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A: I'm sure.

Q: Other parts of Romania.

A: Yeah, I'm sure that they knew for instance that bad things happened in Bucharest. There was this so called ledger, legionnaires that a party or the Green and so on. And they had a massacre of the Jews in several places in Bucharest. And then this General Antonescu sent after them, caught them and killed them. And those who survived, among those, ran and they left and went to Germany and stayed there during the war. And –

Q: Did they mention wearing a yellow – when was that?

A: That was when in the Tecuci I suppose. But I didn't remember for the same reason. They look at some time, yeah they didn't pursue that. And probably because of bribing the police. And the police would say what do I care that too, for them. And it was not a Romanian thing. it was done because of the Germans.

Q: What do you remember from those years of war? Was it a very frightening time for you as a child. You were 14 when the war was over. And you were getting older and more aware.

A: Right, I was aware that there was danger and so on. And be –

Q: Were you afraid of being Jewish? Did that bother you?

A: No, I was Jewish. I was Jewish so –

Q: Were you Romanian or where you Jewish? What did you feel?

A: Of course, Jewish.

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Q: Jewish. You did not feel Romanian?

A: I didn't feel Romanian, no. it was, even though that was the language I was speaking. But I was reading, I was reading a lot in Romanian. Incidentally one good thing about that. They translated from other languages books and they had in this Tecuci place, they had a huge book store that went like several, all the way, had to go up on ladders to, and they had translated from French and English and even Russian books and they were kind of cheap. So I was able to read throughout the –

Q: Classics, is that what you –

A: Yeah the classics. And that was my really passion to read so –

Q: Were you active in sports?

A: Only yes, to some extent but you couldn't call it sports like here you know. We played, if you played say baseball, it was a ball made of pieces of whole ---

Q: String.

A: So we played games like that and so on. But after the war it was different and –

Q: Did your family stay in the same apartment that you had rented?

A: We stayed there yeah until --.

Q: You stayed in one place the whole time.

A: One place, right. And –

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Q: What were your parents frame, do you remember what your mother or father's frame of mind was?

A: Well they're worried, but they wouldn't all the time let us you know just, we still were children yeah. And my sister –

Q: Did you talk things over with your sister and brother about what was happening?

A: I don't recall that we talked about that ok. Maybe that was done on purpose not to make the little boy – so but we knew that it was dangerous times.

Q: Did you see German soldiers?

A: Toward the end of the war and I'll tell you the story. The end of the war came in 1944 for us. The Germans were retreating from Russia. And they actually came toward our own town, Tecuci and retreat. After them were coming the Russians. To attacking them. So I remember this very clearly. It was August 1944. And I was 13 around that time. And this is when they retreated.

Q: Did you have a bar mitzvah?

A: I had a bar mitzvah yes. And my father actually wasn't yet there, home at the time, for my bar mitzvah. He came a few weeks later. And the so an uncle of mine and I was studying for the bar mitzvah with a teacher and bar mitzvah there wasn't the kind of thing that you see nowadays here with the festivity and all this. You went to the synagogue. You didn't give a speech. You just came to the Torah and you read and so on, things that you learned and so on. I was the only one who read it in Hebrew, not in Yiddish pronunciation because I didn't know Yiddish. So my teacher taught me in Hebrew. And that was good for me later on, when I learned, I started to learn Hebrew. And so –

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Q: You had said that your father wasn't home. But I thought you said he came home after two years.

A: Yeah I think that I was wrong about that, the two years. I think that may have been, maybe that they were taking later on, not immediately when we arrived in the town so that my dates are a little bit yeah. And so in any case, yeah so we, I was ok, on this trip to Tecuci and so on, I got all this and my father wasn't there after, when, so one time after my mother was left with me in this house that we were renting. And my father was that was maybe a year after that. And so on. I kept having attacks of malaria, that's what they called. So one day my mother, my siblings were sent to our relatives because I was –

Q: Sickly.

A: Yeah, right. So if I had something for them to be not to catch it from me. And I had high fever and so on. And she had to go and she locked the door and said stay here. Don't go anywhere. I couldn't go out and she didn't want other people to be able to enter. And I started I had fever and somehow I remember this because it really happened. There was a window and the window was opened but the window had bars. So I felt like I was in the room that was also warm. I wanted to go out into the air. So I managed to go through the, between the bars to get there, climb up and down into the – and my mother comes and she screams Phillip, Phillip or she would call me **Philamel** that was my name. Little Phillip and so I was in bad shape so she took me in and she called Jewish doctor by the name of Dr. **Shinewitz**. And he came. It was an interesting story with that man. He was suffering with his heart and he was devoted person to his, to everyone, to all the patients and so he came and he found out that it wasn't just malaria. I had typhoid fever. So and there was a rule that anything that was if a person was sick with something like this, that it was a catching thing that they should be taken to the public hospital. But public hospital meant death. When anybody was brought like that, not because they were Jewish but the hospitals weren't you know the way they should be. My luck was that they didn't take me there. The major medical guy in the town, this Tecuci place was a friend of my doctor. They had both studied in France. They got their degrees there. In medicine.

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So my Dr. Shinewitz told to this doctor, he said look if he goes to there, he's going to die there. So but here. And the man said but look if he is not under what do you call it.

Q: Quarantine.

A: Quarantine then I can't let him stay any other place. So the doctor said there is nobody else except his mother and nobody can enter and so on. He is truly quarantined. So this doctor, the medical officer, came with Dr. Shinewitz to the place and I remember again as if, I was in bed. I had high fever of about 106, something like that. And he sat next to me on this **menich** and so on and he saw that we were clean and so on and my mother was there of course. And he let me stay there and that saved my life.

And my mother, I had to have ice all over on myself to get down and so on. And at the time there were no medications that, like nowadays. Somehow they managed and so on. I got I remember I wasn't allowed to eat solid food and so on. So my mother made everything else and so on. And cooked and she so many times during the night she changed the ice, sheets and so on and I had ice on my stomach and ice on my head and so on. And I survived. You know so due to my mother and to luck with this. I'm trying to find out. I know that the man has died, Dr. Shinewitz but whether there was any, I don't think he had children. He was married but –
So I would like to put his name among those people who saved and so on.

Q: We had been talking about what as a child when you saw German, German soldier, what reactions you had.

A: Yeah I as they, as I said they started retreating. And the Germans. They hadn't been there. They came from the east. So they, but there was a whole army. So they started going to this town and they thought they are going to exit the road away from the coming Russians. So they started doing that and lo and behold the Russians had been smarter than they. And they are waiting for them there. So there is a little bit of skirmish and then they retreated back and they went to another road they thought. Well they were caught. Again. So we heard the sounds of firing and all this. Somehow I found myself outside the house. My parents were there but everybody was worried. Ok what's going to happen. So I got out of the house and took a walk and what do I see.

