# United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

## Interview with Alex Konstantyn
## October 8, 2015
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# PREFACE

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# ALEX KONSTANTYN
# October 8, 2015

Gail Schwartz: The following is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with Alex Konstantyn. It is being conducted by Gail Schwartz on October 8th, 2015 and is taking place over the telephone at the Holocaust Museum and in East Meadow, New York. This is track number one. What is your full name?

Alex Konstantyn: I am Alexander **Konstantyn.**

Q: And what is the name that you were born with?

A: The same. I was born as Alex Konstantyn.

Q: And where were you born?

A: Born in northeastern part of Poland in a tiny village called **Varosh** [ph: this may be phonetic pronunciation of alternative Russian name of Polish village **Wąsosz**].

Q: Where is that near? Is it near –

A: It's, I would say in the area of **Belz**, **Bialystok**. northeastern part of Poland.

Q: When were you born?

A: September first, 1937.

Q: Let's now talk a little bit about your family and your background, their background. What were your parents' names?

A: My mother was Ann or Hannah. Hannah **Koch**, K-O, you say it in English Kach, I guess, It's K-O-C-H. And my father was **Baruch**.

Q: Do you know when they were born and where?

A: They. No I don't have exact information. They didn't have really papers and so forth.

Q: What about grandparents? Did you know any of you grandparents? Were they living nearby?

A: Yes, I don't know my grandfathers but my grandmother survived and I knew her well.

Q: Do you remember their names?

A: Sara, Sara Koch.

Q: Did you have any brothers or sisters, any siblings?

A: The siblings, no I was the only child. And have a half-brother from the second marriage.

Q: What kind of work did your father do?

A: My father was a wheat merchant. He used to buy wheat, especially from one person, from one farmer, bring it to the mill, convert it into flour and selling flour in towns and neighborhoods.

Q: Did your mother work?

A: No she was a homemaker.

Q: Can you describe your house and what kind of neighborhood it was in?

A: No, I cannot. It was a small, according to my mother, it was a small kind of poverty stricken village. My parents were kind of better to do people in this village and they lived in a comfortable home and most of the people according to my mother did not. And it really, depends on the personality and the view. My mother who was a beautiful woman, she had a nice social life there. My uncle who is still alive, Uncle Henry, hated the place.

Q: What did you say? Your uncle what?

A: Hated the place.

Q: Oh, hated the place. Yeah. Did your parents grow up in that town or did they come, I know you don't know exactly where they –

A: They, to my knowledge they grew up. I cannot tell you exactly the town that they were but in a different area.

Q: In the same area, yeah. And I know you were quite young. Did you ever go to school there? I know you were very young.

A: Myself, no. I was --

Q: You were too young?

A: Yeah. I was, I mean 1937 and in 1941 we were out of the house. We were not there. Right after.

Q: Let's talk about that and what your very earliest memories are.

A: At a certain point I will tell you what I clearly remember. Right now from the very beginning, I do remember what was related to me by my mother. And so my father was traveling, selling flour. He used to convert, whenever he could, the Polish currency into gold. He didn't trust the Polish currency. And obviously after the war broke out and Poland was conquered by the

Germans the Polish currency lost its value completely. So he was lucky that he had gold. And the family consisted of my mother's side of the family, three brothers, her mother and her father and they worked for a Polish, a very wealthy Polish land owner called **Holinka** [ph]. My mother was very much liked by the family. She was in front, in private for home schooling with his children so she benefited from home schooling. And when I was born, well she dedicated herself to raise me as any other mother the healthy, hopefully well-adjusted child.

Q: Was your family, do you know if your family was religious early on?

A: No. To my knowledge and what my mother told me, no. And they were really in the minority, according to my mother.

Q: Do you know if there was a synagogue in the town?

A: I beg your pardon.

Q: Do you know if there was a synagogue in the town?

A: Yes, there was a synagogue there and it was, I mean well attended according to my mother but they were not that state religiously.

Q: What did your mother say about 1939?

A: 1939 we heard the news about the Germans conquering Poland in what they called in a blitzkrieg. And it worried us a lot but since our village was so insignificantly populated with Jews we were not, we found out that obviously they left us alone because we didn't see any Germans around there. We found out that the Germans were looking for Jews in larger places like **Zamość** and some other larger towns. And in 1941, so from 1939 to 1941 despite the German occupation our life didn't change much.

Q: What languages did you speak, what language did you speak at home?

A: We spoke Polish.

Q: Polish. Did you know Yiddish at all?

A: I myself didn't. My parents spoke Yiddish here and there but Polish –

Q: But Polish was the language you learned.

A: You must understand my mother getting home schooling with the Polish children and so on, so Polish was the preferred language. And –

Q: So as far as you know, up til 1941 life went on.

A: Kind of the routine didn't change.

Q: About how large was the town? Do you know or not?

A: No, but it was small. It was absolutely tiny. I cannot put a number on it, sorry.

Q: How many Jews were in the town? You don't know.

A: The town was populated by Jews only.

Q: Oh, it was only a Jewish town.

A: It was a Jewish – I hate to call it town. It was a Jewish village. The Gentiles surrounding us were fine according to my parents. They didn't bother the Jews much. They were exchanging services and so forth, bringing in food. And the Jews mainly were like in any other places, tailors and shoe makers and kind of they were not really professions, what we understand as professions.

Q: So up to 1941 your parents didn't say there was any anti-Semitic incidents with people coming in?

A: According to my parents, no. And, and kind of they just stayed away from us. They definitely didn't love us but they didn't bother us.

Q: What was the first change or what is your first memory?

A: The change occurred in sometimes in summer of 41. This was the time, so when the little history when Hitler broke the peace treaty with Stalin and attacked Russia.

Q: Right.

A: And the troops and a mass of troops, German troops moved northeast. In other words they were trying to conquer Moscow in a hurry and that's about also the northeastern direction. That's why you had the -- so many troops in the area. And the Russians to slow them down were shelling the area and refugees, Polish refugees began moving away. Mainly women and children, moving away from the war zone. Now some other refugees appeared in our village, very hungry and very scared, Jewish refugees. And they told us that the Germans were rounding up Jews and these people obviously escaped. Rounding up Jews, loading them up on trucks and they disappeared. Now my parents were extremely worried about it. They were asking them, where did they disappear? Where did they go? They said, and they answered that and we had more information from these people because we hosted them. They were hungry. We gave them food. And they said to us they – we were told by Gentiles that they took them to labor camps. And my mother, did they take everybody? And they said yes, they took everybody. Then my parents became really suspicious because to labor camps, you take, according to their understanding, that they would take able bodied people.

Q: Workers.

