

Interview with Felix Kaminsky
By Rhoda Lewin
April 9, 1986

Jewish Community Relations Council, Anti-Defamation League
of Minnesota and the Dakotas

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY TAPING PROJECT

Q: When were you born, Mr. Kaminsky?

A: I am born on September 15, 1913.

Q: In what town were you born, and in what country?

A: Sendzeszow. It's between Warsaw and Kielce.

Q: Could you tell me your parents' and grandparents' names?

A: Freund. My father's name was Joseph, and my mother's name was Shifrah.

Q: What languages did you speak at home?

A: Yiddish.

Q: Did you speak Polish too?

A: Some Polish, yes.

Q: Would you say that you grew up in a religious home?

A: Well, half-in-half. My father wasn't a rabbi. (Laughs) I mean everybody was religious in the Old Country.

Q: You observed the holidays, and you had a kosher home?

A: Yes.

Q: And was anybody in your family a Zionist?

A: My younger sister.

Q: How many children were there in your family?

A: Eight.

Q: How many brothers and how many sisters?

A: Two brothers and six sisters.

Q: And your younger sister, did she ever go to Palestine?

A: No. She went to the crematorium. She was in her eighth month pregnant.

Q: We'll talk more about that. Did you receive any formal Jewish education?

A: I went to cheder.

Q: Was that after school, every day?

A: Yeah, after school.

Q: And were you Bar Mitzvah?

A: Sure.

Q: What was a Bar Mitzvah like in those days?

A: I can't remember...nothing.

Q: What events were you aware of in the mid-1930s, local, national international? You knew about the Nazi party in Germany, but how much attention were you paying to what was going on before they marched into Poland?

A: Well, in 1936 I was in Hashomer Hatzair.

Q: Which is...

A: This is Mapai. And I went to the camp, the Hachshara. I went there two years.

Q: Where?

A: I was in Tomaszow...Charobiaszow, Zamoszh, Ludmir and Chelm.

Q: Now for the tape, everybody doesn't know, describe a Hachshara.

A: Well, we used to work. I used to work in a bakery.

Q: I mean, basically, it's where you learn how to be a farming community?

A: A kibbutz. This was Kibbutz-Artzi. This was different. This was a different kibbutz, they were more on the Left in Palestine. In Israel, Kibbutz-Artzi, Hapoel Hamizrachi, they are the first kibbutzim. They are very rich.

Q: And you say your sister was a Zionist? Wouldn't you say that you were a Zionist, too?

A: Well, sure I was. I wanted to go to Palestine. In 1936 was my last year. I was called for the Polish army and then I went for 18 months to the army.

Q: Was everybody being drafted?

A: Not everybody. But I was drafted. I was 18 months in the army and I came back from the army and I wanted to go back to the same kibbutz, but my kibbutz wasn't anymore. All my people, they all emigrated to Palestine. And they told me I should go to a different kibbutz. I didn't want to, so I went home.

Q: And so you missed your chance to go with them?

A: I couldn't go. I was in the army! And all the Bocherim and the Bocherot (comrades), they went to Palestine. So the organization, Hashomer Hatzair, they told me I should go in a kibbutz, but my kibbutz wasn't there, and I didn't want to go anymore. So that's why I didn't go to Palestine.

Q: What did you do then? You said you'd worked in a bakery.

A: While I was in kibbutz.

Q: so afterwards, then, when you came back from the army...

A: I was very musical. In kibbutz I organized and we were playing theater. And I organized a chorale. We were singing, and the last day in kibbutz, we played theater. This was in Kubriczow. And in the morning I went to the army.

Q: So then when you came back, what did you do?

A: When I came back I went to work.

Q: Doing what?

A: I was in the leather business.

Q: So then you weren't really paying that much attention to what was going on in Germany?

A: Well, it's only '37. This started in '39. In 1939 I went in front, against Hitler.