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I see a German soldier on his back dead. He had a face like yellow, dark yellow and blood coming from his head. And I looked at that. Why I didn't start running or anything like that. And that was one of my experiences seeing and so on. I wasn't scared. So that was my reaction and then to finish the story about this. They got some prisoners. They didn't kill them all. They, meaning the Germans. So some were caught and they were put in behind barbed wire in a camp and so on but they weren't killed so that's not what the Germans did to the Russians. They killed prisoners. It's well known. And so that was one of my experiences at the time. And the Russians came, were passing through the city. And now this skirmish is finished and so on and some Germans escaped and so on. The Russians army came more in bulk. And once more I was coming, getting out of the house to see where the Russians were coming. There was on the boulevard and so on, they were passing with their tanks and trucks and all that. So I went there and I saw indeed this group of tremendous group of, they were just going. They were shouting now Berlin, to Berlin. So as I was there. This is something that I did. I'm not sure that this is a proud thing to say but I was, I saw some people coming from a building that was a government building. The government at the time, Romanian government had the power to sell tobacco. Nobody could sell tobacco. So everything came to this warehouse that was government. And the tobacco was not cigarettes. Just packages with tobacco that you made the cigarette and so on. And I knew about that. And that was 1944 so I was 13 years old. And I look. I let me go and I saw people coming out in boxes, wooden boxes. And I go inside too. I was just in shorts and so on, in sandals and a cap. Go and I see people taking this and go out with boxes. And then I hear shouting. I was still inside. I hear shouting and then a shot or several shots. To the ceiling. The Russians have come and they, oh tobacco. Oh. They wanted tobacco. They call it **tabak**. And so the people who were there who were adults. Romanian, probably. I didn't know anybody there. They got out. They were afraid to be killed. I wasn't afraid. So I take a box myself. It was heavy. And I couldn't carry it. I had to roll it. It was a kind of a cube. Not a barrel, no. It's just a box, a wooden box with the shape of a cube. So I managed to get down the steps there on a side street. The boulevard was here and this was a side, small street and there was nobody there because everybody were in their houses and by that time when they heard the shots there. And I started rolling it. And I brought it home. And my mother, my father said what did you do. And but I was there, with that. That meant money. Why? Because when they opened up and saw there was all these packages of tobacco. And so my brother was two years old and so on, said he is going to

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take a bag of this and sell it to the Russians soldiers for rubles. And he did that. And that, with that money we kind of, my father started a business again in this town and managed to recover. That, that's a family history. Just my brother reminded me just a few weeks ago. We were talking on the phone about that. And it wasn't ordinarily my parents wouldn't have told, said to me well this is stealing. But that was the, so --

Q: What other memories do you have of the end of the war in 44? Do you have any other memories?

A: Well at the end of the war yes, it was in the very basically since we were liberated by that time. The war ended basically 45, yeah. But in 44 we are liberated. We started hearing about what happened in Germany.

Q: That was going to be my next question. Cause up to that point, did your parents know, if your parents knew?

A: No, we didn't know. What was happening there. We knew that it was bad for the Jews, something but we didn't know details. Suddenly the news are open and they said, in fact the German soldiers who had been in the town during the, there was an airport there. A big airport. And the Germans air force had there and also the Romanians that were forced to fight with them against. And there was a little story about that too. But the Germans used some soap that were some people Jews bought them soap. They didn't know that this soap is made in Germany from the fat of Jews. It said so on the letters. I forget. Rhine, pure Jewish fat, something like that. And whether that was in any case we had the city, this town had we had taken this, from everybody that may have had it and went to the cemetery and they were put in, as dead people. Rabbis were there and so on.

Q: Buried the soap?

A: Buried the soap. In the cemetery yes.

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Q: Did you go to that service?

A: Yeah. I remember that yeah. So and all of us, all the Jews and they went to that. I mean it was a big shock. What? And so on and we didn't know all the other things what happened. It was something that was the soap. You know the soap. That was incredible. And then on the positive side there were, during the war, there was I said because it was an airport there, military airport, the Germans were in, with their planes, air force and also some Romanian who also were forced basically to fight against American and British and so on. So they came, their pilots and officers and so on and there was no room enough in the hotels or anything to put them. So what did they decide to do. The Romanian side said ok let's put these pilots to put them in Jewish homes. So we got an officer, who was a pilot, a fighter pilot, a man named **Longulescu** which means tall. And he was indeed tall and so on and he was a very nice man. He knew we were Jewish. So one room was given to him. And so on. And he came from a part of Romania that had never met Jews. That heard all the stories about Jews killed Christ and Jesus and so on. And suddenly he sees people like him and so on. And he behaved very nicely. He would get, bring us coffee that was something that we didn't have. And so on.

And he was not married or he was, he had somebody a friend later came to stay there with him. But he liked me. I was the youngest so one day he decided to show me, this what he does. He takes me to the airport and puts me in his plane, in the pilot plane. And it was something that, it's so unusual that to hear some. Of course he knew I was Jewish and so on. And he puts me there and you know the pilots when they want to shoot something, there's a stick with a button. That, he doesn't take, he takes off with a full plane. So I was almost ready to push the button. Don't touch it. So it was lucky and so on.

Q: Did you go up in it?

A: No, no. We stayed on the ground, just on the ground so but I remember this and so this man later on and during the war. That was not the end of the war. Actually he was an excellent pilot in terms of fighting. He had actually downed quite a few planes, British and American. But he ended up in the ground, dead. Ok. He was shot down as well. And that was the end of his life.

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And he was against the Germans. He really was, but he couldn't do anything. Couldn't, it was kind of forced. You don't do that. We'll shoot you. Period. So.

Gail Schwartz: 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 what was happening then.

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

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

A: No, during the war, no. No we were not allowed to go there. So only in 44.

Q: What month in 44 are we talking about?

A: I think after August. After August yeah. Suddenly all this appeared and so on. All these things and so people came from other towns who had been maybe underground, continued to be Zionists and so on and organize. But in this town, I didn't know anyone. Nobody did anything there during the war. (coughs) So I became very involved in that and so on. I loved it to be in, so on. And so did my friends there. And we were kind of, 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.

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Q: But the war is still going on. It's not spring of 45, but for you all it's over.

A: It's over because the Romanian army –

Q: In other parts.

A: No, they were no longer, they actually, the king, King Michael told the army –

Q: No, I meant the war going on in other parts of Europe.

A: In other parts of Europe, but we were off that and so some normality started building up and we are allowed in 45, 44 I'm not sure whatever. It's possible but it was too early to say that because the school starts basically like September, October or something like that so they were disorganized. I think only in the, the next semester started the high school. 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, that Podu Turcului and so on. This is a real school with Romanian teachers. But there were some French teachers as well. That again was a Jewish guy. And there was a Romanian friends who were very much in touch. Why? Because the Romanians got their independence in 1848. And they realized at the time because they had been under the Turks in 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 there are 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 –

Q: Do you remember VE Day, end of war in the spring of 45 and when Hitler died and –

A: Right and I remember with the atomic bomb ok.

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Q: But before that. That was summer time. Do you remember when Hitler died?

A: No that I don't. No, I don't think it penetrated to that time. But in 1945 when I heard about the atomic bomb.

Q: You had heard that.

A: 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 –

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

A: Yeah we heard about what happened all right and many other places and yeah, sure. 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 there was no way that they could in any case.

Q: I was thinking of and I don't know how to pronounce it correctly. **Yash**.