A: To work. Men and women but not people, old people, children, everybody went. So they were terribly upset by it. And my mother who was by nature kind of an activist so to speak. You know we have to have a plan and execute it. That, and she said we cannot wait here. I will not allow to wait here for the Germans to come, load us up on trucks and make us disappear. And she, it took a lot of convincing to convince my father to leave his home. Simply because there was nowhere to go. And my mother came up with a plan. She said you see all these Polish refugees, streaming south. How about we join them and pretend that we are Polish refugees. And my father kind of was apprehensive about it, simply because he didn't look like a Polish refugee. He had a -- what they considered in Poland and in Europe in general, a Jewish face. My mother and I, we didn't. Both of us blue eyes. My mother very pretty woman had a European look. My father had a longer face, a longer nose, dark hair, dark eyes. And the Poles who were very adept in spotting Jews, spotted him from a mile. There was fear that because of him we would suffer. Eventually my mother convinced him that we had to leave. And –

Q: Do you have blue eyes? Did you look Polish or Jewish?

A: I, according to my mother, I looked more Polish than the Polish kids. I had the fleshy lips, a wider nose and blue eyes. And my mother had brown hair but she had very pretty blue eyes. And they began preparations for just leaving house and my mother very carefully prepared two bags that she -- huge bags that she converted into backpacks. And one they filled up with food as much as possibly to carry. And one with clothing for winter. What they took with them also is the gold that my father accumulated. Now how do, you know, transport gold and not be robbed.

Q: Are these gold coins?

A: Gold coins, yes. And my mother prepared a tool belt which many peasants were wearing in Poland and from coarse material, fabric and she stitched the coins, she attached the coins, anchored the coins to this material, covered it with another piece of material and my father had a fairly heavy tool belt so to speak.

Q: Oh my.

A: And towards the end of the summer, we left our home. My father was very upset because the family didn't want to join them, refused to join them, to join us. And instantly we became homeless.

Q: Do you have any memory of that time, that particular time or is this just what your parents told you?

A: As of now, still whatever my parents told me.

Q: It was the end of the summer and they're getting ready to leave you said and the extended family did not want to come.

A: No but we still left and joined the refugees. My father, there were kind of groups of refugees moving continuously. We attached ourselves to one group and my father was walking way behind, covering himself with a cap and a scarf, although in the summer it looked suspicious. And some of the peasants were asking how come my mother's husband is not joining the group. And my mother very cleverly told them he is sick. He has TB. And this was the magic word that they were very happy that he kept his distance.

Q: They knew that that was her husband but they didn't –

A: Yeah because it was the man walking behind us. And she had to tell, you know.

Q: So this was all on foot, leaving your house and joining the refugees.

A: Yeah, this is going south, basically the geography according to my parents was on one side of the road were dense woods. On the other side of the road were villages, one village after another. And the Polish refugees most likely, we didn't know for sure, were moving to some either friends or relatives away from the war zone. And that, we, according to my mother, I myself was in very good spirits because it looked to me like we are going on a picnic. And we slept under the stars in good weather or in the shallow woods. In bad weather we used to sneak into barns which were always open. And this was -- my father was very careful about buying food. He didn't want to exhaust the gold coins. He wanted to buy into a more permanent shelter. So after they ran out of the food that they took from home, we were like other refugees, begging for food with not much success. And then he used to buy it with a gold coin because they peasants were very taken by the gold because they, some of them never saw gold. But they did know the value of gold. So they were very happy to sell us food.

Q: Do you know if your parents kept their names or did they have false names?

A: I'm sorry please repeat it.

Q: Do you know if your parents kept their names or did they have false names at that time?

A: The name Konstantyn is obviously not a Jewish name. The name Konstantyn was changed. I don't know exactly when and what year it was changed into Konstantyn.

Q: No, my question is when you were refugees did your parents change their name or did they keep the Konstantyn?

A: No, they kept the Konstantyn. It wasn't a Jewish name.

Q: Oh, I see, because it wasn't a Jewish name they –

A: It wasn't a Jewish name.

Q: They didn't have to change it.

A: No, there was no reason to change it. It's not a, it's more, the name Konstantyn is more popular in Russia than in Poland but it was actually quite acceptable in Poland too. So what happened in the spring of 42, my parents noticed that German patrols on motorcycles were moving around and stopping some refugees arbitrarily, questioning them and then letting them go. My father was mortified. He was afraid that they'd stop us and see the face of my father. They would shoot us on sight. So they decided that they are going to look for some, for a permanent shelter and the dilemma is what do you do. We knew nobody. You just randomly you kind of knock on the door and -- but there was no choice. Also the thought of whoever will open the door is kind of scary. Compassionate person, hostile person and but there was no choice about it so they knocked on a door. And the person opened the door. And immediately became hostile when he saw my father. My father told him what we want. We want not to move all the time but to stay a while in a place. And he showed him five gold coins. The man became kind of instantly friendly and said yes, I will give you shelter. He took us to an underground bunker, kind of like a cellar next to the barn, gave us some straw, a bucket for waste, human waste, and a kerosene lamp and gave us food. And we stayed there for about ten days. Very happily because we didn't have to move and expose ourselves to the danger of the Germans. Around, at the end of the stay, of the ten days, he came in in the evening and this is the time that I remember.

Q: This is the first thing you remember?

A: No the episode occurring here is where I remember. From this point on I do remember most of the things. And he came in and said oh you are nice people. And I'm celebrating today my birthday. And my wife baked something for you to enjoy. And he had it covered with a kerchief. He uncovered it and it was a very deliciously smelling blueberry pie. We thanked him profusely and he left. My father cut a piece, gave it to me, gave a piece to my mother and he began eating it ravenously. And the minute we swallowed the piece we kind of violently threw up. My mother and I kind of like an explosion and threw up. My father kept eating. He noticed and threw up. He stopped eating. My mother was screaming stop eating, stop eating. The man poisoned us. Yeah either he was scared, he was afraid Germans would find us and so forth. He decided to get rid of us. And we threw up. Nothing happened to us. My father couldn't throw up. And my mother rushed to him, tried to, he fell to the ground. She tried to induce vomiting by, to stuff fingers in his mouth but she couldn't because his jaws were clenched in pain. And he was on the floor you know in terrible agony. My mother didn't know what to do. She sat next to him, to comfort him. She put his head in her lap on the floor and she was rocking him gently.

Q: Oh god.