- Q: You were called back in the army?
- A: I was on the front line, in the Polish army.
- Q: So they had Jews, then, in the Polish army, fighting against the Germans when the Germans invaded Poland? Then this does make part of the answer to the next question very obvious. The next question is: In what setting or settings did you have contact with gentiles? Did your family do business with gentiles? Did you ever have gentiles in your home? Well, obviously, you were in the army with gentiles.
- A: I was with Jews, and I was in there with gentiles. Sure.
- Q: And did you have gentile friends that came to your home?
- A: Yeah, a lot. We used to live in a small town, in a very small town. My father, the whole business was with the gentiles.
- Q: What business was your father in?
- A: Well, he was a businessman. He was buying grain.
- Q: Like a wholesaler?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: How much anti-Semitism did you experience, say, in your small town, in the army...
- A: Well, in the army was the first. When we came for our recruit, the captain took us in a separate room. He wanted to find out how the brain is working.
- Q: You mean, Jews might be different from gentiles?
- A: Yes. We were together with gentiles. They gave us a book to go around with, and usually the Jewish boys, they used to have the best...
- Q: Scores on the test?
- A: So the captain came back and he said to us, "I'm not able to take you on the school," the officers' school. Why? We are Jews.
- Q: Jews could not be officers?

- A: No. In case you were a doctor or something, then you could be an officer. A plain Jew, you wouldn't. If you were in first class, or you did something good, then you could get like a couple of...(gestures at chest.)
- Q: Ribbons?
- A: That's right. But not from school.
- Q: I see. And so you were with non-Jews all the time. You were aware though, of anti-Semitism, because like you said, you couldn't become an officer.
- A: Well, even when I went to the public school it was anti-Semitic. Before Easter you couldn't go outside. They used to throw water on you, even when I was a small boy.
- Q: This was just little kids picking on other kids?
- A: Not picking on other kids. This came from what the Pope, last time, mentioned...the Jews has got something to do with Jesus.
- Q: So they learned this?
- A: Sure, this is everything from the middle out of what came...that the Jews killed Jesus. That's it.
- Q: You must have had a very large family. You had not only eight brothers and sisters, but you had lots of aunts, uncles, cousins. Did they live in the same community you lived in? Or were they in other parts of Poland?
- A: Well, one sister went in 1927 to Buenos Aires. After World War II when I was liberated, I found her. The first time I went in 1936. And I didn't see her 40 years, and now she passed away, in 1978.
- Q: And she married?
- A: And she married and has six children. And I am going every year to see the nephews and nieces.
- Q: But your parents, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles of yours...
- A: Everything is gone.
- Q: But they were all in Poland?
- A: Yeah. Sure.

- Q: So then when the war broke out, when the Germans attacked Poland, you were already 26 years old.
- A: Well, when the Germans attacked Poland, I was in the army. This was on the 15th September, 1939. (Transcriber note: the German army attacked Poland September 1, 1939) I was on the first front. We were fighting only two weeks.
- Q: What did you do in the army? You were a gunner, or...
- A: Yeah, I was a special shooter, a big gun. I used to go on the front line. They used to have -- not cars, you know -- specially made bikes.
- Q: These were big guns on wheels?
- A: No, my gun was hung up in a frame, made special. My gun was hanging. And I used to carry about 40 to 50 kilos. That's a hundred-pound pack on my shoulder - - and the gun.
- Q: With the ammunition and everything too?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: And you had a special bike. This was alright when you were on the road, but what happened if you had to go across the fields?
- A: Well, I didn't leave the bike. If I wouldn't have the bike, I wouldn't live an hour.
- Q: Was it a motor bike, or a pedal bike?
- A: A pedal bike, not a motor bike. So I was two weeks fighting. Then we saw that we lost, and I threw everything away and I ran away. I didn't want to go to Jail, to Germany. So I came back home.
- Q: Why did you not want to go to Germany?
- A: Well, they picked right away the Jews. I didn't want that they should pick me up, I was a Jew. Then when I ran away, I went with a friend and we took two horses and a buggy, and we were going. We went in a church and a priest gave us uniforms, me a uniform, my friend a uniform, we should go and the Germans they should not catch us.
- Q: Not a priest's uniform?
- A: Yes, a priest's uniform. Two old uniforms. So we went. The Germans, they didn't catch us, and we went to a town in Galicia. It's called Tarnhof. So came a Polack and told us -- we were freezing -- we should go with him and drink coffee.