A: **Iași**, yes, that's exactly the pronunciation. They call it here **Iași** [ph] and so on, but it's Iași. That was one of the more, one of the first places in Romania that had an independent originally 2000 or more years ago they had a kingdom, **Dacia**, from and spelled D-A-C-I-A and those are they fought, they had a king and so on. His name was **Decebal** and he was defeated by the Romans so invaded Romania and went to the city that is **Constanza**. It's a name, Romania. And the, that's why the 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 someplace, savage place. No they had a kingdom. They had cities with buildings and so on and 2000 years ago and they were quite civilized. They had everything was written and so on. And they left who is what and the history and but they were defeated by sheer power and technology of the Romans. And so the Romans established themselves in the city of

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Constanza and they named some actual one of the poets, Roman poet was sent there as a penalty because he spoke against Nero or something like that. And –

Q: But to bring it more up to date, with Iași, did your family know about what had happened there?

A: Yes. Yeah that became well known and it's because there were some survivors of that train that, yes. And not many. And one nice thing that appeared from the stories told. The peasants who were along, living around the railroad where this were going on. And when they stopped and they heard the Jews water, water. They wanted to give them. The Germans shot them. This is not well known because for some reason there was bad rumors about that all Romanians were like that. They weren't yeah. There were bad as the old 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 about what's happened there. So we knew about that. Absolutely. And what happened in other places whether **Bessarabia** which is called **Moldavia** now. There is a difference between **Moldova** and Moldavia. I was in Moldova. This was the old kingdom and so that and that one, Bessarabia because it was next to the Russians, the Russians picked it up. In 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.

Q: Now you're a member of Hashomer Hatzair.

A: I'm a member of Hashomer Hatzair and of course we learned all about Palestine and Zionism and all this.

Q: Were your brother and sister in a group too?

A: No. I was. 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. Piano and all that. And in fact when she stayed in Romania until 1950. Then she finished actually at the

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university, she became a, she got a degree in being able to teach ballet. And when she came to Israel, she started a studio of her own. And but to reach that point –

Q: Your story.

A: Ok my story was I said to my parents after finishing the fifth –

Q: You're 15 years old now?

A: Right. I said I want to go to Palestine. Said how. What. Leave us, no. They wouldn't do that. They wouldn't let me and so on. And 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 believed me and ultimately I did leave. And the reason they believed me was that I mentioned that earlier that they had kind of believed that I was strong. Even more so than my siblings. And they based 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 here or 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 and so to 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 during the, before the war started.

And so this uncle comes and visit us in Bucharest and he said can I take him with me. You know for a few weeks to live 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 they said if he starts crying just bring him back. So I was there six weeks. There was no telephone and so on in the time so they could call. Only letters and I had a good time there. I was only a little boy there and he had a business of lumber business. He bought the places with trees and so on. And he had people cut the trees, they were lumber jacks 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 these, and I played there and so on. And they treated me so nicely. Why not? I was there. And so after, I didn't cry, I didn't anything so they

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knew that I could stand, could do that. So they had believed that I would, 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 organized from Bucharest, a whole train with Jews that, survivors from Russia, Soviet Russia. And who had been there during the war.

Q: This is all ages. Not just teenagers.

A: All ages, right and also from my old town people that we had been together in school and so on. I was with them also. Hashomer Hatzair and we boarded the train one, actually not evening. But from Bucharest.

Q: What was it like to say goodbye to your parents?

A: Well it was just hugging and all this. My mother was crying. And they are there. I am already on the train. I am at the window. The window was down and my brother and my sister and said get off, don't come. Don't go. Get off. The train started moving and they run along say get off. And I didn't, and I, we, so from this another story starts because we are now on the train. We are on this train were Russian officers and soldiers to protect us. Why? We are going to cross from Romania into Yugoslavia. And they knew there were still places in Yugoslavia, anti-Russians, anti and 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 were the communists. They go to Palestine so they'll have a foot in the Middle East.

That's exactly what. So they did that. They had no reason to bring soldiers and so on and officers who were actually nice. And so we crossed 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, over the, 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. They brought us, there was food there.

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They organized huge breads, round breads. They cut pieces and they had very well organized, amazingly. This was 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 in like a, it was a place where it was a prisoners of war place that they kept Germans, something like that. So we were there and they fed us and we are waiting for a ship.

And we were, the place where we went there was called **Bakar** which is a city on the Mediterranean and they ultimately we stayed there for about two weeks. And one day they said 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 and moved it. They fixed it and they arranged inside that we could go inside and lie down horizontally because they planned to have 2000, in the end there were 2600, close to 2700 people in that ship. The largest ever ship for in this migration. And so basically I said Mediterranean but we are the Adriatic Sea. That's they call it this because it's next to Yugoslavia. It's part of Yugoslavia. And so we, toward the evening we are told to come on the ship and board it there. And –

Q: The name of the ship, what did they call it?

A: **Hagenah.**

Q: Oh they called it Hagenah.

A: Hagenah. Yes. And it's still in existence. It was used later on for the fleet, but now it's just retired and so and I'll talk a little later what happened years later. So and we boarded. It was so 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 and after all I am only 15 years old. We didn't have that. I have no water. And my friends had gotten 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. And now these people they knew what to expect because they have been in these

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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. And so all night I sleep there on the board. On the deck. And comes next day and we started around 4:00 in the morning from there, the ship started. And it's sunny, very nice and so on. And I, I'm thirsty so I see people there with a lot of bottles. And I asked for a drink throughout that day. None of these people, survivors, Jews from wherever they wouldn't give to another Jew.

So later on in the day, my friends who were down in the, they found me. Said oh, come with us. We have a place here and so on and there is water and all this and so they kind of saved me. But in the meantime, during that day, good I was 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 into the, 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 you know metal and so on and I reached up and suddenly a guy on, from the captain's side says all of you get out of there. Go back on the, from the boats. So they said that I got down and then later on I was found by my friends.

So now about the, who is, who were these people who were 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, 2700 people on board and we are the British knew of us and they were waiting for us. And when we entered the territorial waters of Palestine they came with a war ship and told us to stop and so on. And at first they boarded with their marines and so on, with the guns. And they say where is the captain? Where is the captain? Trying to find the captain but.

Q: Did you know any English at that point?

A: No, I didn't, but that was other people who, I mean I knew that they were doing, 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 2700 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 brought us there, there were ships that

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they had caught before and arrested the people there, the Jewish immigrants. The British I mean and they had these free 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. They, 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 2700 it's going to be hunger strike. And there were a lot, because it was such an event. 2700 people on a ship that there were journalists from all over the world there. And they immediately, when they heard about oh there's a hunger strike. No the British are going to kill these people survivors of the, so they, the British said no. they are allowed to enter. And we are allowed to enter but not into, they put us into a prisoner of war camp and that was **Atleet**. And we were there. At least I was there for about close to two month because what they did, those families with young children, really small children and so on, they were given like 1500 per month. That was their allowed to enter. So and then came this, when these were no longer there, they took the other group and the younger people like 16, so not adults and so on. So our turn came and I and others who were my age were taken from there. The Jewish agency and then came on buses and picked us up.