A: And I was sitting next to him, holding onto his shirt and crying. Because father was – I mean hurting. He – I didn't realize what happened but he suddenly became sick and I was very upset. And then he stopped moving. My mother knew that he is dead. She still kept rocking him and I kept holding onto his sleeve, shirt sleeve. And this took a while. And then a thought hit my mother that the man will come back to see whether he did a good job. And if he finds us he will just finish us. So she says to me we have to leave and this I remember like it happened yesterday. And I was hysterical because I didn't want to leave. I said we cannot leave father here. He is sick. We have to stay because he is sick. He is sleeping. He will wake up ok. Yeah. And my mother thought no, we have to go. And I didn't understand it but she dragged me out by force. She had the presence of mind though, taking the bag with clothing and the gold belt. And we ran into the field. And then we kept walking. Here was a young woman, has to take care of her child by herself and had to protect me through enemies. One was the Germans which was easier to protect from them because you could fool them, pretend you are a Polish refugee. But the second enemy was more powerful. It was hunger. And we were hungry. We were continuously hungry. We were begging for food with minor success. My mother taught me how to beg for food. I used to, she used to knock on the door and move back. I used to stand there, a skinny little fellow you know, extending my hand and saying in Polish, **Havaba xleba proshur** [ph – Polish], a piece of bread please. And I had usually more success than my mother. And begging for some scraps of food. Whenever, nobody wanted to give us anything. My mother used to buy it. But at a certain point in time, and this was in the summer of 42, already a year moving on the road, my mother felt that she is starving, that we are starving really. She used to scavenge in the back yards of the villages grabbing some food that was left from pigs and animals, garbage. And she used to masticate it, keep it in her mouth, grind it and then feed it to me and I used to eat it and eat it. And kind of miraculously I must say both of us and really we ate garbage, we didn't get a stomach ache. We didn't get sick. We didn't get sick from the winter either which is amazing. And but, but if you eat garbage you lose your strength. And she lost her strength to the point that she couldn't walk any more. She sat under a tree along the road, leaned against it, took me in her arms and was waiting to die. And then somebody taps on her shoulder and says in Polish, are you alive? Are you sleeping? And my mother barely raised her head. She said and she begged her to bring her some bread and water. And the woman says of course. She was very taken by that we were like dying in front of her eyes. And she ran into the house which was very close to the tree although my mother didn't notice it. Cause she was in such a stupor. And brought some water and bread and some diluted milk for me even. And then she helped my mother to stand up. She told her to lean on her, took me in her arms. And we walked into her house. And then she gave us more food. Set up some blankets on the floor and told us to rest. And we fell asleep there until the next morning. Absolute angel of mercy if you think of it.

In the morning she said well if you want to stay here a few days you are welcome to it to regain your strength but you are so filthy you should take a bath. I am going to warm water for you which was amazing by itself, what she said. And you should take a bath, she told my mother. My mother did and she gave her some of her old used clothing that – and then she threw away my mother's rags. And then she said something that worried my mother a lot. She said why don't you give the boy a bath too. He is so dirty. My mother said no thank you. We will leave. We have overextended our welcome here. You saved our life. We are grateful. And she says, what do you mean? Don't leave. Give him a bath at least. And she was focused on me for the reason that she told us she had a boy about my age which now is five, little more than five. And he was in the dirt he was playing in the dirt, found a grenade that fell off a truck. He pulled the pin and which ripped him apart. He died and that's why she's so focused on me, you know. I reminded her of her son. My mother still tried to wiggle out of this chore of giving me a bath but without success. She was afraid the woman will notice that I am circumcised. The woman didn't know that we were Jewish, obviously. Well so she shielded me with her body. I got into the bath that she took minutes ago. But the woman noticed. Smiling she said oh I will be back in a few minutes. Give him a bath. And she did. The woman left some clothing from her child, left over there and I was wearing it. And then within about several minutes she came back. And she came back with a German policeman.

Q: Oh god.

A: And she said, my mother never until the end of her days, she never forgot what the woman said. It was like a stab of a knife. She said take these, in Polish she said, take these lepers, Jews out of here. So on one hand you have that angel of mercy and then you have this woman full of hate like Jekyll and Hyde. Unbelievable. Until today, it takes my breath away.

Q: Did you know the name of the woman?

A: No. No. And the policeman was, to be accurate about it, the policeman was a Polish man working for the German police because they needed people who speak their language and he took us to a police station. And at the police station we were placed in a large cell, filled already with other Jews. We found a spot in a corner. My mother folded the gold belt. I sat on it and we were waiting. A young Polish policeman working for the Germans came in and asked who of you women knows how to cook well. My mother raised her hand immediately and so did other, three other women did the same. And he came close to my mother, looked at her and said not a stupid guy. He said to her I know you are lying. You cannot be a good cook. You seem to be too young to be a good cook. But since you are the cleanest of them all, come with me. Can you imagine? The bath went a long way. And he took her to the kitchen and she was helping out the cook who was a terrible cook. That's why they were looking for another one. And pretty soon to her own surprise, she excelled in preparing meals to the point that the commander of the camp, of the police station, the commandant, asked her to help the cook but also to cook exclusively for the officers, the higher officers.

Q: What happened when she went away to cook? What did you do? Where were you?

A: Ok. I was there in the cell and the cell was emptying like a flow of humanity, emptying and filling up, emptying and filling up. We found out later that these Jews that were loaded up on trucks, carted away through neighboring woods and machine gunned into mass graves. Now the commander gave an order not to touch me. But my mother was frantic because I sit there alone in the cell and, and hey suppose one of the soldiers or policemen makes a mistake. So she came running with whether I am there. And well I was there, she used to go back to the kitchen. We regained our strength at this police station because we ate fairly well. Absolutely. So we ate very well I would say compared to what we went through.

Q: Do you know what town it was in?

A: No. No, there was village after village and it was not, we were not –

Q: So you were alone in the cell while your mother was cooking in the kitchen.

A: Yes, yes, that's what it was. Interestingly enough the commandant of the camp of the police station talked to her a few times in German and she responded in Polish by saying I don't understand. But she did know German. She did know German because she learned German with the kids of the landowner, during home schooling. She didn't know perfect German but she understood German. But something, an instinct told her, don't reveal this and sure enough the instinct served her well because the whole police station had to be relocated for one reason or another. And she heard the commander saying to his deputy, next day get rid of the woman and the child. And so I guess she knew what it means. And she start preparations to try to escape. She found a – the cell was at night it was, they locked the cell kind of a bar and across a small bar went across the door outside with a little broken window in the middle. And a guard was walking back and forth this large complex used to disappear around the bend and come back, come all the way to the door and going back. Back and forth. And she found a piece of wire, told me to hang onto it and at night she made a loop out of this wire and tried to open the door when the guard was on the far part of the complex. After quite a few tries, she succeeded. She opened the door. We ran out through the door. She locked the door and we ran into the back of the cell and into woods. And then we were stopped by barbed wire. And my mother simply, this didn't stop her. She opened the wire with her hands, lacerated her hands. The barbed wire was -- this I myself didn't make this observation. My mother told me later the barbed wire was very rusty. And then when I went through it, she got stuck in the barbed wire and I injured my back and she injured her legs and hands. But she got through. She went to the road, was very early in the morning. Almost like in the movies. The timing was such. We came to the road and a farmer on a horse and a buggy was passing by. And here is a woman bleeding with a ripped skirt. She