We went to him and we lay down in the barn where the straw was. In the Old Country, usually the older farmers, they used to come in the market. So we came to Lienszut, we came in the market and so he was begging us that we should go. We lay down to sleep in the barn, and then he came to the barn and he said, "You're gonna freeze in there. Why don't you come in the kitchen?" so we went in the kitchen. I was together with a friend, with a Polack. He wasn't Jewish. And he said to me, "Felix, don't go. Don't go. We are warm, we are laying here on the ground and we are covered. Don't go in the kitchen." So I said, "What the hell, come on in the kitchen." So we went in the kitchen, and this same Polack, he "stole the boat," he stole from us the horses! In the night time we were asleep in the kitchen and he stole the horses. So we didn't have with what to go. At this time the Germans used to "unload" everything from the Jewish houses, from the factories, from everything, and they sent this to Germany. So I went on a train like this and I went home. I was traveling 200 miles, about four, five days. So I came home where my parents used to live.

Q: So now it was two weeks, the war was over, you had gotten home. What was going on in the community? There were a few Jews in this little town?

A: No, it wasn't a few Jews, it was about a hundred families.

Q: In a town how big? Was this maybe a third of the town?

A: Yes, I would say about a third of the town.

Q: And what were the Jews saying at this point? What things were going to happen?

A: This time they start right away. The Germans start taking us to different kinds of work. Between the Jews they organized a Judenrat, and the Judenrat was responsible that we should go every morning to work. And they didn't pay us nothing for this. We worked every day. I used to work on the railroad tracks. And I lost my right eye at this time.

Q: How did this happen?

A: Well, the German guy, he was playing around where we cut steel wires. He took a wire, and he was playing like a bird. He was going around like this...

Q: Spinning around his head?

A: Spinning around and it went in my eye. Then I went right away into Cracow. We used to wear the Star of David already. We couldn't go by train. Well, anyway, I went to the hospital. One Jewish policeman -- at this time was already Jewish police -- he went with me to Cracow to the Lazar hospital and they operated. The doctor -- a Jewish doctor -- told me. "Well, we could save your eye, but at this time it's not allowed. You don't know what's going to be, so it's

better to be taken out.” I still can remember the doctors. One was Meirovsky and the other doctor was Schell. I don’t know how many days I was in the hospital in Cracow. I haven’t got my right eye.

Q: So that’s an artificial eye?

A: That’s an artificial eye.

Q: But the other eye is okay. You can see alright?

A: Yep. This was in 1939.

Q: Did your family talk at all about trying to escape? I mean, where was there to go?

A: No. I don’t know. From our town, I don’t know even one family that was so smart that they started thinking what’s going to be, and to... Well, it’s a fact, when I was in the Polish army, when that captain came to us and said, “We are not fighting any more, everyone should go on his own,” this was in Tomaszow and I wasn’t too far to go to the Russian side. But I wanted to go home and see my family. That’s why I came home, and that’s what started the whole trouble.

Q: So there you were, working. Every day the Judenrat would call you out and assign you to these jobs. That’s men and women?

A: Women they took to a different city, to Cracow. They picked up a lot of young girls from our town and they took them about 80 miles into Cracow, and they used to work on the airport. They used to do a different kind of work for the Germans.

Q: Now were your sisters over there?

A: Not my sisters. My niece was over there.

Q: Did you have any contact, any communication? Did you know what was happening with her/

A: Yes, I was in contact. She saved my life.

Q: Shall we talk about that now? Or was that several years later?

A: No, this was the whole thing. I was home and she came home. The pilot came with them, with all the girls, to this town. They wanted to see all the parents, if they’re still all alive. So my niece heard that that’s going to be the second “selection,” and she said, “Uncle, you better start to run away. Don’t wait until they’re going to come and take you. And when you’re going to run away, you come over there on the airport.” She used to work for a German guy where he

was like a boss.. He used to raise tomatoes. And she was a nice little girl. He was stealing tomatoes, and he made a little hole by the fence and he sent her every day out to his home with the tomatoes. So she told me where the hole is, and it happened like this. They came, the Germans, to start taking everyone, so I ran away and came there, and went through this hole in the airport in Cracow. And she told me there's going to be "companies," with Jewish people working for German companies. I went and I saw Jewish boys working, and the boss came over and he asked what I wanted. So the boys, they told him I want to work, So that boss, the German boss, he said, "Let him come after lunch." So I came after lunch, and he registered me, so I was already a free man.