Q: Had you had any contact with your parents during this period?

A: None at all. Nothing at all. They didn't know if I arrived or didn't. 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.

Q: Were the conditions on Atleet terrible?

A: 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. And 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 they were a lot of dining

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halls there and if you come at this time and so on fine. The trouble was for these Jews who were from, people were born right there and what did they do. They stole from the whatever the Jewish agency and they got very bad food. And very little. The milk was they poured a lot of water in the milk.

Q: Who did this, the Palestinian Jews?

A: The Palestinian Jews. 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, but who actually went and beat up the cooks and who were responsible for that. And the British had to come in. But it was so surprising. And not many people know that because it's shameful to mention that but it was there. And so after that the Jewish agency changed them and so on. And well it was like a paradise for two weeks. And they continued the policy. That was, but by that time I was after that.

Q: So you went to Mount Carmel to –

A: 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 decided? It was a committee from the various Jewish Zionist groups. Hashomer Hatzair and also the fathers, Jewish, the religious groups and all that. And they wanted to send to some of us say 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 friends there. So otherwise, they wanted to bring us to a religious group. But I didn't want to go. Simple like that. So finally we had stayed there for several days. And it was a beautiful view of the Gulf of Haifa and so on. Everything was the food was terrific, and the people were nice in those places and so on. And then they took us to a kibbutz in **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 40 some. In a way as if we were their children.

Q: So it was all children they took to Ein HaShofet? It was all teenagers?

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A: All teenagers, right. And they treated us you know with tremendous and some of the, some of us were orphans who lost their parents. Some had one parent but not there. And so on. And it was I was there for three and a half years and it was at one of the times of 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.

Q: You picked up conversational Hebrew?

A: Right, yeah and they taught Hebrew and they taught because most of us didn't speak Hebrew. So many of us had went for the bar mitzvah but that. So in a short while, at least in my case, I was after six months, I was able to be current in Hebrew and so on and Debby had, we studied like a regular school and everything. History and literature and all this. And we had this and terrific teachers. One is a man, Josef **Vilfand** and the other one was a woman. Reva **Meisler**. And she is still alive. I saw her this year and she is 93. And she, when we visited she was having exercises with another girl. And she had memory absolutely incredible. And it was so pleasant to be there and to see her and she saw me, ah, **benzion**. Amazing.

Q: Tell me about the partition plan and United Nations in 47.

A: Oh, ok. That was –

Q: You were still on the kibbutz?

A: I am still in the kibbutz right.

Q: Did they do anything in the kibbutz

A: Oh yes. We celebrated, tremendous celebration and but before that once I were in the kibbutz in 1946 and 1947 they were already trouble with the Arabs, before even the United Nations decided on this. I have a little story about the days that this happened. But so we were trained.

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We started being trained how to use a gun. Rifles, machine guns, what do you call 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 we had to, to this day I 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. We were just – and we were all happy about this. And so we, then came the day of the 1947. I and a friend of mine had a, who had a 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 this, a time every year we got a week off. So he said do you want to come with me to that place. Yeah, he had talked with them and so on. That he can bring me. So I and he went there. And we had a very nice time, the three of 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 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 to **Amick** 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. 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. We are at this bus station which was down in the, not in 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 was going to stop there. So we'll wait for them. Sure, we go. We had this back, bags and so on and we are in shorts and so on. And the equipment was sold for, bought from the British army.

And there we start walking and where, 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, there you see them, there were coffee shops with tables outside on the sidewalks and they all sit and smoke and drink coffee. And suddenly from one of them, one guy comes out running and it was kind of toward us. And I say Shlomo, [foreign language phrase – Hebrew?) 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. He said no I'm tired. Well I said let's go. But nothing really

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happened. So we came out of Haifa and a bus stops in the, toward the exit, stops, came from the **Mefratz**. And he sees us there, two little youngsters there. He opens the door to the bus and get in. We said we don't have money, **ein kessef** [ph]. He said (foreign language sentence – Hebrew?) You're stupid. Don't you know what happened today. It's this and Arabs are attacking. They are mad. So 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. But that was the experience that –

Q: What about in 48 when the state was declared?

A: Well that was. I was still in the kibbutz, right. And we were left and since the army was in, 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. 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 you 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 this is going to happen. They didn't care. We didn't care one bit about that. What we were, this, after 2000 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 in outside felt equally but we were there. We were there in the place and so we have been there, as I said for about three years and so on.

So in 1949 our group was getting, we are by now 18 and excuse me, at kibbutz **Arti** which is the organization of Hashomer Hatzair, decided to put us to send this group, instead of leaving us in HaShofet, they decided that they have a place to send us, to a place called **Gan Shmuel Al Kibbutz**, Gan Shmuel Alomir 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 would survive. But they weren't enough people.

So they decided because it was political as well to have so take this group, **Kevrat Udem** 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, this three and a half years we've learned all sorts of things to do. We worked, we studied and I worked in the

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gardens, the 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 in a truck. And so on. It was ok. It was 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 I still can do it. So we are proud of all these things. But we come to this kibbutz. We didn't know where we are going. They were stranger to us and they behaved not like strangers, but like bitter toward us. They put us to do the, also to things that only us to clean the bathrooms and so on. And so and we had a man who is our supervisor, **Madrek**. We didn't know that he was really a communist. Amazing. And he is allowed to steal this probably. And at one meeting with him and so on, we started complaining. What are you doing to us? We have **mech to ot** [ph] meaning we have learned how to do this and you are sending us only to do only that work and so on. And you're not treating us properly. Because in the kibbutz it wasn't like that. We, if you learn something that was that. You could do what you 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 that's not nice what you are doing. And he 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. The next day or two days after I went to Hadera and I enlisted in the army. And but the army said you have to come a week from now. So I, 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 I, 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 **Ocher**, no more. You should get out. But my friends who were still there they came and brought me the food from there and so on. And survived and it was only two of us who did that. I and another member, **Zev**, Zev and **Godol** there were two of them. One is small (inaudible) and we enlisted. And then a week later we were taken from Hadera to another place where we trained, real training and so on. And –

Q: How long were you in the army?

A: Four years. And I was supposed to be really only two years but they said you can enter into

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the regular army. You can continue if you want and then you are a member of the **Sva Keva**, 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, ok, **Jafo**. And I worked on kind of a, what can I call it. An organizer, not the community organizer, but in the time that was, we 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 you 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 and you are very smart in doing. I was designing at the time just young as I was, put together people and so on in this, in making groups and so on. That from the reserve people. The reserves they are until you are 50 years old, you are 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 group, 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 got, I went to the exams, external exams. But at the same – that was exactly like the ones given in the schools at the time. And so on. And the same questions. And I succeeded very well due to my teachers and I, at the end of that, in 1950, was I started, I went to the university. I was accepted for the university, Hebrew University and studied there for my degree.

Q: In what field?

A: I started in physics and that's what I did. At the time, they were, 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 had to get a master's degree. A master's degree meant that you had 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, could have been considered here as a PhD thesis, because it was different standards at the time. And in fact some of the people who didn't do it, they didn't get their degree. They

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didn't do that in Israel. They didn't get their degree. So they went, they did something else. So that was my –

Q: So then you finished at the university and then what did you do?