said to him she escaped. Give us a ride. We escaped from the police station. He was so amazed that a woman and a child escaped from the police station that he gave her the ride. Yeah and after a while where traffic intensified on the road, he told us to get off because he was afraid. We got off and my mother kind of stole a skirt and a shirt, a blouse for her from a clothes line in one of the villages because hers was ripped and part of it was covered with blood. And she found something for me but it wasn't boys clothing. It was girls' clothing. And she was very happy that it was girls' clothing so nobody would bother to identify me as a Jew if they see a girl. That was her thinking and it was good thinking. So I was a girl for a while. And my hair was long enough from not cutting it. It posed -- pretend that I am a girl. And the only thing that she did major is that she reversed course. What happened is she noticed that some refugees were going in the opposite direction. In fact, they were going back north. And she asked them why. And they told her the Germans, people who stayed behind told them that the Russians are not shelling any more this area because the Germans pushed them deep into Russia and it's quiet now in the area, so they were going back home.
And my mother decided that there is no sense, doesn't make any sense to move south into nowhere. When she decided to go back to the man who was selling wheat to my father and had good business relationship with him and ask for shelter from him. And that's what she did. She did. And it was absolutely, absolutely horrific when it came to winter. And securing food and she hitched some rides on horse, horse and a buggy or sleds, pulled by horses. And we must say that because of that we arrived at the place of the man that did business with my father in record time. And beginning of 43 and his name was **Burka**, Mr. Burka. I don't know his first name.

Q: B-U-R-K-A.

A: B-U-R-K-A. Yeah. My mother waited for the night to set. He came out to feed the animals and so on. And she approached him. She didn't want the family to know that we are asking for shelter. And she talked to him. He did, at the beginning he didn't recognize them, recognize him and he and then she said I am **Berko**'s wife. The Poles called my father Berko. His Hebrew name is Baruch. And he was very happy to see her. He asked her about my father. And she told him that he was murdered, was very upset. She gave him, my mother gave Mr. Burka the belt with the gold. Told him what it is and she said, you are you know you are the end of the road here. There is nowhere for us to go. Please give us shelter. And he said but of course I will. And he took us to a woodshed. And in this woodshed very expertly, there was a panel in the wooden floor which was kind of cut out and camouflaged and down it goes into one of these shelters similar to what the other guy had. And there again he gave us straw, kerosene lamp and a bucket and he was keeping that from soldiers, something which was very precious for him, spirits, alcohol. He was manufacturing it, he said, from potatoes. I still don't know how it's done but that's what he said.

Q: Was this near your birth village? Was this –

A: Not far.

Q: Not far?

A: Not far.

Q: Do you know the name of this place or not?

A: No. It's, it is a, these are Polish villages all around. I have no idea what the name of the village is. Now we stayed in this place, unbelievable, almost two years.

Q: Oh my.

A: Now, my mother was ecstatic that we found shelter. He brought us food. He emptied the bucket very early in the morning and kept bringing us food. Not much but enough to sustain us. And my mother had some other worry on her mind. And this was what is happening to me. She, when we are liberated and this is, she is relaying these thoughts, obviously. I didn't see the sun for such a long time.

Q: Did you ever go outside this shed at all, this wood shed? Did you ever go outside or did you stay inside?

A: No, I will just explain. He told us not to go to the woodshed even. But my mother didn't listen. She was afraid that I had without the sun, without fresh air because it was very stuffy, without nourishing food, when we are liberated and she always believed that we will be liberated. You know very optimistic about it. She felt that I will be liberated as a deficient child. So she has to do something about it. First of all, physically she was rubbing my muscles making me crawl back and forth we share in that limited space. To me it was a lot of fun. My mother was like playing with me. And at night despite what he told us, we went to the woodshed. She used to open the little window there and told me to breathe in the air and I did and she kept that hole open, that panel open and to air out the place. And that's how we lived. For my mind, she was inventing stories. She was telling me stories about various writers and composers and she inserted the Polish names of famous composers like Chopin and poets and like Adam **Mickiewicz**. And **Bolesław Prus**, all kinds of names. Fairly difficult names. At the end of the story I had to repeat these names to her. And sometimes I did and sometimes I didn't. And she said no, no, no. You have to listen to it again. And so it went.

Q: How old was she? Do you know, at that time? Do you have any idea?

A: She was still in her it's almost five years, in her late 20s.

Q: Oh my.

A: Now and then we were waiting for the liberation. And the liberation came at the end of 44. It was winter time. My mother suddenly became -- there was a lot of shooting outside and she became practically hysterical with joy. She says ok we are coming out. We are coming out. She heard Russian voices. The hole wasn't deep enough so you could hear what goes on outside. In other words so she heard these voices. And there was a lot of shooting. She was getting ready to climb that little rickety ladder and push the panel out and then she hears German voices. So she stopped and the Germans kept talking. German, German. And so we had to stay. And so it went for about several days. German and Russian. There was a very intensive fighting in this area and finally she hears just Russian voices. She waited a while and then she says we are coming up.

She pulled the panel out. We didn't know even if whether it was day or night. At her state of mind. She pulled it out. It was day time. And at the same time, four Russian soldiers burst into the woodshed with their machine guns at ready. And they see a woman, half of her body out of the floor. They were looking for Germans. We found out later that they had ordered any Germans they find to shoot them on sight. And my mother is yelling, **Yevrai**, Yevrai. Jews, Jews. One of them wasn't that impressed. He didn't believe her. He hit her hard in the face. And she fell back into the hole. And he took out a grenade, so we were told later. And wanted to throw it into the hole. Mind you it's liberation time. The man behind him, another soldier put the gun to his head and said put the grenade away. You're not going to kill this woman. She survived and now you as a liberator is trying to kill her. And the man, just unbelievable, was a Jew. And people will say well coincidence. I say maybe. Jews were not known and were despised because one of the things that they were known of in Europe were that they were cowards. They didn't take them into the army. The Russians forced Jews into the army towards the end of the war because they suffered such horrific casualties. Yet they were some Jewish generals in Russia which were quite outstanding. But not soldiers. The perception was that Jews are not good soldiers. So a Jew to be there among these foreign people was absolutely amazing. He told us not to go out because he said the sun and the reflection in the snow will blind us when we found out that we were so long underground and he came back with goggles which he smeared with this I remember so well. He smeared with some dirt for make it like to filter the sun and we put this on and I kind of, according to my mother, looked kind of greenish. Later in life she was laughing about it. She says I looked like a Martian. And we came out. I became petrified immediately because I saw soldiers. I was always told to hide and be quiet when I see soldiers. And when they saw us coming out from there and our guardian didn't leave us until he saw that everything was in order. And a large group of soldiers surrounded us. And they were looking at us. And they were silent, very unnerving. My mother was happy. She was smiling and waving and I was crying. I was afraid of soldiers. And they used to, one by one kind of they approached me, pat me on the shoulder and said kind of **Harasho**, harasho, [ph, Russian] kind of like well done. That's kind of they were amazed that we survived you know. And then one of them grabbed me, put me on his shoulders and I was absolutely hysterically crying and grabbed my hands and start dancing. (laughs) Crazy stuff. And the soldiers around him were dancing around him. And my mother was standing in the middle clapping. And then it looked like fun and nobody is harming me, I was enjoying it too. I became a mascot to them. They gave me candy, they gave the chocolate. The doctor of the division told my mother not to give me any of the sweets. He said that these soldiers will kill your son with love because they gave him so many sweets. His body won't be able to tolerate it. So she didn't give me any of this and she saved my life again. And that was our liberation. Yeah.