A: Well I started, 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 at the Weizmann 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 one sense. I was trained in the Hebrew University, particularly mathematics at a level that MIT didn't have it. And very few of universities, the best universities in the world we had that kind of training. And this man really didn't. So when I would, 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 no what you wrote here on the lab work, it's not true. And you failed that (inaudible) 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 that day. You know what. You should sorry. You should go to the US and get your PhD there. So how do I do that? I mean I have no money. My parents don't have money to send me there or anything like that.

So 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? The 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 am acceptable but not for the very first semester. In September. But if I wait, I'm accepted.

And only one other university, the 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

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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 dollars to one, at the time if you leave and don't know to travel. So my parents bought the ticket and so on. And I arrived in New York and I had a little bit of money and –

Q: Did you know English?

A: By that time, yes, yeah because I used English at Hebrew University and also shared the 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 Vilfand. 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. So he, 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 Encyclopedia Britannica junior and here is an article about coal. And translate it into Hebrew. So I did, so I did and he would check, do these things and that's how I learned English so I wasn't yeah. But I became really very easily here to –

Q: So you went to Maryland?

A: I went to Maryland.

Q: For how long?

A: Well I was there 1960 and I was there until 1964 so I got my degree and PhD and I had my advisor was a guy named George Weiss, he was Jewish and religious Jew too and he lives not far away from here. It's an amazing situation. And we at the time when I finished it was quite a different, difficult time with jobs for physicists. It's amazing within a short time this situation has changed. Because with the ride to the moon and so on, there suddenly they said only reach that. There's no more money. So whatever you tried to get a job they said we are firing people. And indeed that was a disaster. 1966. So I got also the little jobs in between 1964 and 66. Finally I

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managed to get a job with a company in, Raytheon company in way back on what is the name, Rhode Island. And I worked for them and I was doing work, what they were interested of just actually was supported by the Navy. I didn't know that at the time that the Navy, and but it was deltoid problems in the Navy. And I was there for about, but I'm actually before, before that actually I had a benefit of working after I got my PhD, the National Research Council awarded me a three 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 in Greenbelt Maryland. And that was very interesting and I actually this was basically before, a little bit before I got my PhD.

And I finished my PhD and submitted a thesis to the, 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 talk about you show them your PhD and thesis and so on and they ask questions and so on. And there was one guy from the committee that was part of the faculty at Maryland. In the Physics, nuclear physics and he said to some people there. Wait a minute in front of me. This is not physics. That 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 were I worked for NASA and I worked on things that were, dealt with what are called solar flares from the sun ok. And things that hadn't been done before except in my work at the time. So as I'm there and he's 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 and he talks what do you mean mathematics. This man has worked here on this and so on. And so the committee decided that I deserved the PhD.

Q: It was kosher. You worked how long for Raytheon and then what did you do?

A: OK so but I was still, then at that point I forgot to mention this, the order of the, I was with I worked for NASA and now I had 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, right. It was. 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 was really

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decided that I really didn't want to continue because the reason is that I as a physicist when I look at astrophysics as it's called today like with NASA was involved but we actually were, NASA was involved really in a real problems that had an impact on the, by the so called astrophysics. It was kind of 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 solar flares, these things that happened 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 war or whatever.

So I decided I want to go in, to a place that will 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. 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, what I did for them. And then that particular one collapsed.

Gail Schwartz: this is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer collection interview with Phillip Abraham. This is track number 3 and you were talking about working for Raytheon in Rhode Island.

Phillip Abraham: Right. I worked there and problems that had to do with submarines. How to make sure that the submarine is not sunk by some missile or detected by an adversary. And this means that there is sound in the water. It's not like the sound that we hear in the air. But that can propagate through the ocean thousands of miles. And in the process may hit an object like a submarine. And reflect it. And if there is somebody there waiting with their own sensors they say oh there is something there. And they can determine sometimes what that something is. So I worked on that. And I did, I in my opinion and others I did good work. But this was a little

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company part that I was working in on this. And it was actually given money for that research by the office of Naval Research in Washington because it was an important need.

So but they didn't, the company itself didn't put money into this. And suddenly the money that came from this part of, from the Navy stopped because in other projects they didn't provide what they were expected to. So they cut them off. And Raytheon decided to close this place. So suddenly all the people who were there are out. They gave me two weeks' notice and so on. And now I'm without a job.

And as I said, this was like it's like 1968, something like that. And I am without a job and I am married and I have two little babies.

Q: When did you get married?

A: I got married in 1964 when I finished my –

Q: Was your wife American or from Europe?

A: No she was an American yeah. And we met through the other people. She was at the American University when I was at the University of Maryland and somebody said oh you should meet this and so on and we met and we got married. So we had, we have two children, a daughter and a son. Of course my daughter is close to 44 years old. And my son is just 41, 42, something like that. And so that was, I was in a, and I was at the time, I was living in New London, Connecticut because that's where Raytheon group was there, that particular group. Even though they are in Rhode Island. So I'm looking and I'm looking and trying to find a job. Finally I visited the University of Connecticut, the physics department and I see something there, maybe on the bulletin board outdoors that they were interested in something like physicists or something. So I knocked on the door and I met somebody named like Paul Clemens, a Jewish guy who got actually born in Australia, but had been in England, got his degree there. And so on. And he was the head of the physics department at University of Connecticut. So he said well you know I, we don't have a spot on the faculty but I can arrange for you to be here as a research associate. Some salary is better than nothing. So I moved there to basically University of Connecticut is the College Park. Sorry, not College Park. What is it called.

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Something, it escapes me now. In any case, I moved to that place and with my family and I was there for several years. And they didn't have a real lot of space for me to become a real –

Q: Professor.

A: Yeah. And on the faculty so I had to make do with a job still with the University of Connecticut but not at that place. But in Hartford they had a kind of a college or a branch up there and I taught there, undergraduates and some graduates. And ultimately I escaped that because there was no hiring. And finally I looked around and my friends who were in Connecticut and they said maybe you want to work for, let's see what did I do there. I was in Connecticut. There is a place that can hire you in New London that is not university. It's the Navy. And that, and I went for an interview and they hired me and I had to give some talks and so on and they hired me. And I was there for eight years as a member and I became, of course not a temporary but and with pension plan and all that.

And then I decided to move elsewhere and something happened also in my family. We got a divorce. So I moved from there to right here in Maryland basically and the Naval Research Laboratory. You probably heard of it. And I arrived there and I was a member of the Naval and so on. And they started doing research on what they were interest and based on the work I'd done before and I stayed there for seven years. And one day they asked me. There was a vacancy, a temporary vacancy at the office of Naval Research in Arlington, Virginia. And somebody that has your background and only for a month or something like that. Would you like to do that? Managing something. I never managed anything except myself and doing my work. But I said well I'll take it and see what, I wasn't losing my position at NRL. Ok.

I come there. So they give me a whole program with money to go and the first thing I do, I interviewed all these people who had already programs from this and so on. And I had to cut immediately a group at Catholic U. That was, but what I found about myself, I found that I never thought of myself capable to do managerial work.