And obviously the first thing my mother did is began to look for survivors. At these camps that the Russians set up for the survivors. There were lists of people who placed their names on it and –

Q: By now you're seven and a half, right?

A: Yeah. Yeah. And we found out that one of my uncles survived. That, they were -- she had three brothers. I failed to mention this at the beginning. I mentioned it but one of them, Uncle Henry. Two of them. Uncle Henry and Uncle **Lonek**, her brother and my grandma survived in the woods. It's worthwhile to mention that my uncle Henry is still alive. He is 96 in Florida. And he used to come out of the woods here. A tall man over six feet, with an ax in his hand, he used to go to a Polish farmer and demand food, not ask for food, as we did. And they used to give it to him. One look at him with the ax in his hand, they gave him food. And they survived in the woods. My younger, her younger, youngest brother Lonek, terrible tragedy. At the end of the war, he was killed by Ukrainian bandits. They shot him and he bled to death in my grandma's arms. The brother, one of the brothers, **Yannick** or Jimmy, because he changed his name. Before the war, I should have mentioned this, went to Italy to study medicine. And then he was successful in escaping to the United States from all places. So we found out, at the end of the war that the -- Uncle Henry and my grandma survived. And my mother who wanted to give me and herself back a normal life, remarried after one year. To another survivor who lost – Eli **Diament,** D-I-A-M-E-N-T, who lost two children and a wife and he himself jumped off a death train. And we stayed in Poland for five years.

Q: The three of you?

A: The three of us.

Q: Were you back in your home town?

A: No. No. As a matter of fact, before my mother met my stepfather, she did one thing which she considered in retrospect later, foolish. She went back to reclaim her home, after liberation. And obviously the home was more quality of a home than other homes and a Polish family was living there and she came back. She said this is my home. And I came to reclaim it and the guy recognized her and he said you better leave. Now Hitler didn't kill you but believe me I'm going to kill you. And my mother could have gone to the Russian authorities and reclaim the home but she didn't see any future there. And she'd be kind of surrounded by people that were ok before the war but who knows since the war how their attitude changed over the Jews. So she walked away. And we stayed, we drifted towards a large city called **Łódź**. And then we stayed in Łódź until 1950. From 45 to 50 and then my stepfather found out that part of his family survived and are in Israel. And he tried to convince my mother to go to Israel. My mother wanted to go to the United States because my grandma was allowed to go to the United States. My uncle Henry went to Israel too with us. And we came to Israel in 1950.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your life between 45 and 50 though, those five years. Did you go to school?

A: I, yes. I did go to a school. Mind you to a private school so to speak, to a Jewish school. The parents of surviving kids were very protective of them and a Jewish school was formed. And I went there to school. I wasn't a good student. I was falling asleep in school. I couldn't sleep because I was tortured by nightmares. I was chased by dogs, by soldiers shooting at us and waking up screaming and couldn't sleep. I used to fall asleep in school. After school I was very eager to play with the street urchins in the neighborhood. This was a huge tenement in Łódź, large city. And they didn't want to play with me. I was Jewish. They didn't want to, any part with me, of me. There was a Jewish Zionist organization called **Gordonia** was for then the Jewish kids drifted toward this place. Meanwhile in the neighborhood, I was beaten up and fighting back, coming home black and blue and my mother was beside herself. She says oh the Germans didn't kill you. These Polish kids will kill you. She was hysterical.

Q: Were you a big child or a small child?

A: I, no, especially after the war I was, my growth was stunted by -- obvious reasons. Lack of food, lack of sun and so forth. I am surprisingly enough I am fairly healthy. At that point in time, when we went to Israel I was in fairly poor physical shape. Presently I am five, eight so I am on the short side. But the growth wasn't stunted completely kind of. And so the memories are very bitter from Poland through these five years. I suffered through these five years. So did my family.

Q: What did Israel mean to you when your mother said you were going there? What did it mean to you?

A: It means nothing until we get, until we got there. In other words, I heard about Israel. As a matter of fact, a little trivia. My uncle went to Israel before us. And I remember it like yesterday. He sent us a kind of, a large box of Israeli oranges. And here I am second floor sitting on top of the open window, eating an orange, and the Polish kids, downstairs begging for some oranges and the only thing I threw down were some peels of the orange. That was my revenge. And but this is my first encounter with Israel. **Yafa** oranges.

Q: Had you seen oranges before or was that your first –

A: No.

Q: That was your first time.

A: that was the first orange. If I were religious at that time, I would say **Shehecheyanu**. But that was it. So the, my first encounter with Israel was beautiful. Through the oranges. And then we came to Israel.

Q: How did you get there?

A: Good question. We took a train, mind you, all the way to Italy. And from Italy we took a boat. And it was the most horrific ride I ever had. We were, so many people, and on the deck you know with vermin crawling all over us, horrendous. And when we got to Israel it was like, to me at least, it was like stepping into paradise.

Q: What time of year was it?

A: This was --

Q: It was 1950 you said.

A: 1950.

Q: What season?

A: About the month.

Q: What season was it – spring, summer?

A: It was definitely toward the end of the summer. The reason I remember is because the weather was moderate. It was kind of pleasant. Otherwise it would be –

Q: Did you know any Hebrew at that point?

A: Zero, no Hebrew.

Q: Was your step father religious at all?

A: Well now he lost his faith during the war when he lost his family. As a matter of fact, his parents who survived were Chasidic Jews. But he didn't want to do anything with religion. And

I went to school, didn't understand a word they said and I lost about two years because of that, adjusting to school. I remember the –

Q: Are you talking about in Israel now?

A: In Israel. In Poland I had no problems because I knew Polish.

Q: Where in Israel did you live when you first got there?

A: Ok we lived in **Yafo** first, not a pleasant experience. Then we stayed with my stepfather's brother in **Ramat Gan** for a while and then when my father started working we went to **Herzliya**. Herzliya at that time was a small village. Now it's a very upscale place. So and we rented a place in Herzliya and in Herzliya I went to school. I went to public school and then by high school I already was proficient enough in Hebrew. My mother still talked to me Polish and I started, to my surprise, I had enough stamina to get involved in sports.

Q: Did you have a bar mitzvah?

A: Yes, I had a bar mitzvah.

Q: Where was it, in Israel or in –

A: It was in Israel, very modest (laughs) and –

Q: Cause it must have been soon after you got there? Right, cause you got there in 1950.