But I learned and I became a manager as well, even though I continued to be my interest and I never stopped learning. So I was there for the rest of my profession with them until 2007. So that was, after 32 years of work for the Navy.

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So in the meantime, that program that I started there that I was given at ONR but I mentioned the fact that I didn't know that Raytheon paid my salary because they got it from ONR. I never knew that. Suddenly I am at ONR and this is life, very.

So one day my program, they decided that they don't want to continue to do it. It was filled with submarines and some stuff like that. But they had been doing so long with submarines, basically since the beginning. If one goes back, the First World War when the submarines appeared and they were continuing in that and sometimes they reached a point where nothing new was done really to do better. So they decided not because I failed or anything like that, that they are not going to put money in that.

And so what to do with this guy, me, that I am an expert in that. They said well there is here a group that works in logistics. Gives money to do science and technology logistics. And this right now it's headed by a captain who is coming, retiring from this job. And we need somebody else. Would you like to take it? Well I'll try.

So yes, I tried and yeah in the meantime I had been, become also no longer belonging to NRL. I was belonging to ONR. So I'm entering this. I didn't know what logistics is. Only some very primitive idea. I looked in a dictionary and so on. And then I looked at what this captain had done and so on. He was a very nice man who, but he was not a scientist at all. And what he did for, what he did was ok. But it wasn't the science in there. So here I was to try to find out exactly what other people have done who were being paid money and so on. And the first thing that does, I do, interview these people. I went for instance to Catholic U where there was a group there working with a program. And it's not logistics and I said you know I wrote to my supervisors at ONR that this should be cut off. It was something a million something for three years. And they didn't quite cut off because Congress intervenes in these things. And the people in Congress have the power and the people upstairs in the ONR, they unfortunately they, instead of saying no. This is not a good place to do so I didn't suffer from it.

But so ultimately I took over this logistics program and it became indeed science and technology with a lot of people that were doing in universities and also industry. And maybe in institutions themselves. So quite a large I had ultimately something, a program with 35 million dollars per year that had to be, and I will go, travel a lot to see what they are doing and going directly to the people who were working on this and they had to give me a, every time what have they done.

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And so on. And discussing it and I would say go in a different direction and all that. And I was -
- and people were at least those who I didn't cut off were happy with me.

But the, I selected the people who – and I had connections. Sometimes I would be asked to come and see what they are doing prior to. And in one case it was something in San Luis Obispo, that's in California and they have Cal Poly there. California Polytechnic. And they said they have a new method of dealing with certain things. And what they called intelligent agents, artificial intelligence, so called. And they showed me when I arrived there. They had three people with computers and the task that they had was to load with equipment a ship that is, can bring these things to the, of the Navy into the ocean and to resupply and so on with all these things or whatever to be. A tank or a truck or any, everything.

Now to load something like that, it's not easy on a ship. A ship is, has all sorts of decks and it has elevators. Can they do this or not? They have cranes. It's a very complicated story. And they used to put two people to work for one single ship, maybe two weeks or more to decide whether they, how to do it. So with this intelligent agent, just on a computer having all the data about what loads they have to put on the ship, they could do it in half an hour and they proved it to me. And indeed this is one of the most successful things that I, and with not a lot of money.

Some other projects cost millions of dollars and didn't perform as, but this with a quarter of a million dollars they advanced. And nowadays they have a company of about 200 people that work on this. And it's not only the US Navy and the Marine Corps and the Army but the British are paying to have this program. And it was really something that, and I also suffered from it in one sense. When you are in the Navy you are any government and so on, you defend yourself from anybody else by saying this is no good for us. We're going to do that. You know we don't want that. And indeed they refused to use something like that and this is a story, a long story in itself. But so –

Q: It sounds like you've had a very interesting career.

A: Really, I did yes. And these people who, from the university there, are still in connection with me and send me what they are doing nowadays. I started also much more, not only this thing, but I went deeper into the, myself, into the what logistics should be about. And something that I saying this, I'm saying this and people say you are bragging but it's true, a thing it's the truth.

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Because I started studying and see what is this logistics. What do we do? It's all these supplies and oh I need water. I bring a tank of water. Is that enough to do with that logistics? No, I have, I realize by studying it really not just for the Navy that it's much deeper than that. It goes all the way to the people in a mine for coal and all these materials that we do or the people who grow food and so on.

Everything is connected. When you hear you know oh we'll do this or put this, we'll send shovels to Obama style, ready shovels. Who is making the shovels? Somebody. Well what are they made of and so on. Oh in the mine they bring this. It's not a circle. You have roots so many roots that to the final object. But even more so even military philosophy and how do deal with the battle and all this. So I wrote about this and so on.

And only some people paid attention. And interestingly enough, after 9-11, what do they do? The Navy decides they don't need logistics. It was the stupidest, absolutely the, something that the public doesn't know. They cut at ONR they no longer have anything, logistics. It's to me it's a sad, very sad thing because many people have died because of that.

Q: Can we get back to —

A: All right, I'm just taken because I feel strongly about that. Not because my whole life, I had my careers ok, but it's how sometimes when people refusing to accept something and later on I'll tell you a story.

Q: Do you feel Romanian at all, any connections with the country?

A: Not really no. No I have never felt that. My parents came from there 1950. And my brother my sister. My, I have the roots there in the cemeteries and families and so on. And maybe someday I may go and visit this, where I was born and so on.

Q: Do you think you would have been a different adult if you hadn't had to get up and move to a different city and then leave the country and so forth. Did that mold you into who you are?

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A: Yes, I think so. And I'll repeat the words of a guy that I worked with in New London. He was also a guy with a PhD, born here. And so on and he just asked me about my history and I told him. And he said, I really envy you of having all these experiences, while I, he said, I went to grammar school, then high school, then college. Then I went this. I'm not working here. I never had any, any obstacles to the challenge and but you had all this. And I really felt good when he said that because indeed this is what happened to me. I didn't know that this is going to be but somehow that's how fortune or lack of it or whatever made me into what I am. So –

Q: Are you proud of being a Jew, even though you had to leave your home country?

A: Absolutely.

Q: Because of the fact that you were Jewish?

A: Well I'm Jewish because I know Hebrew. I know all these things that I've learned and more so than most Jews that live in not, don't live in Israel. Sometimes even those in Israel don't know so much about you know I read and so on. I always love to read. And I, I think that what happened to me was fateful sort of thing. You know fate if you wish and –

Q: Do you feel that you still had your childhood, that was now taken away from you?

A: No it wasn't taken away because as I said when I was, I was not a child anymore. But when I was in the kibbutz but we had –

Q: No but you were eight years old when you had to leave one town to go to another.

A: No because we still had, we still had friends and we did things together and so on, in the snow and all that. So we're not, for instance I used to, when I was still a child like that, there was a little girl my age who had some books that I wanted to read. And said oh I'll lend them to you if you pull me on the snow. So I did that. In order to get the book to read. So my parents and my siblings said first of all my parents didn't like me to, at the table to read at the table when we ate.

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And stuff like that. Because I was very much involved. When we lived in Tecuci we, in this house, I, my brother slept in a room that had one wall was windows. So during summer time or something like that, when the moon shined, you could actually read and we could actually read at the light of the moon. And I used to read, hiding my book under my pillows. My parents didn't know.

Q: Did you read, you talked about seeing a dead German. Did you see any other destruction, any damage from the war at all?

A: In Romania. Yeah there were things like that because they bombed you know the city you know and so on.

Q: Did you have to go into shelters, things like that?

A: We didn't have a shelter. We would go down maybe in the basement yeah. If you had a basement. There were, it was not a common thing. it was a basement that they cut. They didn't put walls, real walls or something like that so –

Q: And was there a lot of destruction in your area, in your neighborhood?

A: Not that much because it was the only thing that the American and British air forces did, they bombed the airport. Sometimes they, for instance they did bad things in Bucharest that they shouldn't have done because they hit population. There were no military and so on.

Q: But I meant you yourself experienced.

A: No, I didn't experience that. No, no.

Q: Do you get reparations at all?

A: No.

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Q: Do you think the world has learned any lessons from the Holocaust?

A: Sometimes I think no because we see what's happening right now when you have people killed in Israel and so on. And Israel reacts and immediately they all yell Russia, a country of, a failed country if any and so on, that committed such massacres, everywhere they went. In their history the whole history. And they are saying all this. And Belgium and all these countries. And even here. What is our so called president in the, it's not fair to react. So yes, I'm definitely I think that we haven't learned yet.

Q: What are your feelings when you go into the Holocaust Museum building?

A: Well first of all its sadness, deep sadness that this happened cause you cannot really go to it and not feel like crying when you see the youngsters and the old and the women and the men and so on. For nothing, for just nothing. And I get mad, I get very mad if I have been there and they had a gun I would have shot. And one thing that made me mad is well the Jews, they didn't react to or see the, in the beginning that this is so serious. No they believed, the German Jews they believed that oh it cannot happen here. After all it's such a cultural nation and so on. And they couldn't believe that this was happening. So –

Q: But even though your father was told to leave and he said I can't leave because I have to defend the family.

A: Exactly right, but at the time it wasn't, in Romania it wasn't so bad. That's why. It was somewhere else. But many times we talked in the family. You know we could have been born in the United States or something like that. And living in the United States.

Q: What are your thoughts about Germany today?

A: I, I have I don't know. I have met some nice people from Germany. One of them is a man that I supported at Cal Poly. He was actually born in Australia. He is of German origin. And he

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is a professor there and he was the one who pushed this new thing that I mentioned. And he is a religious man and he really is a man with standards so and we didn't talk a lot about the Holocaust. He is not guilty of having done that. But so there are people like that, that I respect and I think there are but there are still groups there that are not –

Q: Have you been to Germany?

A: No. And frankly I don't want to visit.

Q: Because –

A: Because I don't know. I'll be, I'd feel really not because I'm afraid of them. At this point I'm not afraid of anybody. I will fight for my life but I'm not afraid. So it's I don't like it. I don't like the – so and to some extent I don't like the French. Even the Dutch. They didn't behave in a way that they should have. The people that had a, actually a tradition of helping the Jews in Holland during the Inquisition and here they are and instead of being fully support this small minority of Jews, they did bad things. Not all of them, not all of them.

Q: Do you volunteer at the Holocaust Museum?

A: Yeah.

Q: What kinds of work do you do?

A: Well basically to translate from Romanian. People who have been interviewing like you and I think my (phone ringing)

Q: So you were talking about what you do at the museum.

A: Yes because I still know Romanian language I can translate and so I went there and I was given a task to get something like this that was an interview, listen to it and translate and I started

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doing that. But because I was busy with other things I didn't quite finish it. I still have to finish it and so on. It was the, somebody in Romania who in the north of Romania, on the border with Russia where the Jews were picked up and so on that was horrible thing and stories that are – and that was done by the Romanians, yeah. Romanian police and army. And it's very, in fact one of the, my friends in Israel, the wife of a good friend, she was there. And survived and she was hit with a bayonet in the back. And to this very day she is like 77 years old and she still suffers from that. But she survived.

Q: How do you feel being from Romania, knowing that others in the same country suffered more you know?

A: Well I am suddenly very, supporting for the Jews who suffered, yes. There is no question about that. And I was just lucky. We were lucky. Those who didn't have that experience. It could have happened and so but it wasn't their fault. They were yeah. I'm not saying that the German Jews are at fault, weren't for this Holocaust of theirs.

Q: The Germans.

A: The German Jews. Yeah because they couldn't believe that people will do something like that. You know.

Q: Is there any particular part of the museum that you identify with?

A: Identifying in what sense.

Q: Any exhibits that kind of strike you as –

A: Well I admire and identify with when they started reacting by, with force against, that's –

Q: The resistance.

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A: The resistance yes because I feel that small or without powers and so on, as I am, or I was, I'd still would have taken a stone and throw at them. And that's my feeling. To this very day if somebody ok, tried to attack me, I wouldn't sit there and let them. Whether they have a gun or not. And I truly admire, and those people who defend themselves and I believe in the death penalty. I think that a murderer should be executed and I know people that say oh you are, oh let's keep them and 30 years and then they say well he learned something. Let's give him, let him out. When I hear this I just see red. Because it all the time, it happens. If you read the newspapers what happens. Oh he was given for this that he killed this but after all he is not the psychologists say that this or that and so on. I don't believe in that. Frankly I would say it in public and –

Q: Has your experience affected you religiously in any way? You were a child obviously before –

A: As a child actually until my bar mitzvah I was still a believer and –

Q: But now as an adult that lived through this and experienced it.

A: Also being a scientist has something to say. When I hear you know that people talk about the spirit that have created the world and so on. If people believe I'm not laughing at them. No. I'm saying that's fine. You believe in that but what I believe in it's a mystery whose answer or solving will never happen. It's so, when you look out in the sky and you see the stars and all that, and if you are a, those who can actually look through a telescope and see much more than we do, how can you say there was some spirit or somebody who created all this. Can he understand this? Absolutely not.

Why it exists. There is a mystery in looking at an ant you. You try to pick it up. It runs away from you. It knows you are there. It's a mystery. I mean how. I know Darwin said evolution but that's a mystery too. Big mystery and sometimes even our rabbi at TI, Teferith Israel, sometimes says that his, doesn't know what to believe. He has the courage to say that to a congregation but I am not –

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Q: You are observant in the sense of holidays and things like that.

A: The holidays yes because that's a tradition. In a way it's not so much the religion as being a nation, being a nation that it's another thing that we should really respect ourselves, a people who suffered so much in their history and they survived. One can say it's God's doing but can we say it's God's doing the Holocaust, the six million Jews killed. It never happened to other people in such way. No. Never. In all the history of mankind.

Q: Are you more comfortable being with people who were born in Europe than those who were born here in the United States?