A: No, no. I had it quite later. Yes, when I knew Hebrew. You can have a bar mitzvah any time.

Q: I know. Did you pick up Hebrew easily?

A: No. I, my wife and my children pick up languages well. I don't pick it up that well. And I struggled with it. That's why I lost about two years of my schooling because of that. And but I was a fair student in high school but I still was plagued by the nightmares and again it suffered in school because I just couldn't concentrate and so forth. And my wife, no my mother took me to a psychiatrist and he said something. He said I cannot give a medication. The therapy sessions will not help. When he realizes that he can protect himself and protect you from what you went through from his enemies, then his nightmares not guaranteed, he said, but they will probably go away. But the nightmares continued. I finished four years of high school. And then I was drafted into the IDF. I have even a picture of it, me standing with a gun and, bayonet, a rifle. And –

Q: You're now 18? Is that what you are?

A: No, I was close to 21. Yeah. They draft people at 18 but since I didn't finish school they let me continue, finish school on time, I mean. So but that was to my advantage I would say because I became more and more physically proficient. And then I went into boot camp and I carried myself physically quite well. And I was, as a matter of fact, to my surprise, I was sent to a combat unit in actually division, not unit, combat division down south, south of Beersheba, a camp called **Mahela Natan** [ph]. And it was a tank and armored infantry division and then I was in training. Terrible stuff, by the way. It wasn't easy. But –

Q: We're talking about 58, 59 now? 1958, 1959?

A: 59. Yeah. That's right. It was the end of 58, 59. I was there already a while and to the chagrin of my friends, of my you know brothers and I so to speak, I was waking up screaming and waking them up because I still had the nightmares and then one day towards the end of 59, we were getting ready to welcome the Prime Minister of Israel, David **Ben-Gurion** and he came to talk to the troops and this was a big camp. I mean the camp consisted of about 10,000 people. 8000 combat and 2000 auxiliary, support. And hundreds of tanks and armored vehicles and so on. And we are standing in a huge U formation, waiting for Ben-Gurion kind of six, seven deep. Ben-Gurion comes with photographers, with journalists and so on. Very, very astute politician and he comes in, doesn't like the station they prepared for him and insisted to talk to the troops from a tank. And they have to whatever, the Prime Minister says you have to obey. They brought in the tank, causing a lot of dust and stuff. And they set up the amplifying system. He climbs on the tank and gives us his speech. Great orator. Warriors of Israel, you are the steel fist of the south and et cetera. And he was such a great orator that at the end of the speech, spontaneously and this is not allowed in the army. In the army you are not allowed to do spontaneous things. So a group of soldiers starts screaming Ben-Gurion, Ben-Gurion and everybody joined in. And he was in his glory. And then we found out that he gave to the commander of the camp an order not to punish us for it. And while everybody was screaming Ben-Gurion, I was standing there and crying. To my embarrassment and to the embarrassment of the officer who kind of liked me because I tried very hard to be a good soldier, to the amusement of my friends, because it's not cool to be a good soldier, to show off to be a good soldier and he says constantly an IDF soldier doesn't cry. And many years later I was laughing when I saw the movie, A League of Their Own, where Tom Hanks says to the ball player who is crying, "You don't cry in baseball." And I was laughing so hard. Reminded me of the officer. IDF soldier doesn't cry. I told him hey I cannot help it. I will tell you later why I am crying. I was looking around, taking in the scene, the screaming soldiers. The tanks and motorized cannons and the half-tracks and this power in this camp made me feel suddenly like a superman. I just felt to, but I expressed it through crying, strangely enough. And then I told my friends who thought that I was kind of standing too long in the sun and still going crazy. I told them why I was crying because of my nightmares and what I went through. And the officer who was really also a gentleman because he really hugged me and apologized. Only in Israel, mind you. And guess what? I slept that night like a baby, no nightmares. So the psychologist was right. From time to time they resurface but quite infrequently. So that's the episode in the army.

Q: Tell me about your bar mitzvah?

A: Say it again please.

Q: Tell me about your bar mitzvah.

A: I truly you don't remember much. I can mumble the way. It's, see you are looking at it through American eyes. In Israel it's a modest event.

Q: How old were you?

A: I was close to 15.

Q: So then you stayed in the army for three years?

A: I was in the army two and a half years and the last six months of the army, I was injured in the army. I was wounded in the army because once in the year they have, they use live ammunition, at least in my time. Once a year and there are some casualties from it. And I was hit by a bullet in my leg and I was removed from the combat unit and spent my last six months in ordinance. We were testing ammunition and weaponry. And that caused me some problems after I was discharged because we were going to ammunition factories which are underground cities in Israel. And I knew all these places and then I couldn't study after the army and work at the same time. But I had to work. And I wanted to have some schooling. So my parents and I went to the United States. But I had a problem leaving because the army told me hey you might be caught, captured by some Arabs or terrorists, tortured and tell them all the secrets. They were afraid. And I said to them well I cannot live in the shadow of terrorists. I have to live my life, you understand. They gave me really difficulties leaving until I threatened to go to the press. And complain about it. Then they gave me a whole ordeal how to deal with it in case I am captured. And when they were satisfied or more or less satisfied, they were never satisfied I left for the United States with my parents and in the United States we went to Newark, New Jersey where my mother's brother, my uncle Jimmy, the one who studied medicine, who had to study medicine all over the United States, had a practice. And I had a brother who at that time was already, he is 12 older than me, who was about 12, 13. And –

Q: This was your mother and stepfather had a child together.

A: Had a child together. My brother presently, he lives in New Hampshire and we are on good terms, although my mother always favored me because I mean she gave me birth again if I may say so and saved my life so she had a special --. And my brother who I feel is really an amazing fellow because he understood that since early age. I tried to tell to my mother, stop but I because **Yosi**, Joseph, Yosi in Hebrew. He doesn't say anything, I tell him, but it hurts. And she understood it but she couldn't help it. I kind of idolized my mother, mind you. And she saw me growing up but I was still her baby. Whenever I came from the army, to, to a day or two of vacation she used to look at me and once she said what are they doing to you in the army? I said nothing. They are teaching me to be a good soldier so I can protect you, kind of in a humorous way. She says no, no, no there's something else. I said no, no, I am ok. She looked at me, but you are more serious. You used to be such a clown, she said. I say well, it's serious business to be a soldier. No, no, no she said, they took away my baby. She was so sad about it that I kind of changed. I became more serious.

Q: So then you get to the United States and what did you do?

A: Well it was some ordeal. My stepfather found work in Port Elizabeth which is close to Newark, New Jersey. And we lived in Newark and he traveled by bus to Port Elizabeth. And then he arranged for me to work there too. And I became a, you know they call it, you are loading up rail cars and trucks with toys from a toy factory and after a while I had a crew. I became a checker and I was responsible for loading up an order that would ship exactly, nothing left over and so on and it was an experience whereby I, the workers were mainly black and I became good friends with them, yet I didn't understand a word they said.

Q: When did you learn English?

A: English I learned in Israel.

Q: Oh you did?

A: That was useless English. In other words it was English. In retrospect, it was absolutely horrific how they wasted my time. Or I look it's time too in high school because they taught us poetry like Byron and Shelley and –

Q: It was British English?

A: It was British English, but besides that it was poetry. It wasn't spoken English. And what, now thinking about it is absolutely ridiculous but it was very frustrating and that's why I just didn't speak well English when I came here and I used to tell the white workers, I learned some English but I don't understand these guys. And they were laughing their heads off. They said hey we were born here. We still cannot understand it. That was politically incorrect but that was it. I didn't have any prejudices when it came to black or Afro-American or Hispanic people so I became good friends with them and I enjoyed their friendship.

Q: How long did you stay in that job?

A: That job lasted I would say two years.

Q: And then where did you go?

A: No, no, no. In between I used to go, at night I used to travel to school in the city. Actually started at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Yeah. And used to travel back home and then I wanted to go to a university as well and I went to Pace University, downtown there by the bridge. And I had to leave work simply because I couldn't manage working and going – at that time I was going about to two schools. To Pace and finishing the Jewish Theological Seminary and stopped working. In 1965 I graduated the Seminary, got a bachelor of Hebrew letters and back and forth in part time as a Hebrew school teacher mind you. Finished Pace. It was majoring in psychology which is absolutely worthless. And kept working in Hebrew school. I got married in 1969. This I better remember or else. And to an absolutely lovely woman from Detroit, Susan. And we had a beautiful wedding in Queens and we lived in Queens about several years, three years and in one of the **Lefron** buildings, apartments and then I got a position as a principal in Kings Park, Suffolk County. Long Island consists of Nassau County and Suffolk County and from 73 to 83 I worked there and then I got a position. The school became smaller in East Meadow Jewish Center in 1983 and until the present I am here. I retired in 1909. I still live in the house that they gave me, didn't give me. It was a part of the contract.

Q: Not 1909. You mean 2009.

A: Now I am paying a small rent. And I have two children. Dalia is 43 years old and actually close to 44. And Ari which is 40 years old and have eight grandchildren. Yeah and I would say this is my revenge over Hitler. We have the two families are observant families. So am I and my wife. My daughter has three girls and a boy. My son has two boys and a girl. He lives in Israel. He is a rabbi in Israel. My daughter lives in Teaneck, New Jersey and I feel blessed that I have a good marriage and good children and good grandchildren and my life is fulfilled.

Q: Before we close can I just ask you some of your feelings and thoughts. You did express some of them just so beautifully just now. What are your thoughts about Germany?

A: Ok. Germany as a matter of fact, I failed to mention it. Germany, when I was in the army I encountered some German young people who came to Israel which was very nice to visit this land where the Jews are running it. They were kind of amazed that Jews can run their own country. Some Scandinavian kids, but some kids from Germany were asking us as soldiers, and the government made sure that we encounter as many of them as possible just let them have their exposure to young people who serve their country. And these young people used to ask are you Jewish? They asked us. Said I didn't answer them but somebody else did. Yes, we are Jewish. Why are you asking such a question? Didn't say such a stupid question, but why do you ask such a question? Said well because we always thought that the Jews don't know how to fight and we thought that you were mercenaries. Can you imagine? And so Germany is -- learned that the Jews are people and that they can stand up now for themselves. And I am gratified that Germany, I would say, and absolutely amazingly enough Poland too, are the best friends that Israel has in Europe unless I am mistaken. To my knowledge, this is the case. I know that the Polish air force is practicing in the skies over Poland with Israeli air force and that's a fact. And they allow the Israeli army be able to send all its divisions, all its units at time commemoration at Auschwitz.

And I always cry when I see the three planes passing over and this is a fist, I would say in my book at least, this is a steel fist right there in the sky to a warning to the enemies of Israel never again. And back to Germany though. I didn't fully answer, I am rambling on. I will answer to your question. I am gratified that Chancellor like Merkel, Mrs. Merkel is a good friend of Israel. Yet, I don't trust the Germans. And that may, you might call it a hang up from my survival but I truly don't believe that people change. But this is so politically incorrect, I understand it. But that's a feeling that I have. And I cannot help it.

Q: Have you been back to Germany or to Poland?

A: I would never go to Germany.

Q: You would never go.

A: And I would, I would personally shoot all the Israelis and Jews who are still in Germany doing business there like nothing happened. I never, I would never go to Poland, never went back to Poland.

Q: You did not.

A: My brother who wanted to visit the birth of his father, called **Krasnobrod,** wanted me so desperately go with him to Poland and I refused. I explained to him and he understood the minute I explained to him I said Poland in my mind is soaked in Jewish blood. Whatever you walk, you don't know whether you step on Jewish graves or not. I will never go to Poland because of that. And my son was very upset with me when my 16 year old daughter went on the March of the Living. My daughter, by the way, also was the first one who went on the March of the Living, when she was 16. And he said you the survivor right there. I said I cannot do it, Ari. I cannot do it. And he didn't take it that graciously as like as my brother did. But he had to live with it. And I compensated Poland by talking to her class that I survived my experiences as a survivor in the high school in Israel. Did it in Hebrew, not as well as I do it in English because I think in English and that, it had to suffice.

Q: When your children were the age you were like five years old to ten years old during the war, did that make memories come back even more. Did you –

A: No. I would say, I tell you and thought my children absorbed the story and were very respectful of it. They went to here on Long Island to the Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, HELK and it's an orthodox yeshiva and they were, I was making breakfast for them, very early in the morning. My wife cannot function well. She functions well at night but I'm a, used to be an early bird. First to get up, make lunch for them and cutting up baggies of vegetables for them. They were the only kids who had vegetables with every school, and the other kids obviously were making fun of them. One day I asked my daughter, now Dalia I said do you eat these vegetables or you toss them? I know you cannot exchange it. She said Abba, both of them call me Abba. Abba that's a terrible thing to ask me. After what you went through almost past, I would never throw away food. So I know that they took it seriously. And my granddaughter's, my oldest granddaughter's bat mitzvah she dedicated it to me and my granddaughter, at her bat mitzvah in Israel, they dedicated it to me too by singing a very moving song called Last Night. I had a dream I was in heaven. That is a beautiful song and was very moving, very moving words in it. And so I do, I did go to their schools to talk about this. They invited me to talk to their classes. Can you imagine well they are still two more kids who are younger in Israel. But right here in the states, I went to all four kids' school. And now I am invited again to one of the schools to be recorded like I am recorded now with also with video. I did it already in one school called High Torah here and the program is called names, not numbers. And I am going to do it in January. Well if I stay around. I am kind of, my wife always gets upset when I talk like that.