A: No, no I don't. I'm, I can be, one, in one aspect though. I would say the American Jews, there are a lot of them who are really not in connection with their history as a nation as a, no they feel themselves Americans and so on. That's a major thing and I feel that that is missing something. While the, those Jews who are born in Israel or who came to Israel they know that's a different story and indeed some Americans who when they are, became Israelis. But when I see at the synagogue for instance what are they doing many times. They are very active in things that are done in Somalia to people or other places and so on or in the District and so on. They never talk about poor Jews or let's give to Israel. Yes, there are in the prayer book there is a whole thing about Israel, and so on. And we pray and we read this and say fine but what about yeah, many times they send the children to this new thing that's youngsters can go to visit Israel.

Q: A birth right.

A: Yeah. And that's fine and in fact when my wife's, Naomi's grandchild, Samuel, Sam is going actually in a few days for nine months in Israel. And oh I like him very much. He is a really for Israel and a great youngster really. I knew them from when they were born. Ok.

Q: So you remarried?

A: Yes, yeah right. And my children are not married. I have no grandchildren of my own and so

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Naomi has five grandchildren. And I have been there so one of them is already in college and the second year in college and the others are still, there is only a young one that is only 14.

Q: When your children were very young, did you tell them about your childhood or did –

A: Yes I did. I did. Yes and my first wife was not Jewish so –

Q: How were the children raised?

A: Well actually I tried to raise them you know but when I was a professor at the University of Connecticut I met, there was a synagogue there and I would go there with them but somehow it didn't work out. And so but my children know one thing of course. That is always told to them. Since their mother is not Jewish, then they are not considered Jewish by the --. So they point this out, but they are certainly for Israel and so on. My daughter has visited quite a few times.

Q: Have you gone back to Israel?

A: Oh yes, yeah. I actually ---

Q: Do you consider yourself Israeli or American?

A: This, it's interesting. No, both and I feel that I am Israeli and I'll give you some examples of that. When I came here I was not a citizen. I was a foreign student so to speak. And I was when I became a citizen in 1968, they never asked me, meaning to have you denounced your citizenship, Israeli citizenship. Nobody asked me. And I thought that just by living and I lived by that time eight years here, I'm not a citizen anymore there. And I became a citizen so when I visited there in 1973. I took my children. They were very young at the time. For my parents to see. My mother actually had died so only my father saw them and my relatives there. But when I and they said nobody, when I came back, I visited to Israel, I saw, I had my passport, American passport. Nobody asked me any questions. When I went again later on a few times, nobody they asked. The last time that I was there in 2007, as a matter of fact, that was not the last time, but

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that's when something happened. They looked up when I came to, on the computer, they had my name because the time an Israeli citizen. I had a passport once which I still have a copy of that old passport. And they said you know you won't be let out from Israel if you either renounce your citizenship or you have a passport, an Israeli passport. So I said well, they said. That, I said ok, I'll get a new passport and I had to go to, and so on and I was lucky because I and Naomi, she was with me at the time, we had a flight back in a few days. And the bureaucracy in Israel is such that it may take you a month and so on. Luckily I have a friend from the kibbutz. We have been friends for the, all these 60 years almost. And he knew somebody in Haifa in the place of the passports, the passports and we went there and they did it on the spot for me.

Particularly because they saw I had been, I served in the army and all this. So I said they're not going to do problems to it, just so I have an Israeli passport. So I'm a dual. I mean it's legal. One thing happened when, before I finished my work and I retired in 2007, they wanted me to continue to work, not at ONR, but at NRL by being a contractor with a company. They would pay me and so on and work as much as I wanted. And I said ok. But for this, they said you have to fill out this form. And this form asked you, are you a citizen, what, of what country. And I said the United States and they asked do you have any other passport. And I said yes, and they said ok, we can't give you a, what do you call it, a security clearance and so on and work. I said how is that possible? I had secret clearance and now you're telling me, and then they came back and said ok, if you give us your Israeli passport and we'll cut it off into pieces, you can still enter the laboratory NRL. And I said no. I had enough of that. I don't want people to tell me what to do anymore. So money. They were going to pay me basically a thousand dollars per day. That's pretty good.

I never had that when I worked a regular and so on. But I decided no. There is point where it's not –so that's how I feel. I feel for America and Israel at the same time. I. Why, because I feel these two countries are so connected, even they don't, many people don't realize, including the Jews. How come? They if you look at the history of the United States and I've learned a lot from the history, reading books. I collected books and so on from biographies and all this. And when you read about the founding fathers, what did they depend on? They went to the Old Testament which is the Hebrew Bible right and all this. It's so, there is no other country that has that and believed in that and the two are basically they, one invented this God and so on. The others invented how to behave as a nation. How to do it, liberties of human beings. That's what's

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the connection. There is no other country in the world that has done that. Neither Israel as a nation or the United States as a nation and as a – it will be a tremendous tragedy if one of these two countries will disappear. And sometimes I feel very strongly about the United States that it goes to in a direction that is, to me is extremely dangerous, becoming something that it shouldn't become.

When I hear about illegal immigrants and this is oh it's no, these poor people. Well they have their lands. And when you talk about South America, now you can call me a racist or something like that. I feel they have a land, rich lands. Mexico and so on. They have natural resources and so on. They don't know how to conduct themselves as nations. And in a way I remember in the time that I have been here, arrived in 1960. The Americans were Americans. Really when I look at people they suddenly we see groups of people that don't look, they look, looking differently. And I'm saying bad ok, differently. Different. And to claim that I even wrote an article, not an article, but a letter to the editor in the Wall Street Journal because there was a man who was a, in a consulate from Mexico. And here in the US. And he wrote, oh he doesn't understand why people are against immigrants from illegal or not. We are giving you the best of us. And I couldn't stand it. You know because they are giving us the best of themselves. How many scientists are coming here? Illegal. Coming people that don't have jobs, that they have the worst jobs and they are and they come here and so I felt very strongly about that. And that's only one, one thing. But there are so many other things that are happening. The freedom of the people in this country is in danger. With the government, what it's doing, taking over things that it's not, it's unconstitutional. That's how I feel.

Q: Well –

A: That's what I am and I'm not ashamed to say that. For instance, when people talk about I hope you will not be, I have some views about those same sex marriages. I am totally against that, to force that on the rest of the country. No matter what. If they want to call me a bad guy, fine. And so, but many people have this view that this is freedom. I'm not sure that this is freedom. I'm against hurting anybody like that. I don't want to do anything in jobs or anything like that. But the truth is that and that's my view that they go beyond, beyond this tremendously. And it's bad for America.

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Q: Well thank you for telling the story of your life and expressing your views.

A: Well I was asked. I didn't want to talk really about my wife or she said oh, what did you do.

Q: Let's just end up by you telling me why you did this interview, why you were willing to do the interview.

A: Well frankly I never thought about looking back at my life and so on. Yes, I have a lot of material, the things that I've, papers, that I've published and so on and but I decided maybe I'm going to organize myself and so on and leave it as a memory for my children. They know some of it and but not really everything, because when they were very young, they were very young and so on. So I decided yes it's interesting and if this can help other people make some decisions or whatever, it's up to them but I'm not going out and shouting it in the street and so on, because I know people they have their own ideas and they don't have to accept mine. Yeah, that's freedom, right?

Q: Certainly. Well thank you so much for doing the interview.

A: All right thank you.

Q: This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Phillip Abraham.

(end interview)