Q: You said that you were not, you were obviously going through the war years, but even before that your family wasn't religious but now you are. Obviously your children, you've lived a more religious life style. Was that because of your war time experience? Did that –

A: It is a combination of this. That's a good question you are asking here. A combination of this and my wife. Basically it is, I thought about it that people who are not religious will smile politely if they are polite. Or laugh if they are not polite, impolite. It's you know eating garbage and not getting sick, going through the horrible winters and not freezing. And not getting even frostbite. Being ripped by barbed wire, rusty barbed wire and not getting blood poisoning. Being saved by a Jewish Russian soldier at the last second and so on, it makes you pause. And to me the question is people throw it at me is where was God? And the answer is truly where were men? You know, not so much where was God? I was confronted by a person at South Hampton Jewish Center who asked me to, how can I be religious after what I went through? I said that I think I am not weakening the people of Israel. I am, in my opinion I am strengthening them but how is it possible. I said well it has nothing to do with God I feel. And well we can discuss without interference of human beings God is in a way helpless. And I learned this. I am not a philosopher but I learned it from Elie Wiesel. In the book, tiny book, Night. He kind of raises the issue. The execution of the three people and the little boy between them in front of the, of about several thousand inmates. They were accused of something and they were about to be hanged and the two adults yelled long live liberty and the died. And the little boy who was so skeletal didn't have enough body weight to break his neck. And Elie Wiesel said we had to look him straight in his face while he is struggling and a voice behind him said where is God? And then the second time when they were marching, passing the boy and he was still alive, he heard that voice say where is God now? And I answered him, Elie Wiesel said, Where is he now? He is hanging there on the gallows. Now to me this is such a powerful thing, although it has kind of Christian undertones. I feel that God is somehow helpless and many people would condemn me for it when wickedness is rampant. We are supposed to do it ourselves. Our president, President Roosevelt was supposed to do it by bombing the camps. Unfortunately he didn't bomb the death camps. This was something which I cannot understand. So my wife came from a family which is an observant family. And when we got married, the understanding was that we will have an observant home. And she is a mild mannered, very beautiful woman and a beautiful personality and she would never force me to do something that I wouldn't like to do. But it was fully, we were both of us were on the same page about it, to have an observant family.

Q: Are you more comfortable when you are with other survivors than you are with Americans who didn't go through what you went through?

A: No. I am, I mean despite my accent, I am totally and absolutely integrated. I don't seek out other survivors.

Q: Do you feel a kinship to other survivors?

A: I do feel kinship. I don't meet them. I talk extensively about my experience with a Power Point and so forth. And the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center in Glen Cove, Long Island and there are quite a few survivors quite older than I am. I am considered quite young among them, and I am 78. I have kind of younger manner then too because I have been all my life, adult life among children so I assume some of the mannerisms. My wife sense that I never grew up and am very happy you know cracking up my grandchildren. They think I am funny.

Q: Do you feel that you are a different person on the inside than you are to the outside world?

A: No, I am what I am. And I don't find much in common with the survivors, truly because of my, I don't want to sound kind of it's an awkward thing to say but I really don't. I meet with them and they kind of lapse into their stories whenever they can. Like I don't have such a feeling that I have continuously retell my story. But I see an impact of my story on others. In my synagogue here East Meadow Jewish Center when I talked there were over 300 people in the, on Yom **Hashoah** and I was very moved by them. At the end of my story, they kind of like, like it was planned but it wasn't. They jumped up and gave me a standing ovation for several minutes. I spent here 26 years teaching their children and they were very moved by my story. I talk to Catholic schools and they are my best audience. And I talk to various groups and mainly my preference is to talk to high school kids. I talked to, at Hofstra University here on Long Island to the Hillel group. A beautiful bunch of children, of students including quite a few non-Jewish kids who kind of hang around with, at the Hillel which I think is marvelous So I am, I don't feel, I feel fairly comfortable among, quite comfortable among non-Jews as well as Jews.

Q: What were your thoughts during the Eichmann trial? Do you remember any of that?

A: The Eichmann trial.

Q: Do you remember any of your thoughts during that time?

A: Oh yes. We were glued to the radio mind you, that was it. On the radio. All the time. It was, you know, at a certain point in time for me as a child, it was somehow boring, the testimonies and so on but it was powerful stuff going on there. Mind you I what was more interesting is when the time has come to decide what to do to receive reparations from Germany. And **Menachem** Begin was in opposition. David Ben-Gurion was the prime minister. And they were debating it at the Knesset. Now this was amazing stuff. Both of them are brilliant men mind you. But Ben-Gurion won and I'm glad he did. Because he said something which won the people over. He said we are going to get the money, even though you call it blood money. We are going to form an army and will not allow it, strong enough not to allow it to happen, for it to happen again. And I totally 100 percent agreed with him. And, but I adored Menachem Begin you know.

Q: Do you get reparations?

A: No.

Q: Did you mother? Or your stepfather?

A: No. As a matter of fact, what happened is we didn't have any documentation about the house any more. We never applied for it. We never applied for it because of I would say we didn't try to apply for it for reasons. Sometimes, somewhere in the back of the mind that was blood money. Now, when it come to the nation receiving reparations, that's a different story because it went for a good use. So kind of mixed feelings here.

Q: Do you find that you think more about your war time experiences as you've gotten older?

A: No, as a matter of – I shouldn't say no that quickly. I am, I am forced into it by myself talking to the kids.

Q: That's true.

A: So it comes back to me but I am not, I am not, it doesn't linger you know. I become very emotional when I describe the death of my father. I, one time, I had to turn around, take a deep breath, and compose myself and turn back and talk. And it was so quiet. The kids were so respectful. And some of the kids, interestingly from Catholic schools, they have different framing I think. They come over, line up without prompting, to shake my hands and take pictures with me.

Q: Were you at all active in the civil rights movement in the United States? I mean here you and your parents were deprived of your civil rights. Did you –

A: No. No. I was upset by the riots. I mean Newark was burning. Detroit was burning. Parts of New York City was being destroyed. But that was, these were days of rage.

Q: I was just asking because you lived in countries that deprived you of your civil rights.

A: Yeah, I am very much, I am very much for civil liberties and I voted Democrat. And this is a personal thing. I don't have to say it. I'm not ashamed of it, also I am saying it. I voted Democrat until 9-11. And not any more.

Q: So do you think the world has learned anything from the Holocaust?

A: Absolutely zero. Obviously not. I mean now we have radicals, Muslim radicals. I would call them I would say worse than Germans. Worse than the Nazis I mean. They would behead a person without a problem. They will massacre people who don't convert. The Nazis were doing it only, they would massacre a village in they found a dead American, I mean German soldier there as a punishment. But otherwise they didn't. As a matter of fact the Poles were less afraid of the (sound ends, approximately last 3 minutes, 52 seconds from end)

(end)