Q: So you were a worker. You were accepted. Was this leather work?

A: No, no. I worked all kinds of work on this airport. And then I met a good friend, he was working in a different place where they made brick. You know, they build houses with. So I went over there. And I read in the paper that to Poland used to come a doctor from Germany -- I used to have a hole where the eye should be -- and my name is Kaminsky, it's a Polish name, so I took a risk. I took off my Star of David from my arm, and I went to the hospital and told them my name and everything. So he made me right away a prosthesis. Then I was really free.

Q: You mean you didn't have an identity card that you had to show, that all the officials would always ask to look at?

A: This time was no identity card.

Q: Or a ration card, or anything?

A: No, no. He was thinking, I'm not Jewish, I'm a Polack. My hair wasn't grey, you know, and I used to wear a hat like the Polacks, and I came with the boots in. So when I was talking Polish to him he made me an artificial eye, right away.

Q: So if you didn't wear your yellow star, they didn't do any checking up on you?

A: Well, before I came to this, was a lot of things. Before I came to Cracow when my niece told me I should come, I went with the train. And all of a sudden, somebody said to me, "Halt!" A Polack recognized that I'm a Jew. Not a German, a Polack. And so he stopped me and he started to talk to me in Polish. He asked me if I'm a Jew and I said, "Yes." He said he's going to call the Gestapo. I don't know where the words were coming to me, but I said, "What are you going to have? Alright, you're going to call the Gestapo, the Gestapo's going to take me, they're going to finish me up. Now what are you going to have from this?" "Well, I don't know." And he said, "Run away! Go from my eyes, I should not see any more!" And that's the time my niece told me I should come to the airport through this hole.

Q: So then after you got your artificial eye you came back to...

A: Then I was free. Then I could go anyplace!

Q: Then you put your yellow star back on again?

A: No, I didn't put on the yellow star. When they took us out from the houses, this time I was with my whole family, with all the Jewish people in the place called Slomit, and I had no eye. I used to wear a patch, like Moshe Dayan. Right away they took the older people, hell, they shot 'em, and we saw that, everything. And then the young people they picked up to work. So then they were going around, seeing that they didn't make any mistakes, so I was in trouble.. So I took down this black thing from my eye and I took a handkerchief and I started wiping my eye as if maybe something is in it, and so I went through the "selection."

Q: What happened to the rest of your family, and when? Were your parents taken quite early?

A: Well, my mother, she died in 1942. When the Germans chased out all the Jews from home, from the town, they hired all the farmers. They were staying on the road. It was young and old, older people, young people, they separated us. They took the older people. We were thinking it's the older people they're going to put on the wagons, or they would not be able to go. No they didn't. The younger people only they put on the horses and buggies, and they took us, I don't know how many miles. Then we heard it. The Jewish police came back -- the Jewish police. We were wondering what happened to all our parents, so the Jewish police told us what happened. They all went through the town, and they told them they should run. And they started to run, and they shot, right away, in the back, and the head, and they threw them over the bank. And then the Polacks came with the wagons, and they put everybody in and they went to a forest called Wimirhof, and they buried over there the whole community, the rabbi and everybody. My family was there. One from my family was over there about three years ago and he made a memorial. This was a hundred Jews, close by Meirhof. It's a big memorial. And it's a fact, the Polacks, they were watching this.

Q: Were you still together with your sisters and brothers?

A: No. My sister when she was eight months pregnant, they took her right away to the crematorium. And this was the place they took the other sister -- she wasn't married -- and then another sister who had two children. They were all taken to the gas chamber. The two children, they are alive in Brazil. My niece who didn't survive, she was on this ship -- they asked President Roosevelt to save the ship -- and the Germans drowned the ship. I think this was in '45. She was a young girl, about 16 years old.

- Q: So then you were in the factory at the airport with the Luftwaffen, working. How long did this last?
- A: I don't know. About a year. Then one time came two big semi-trucks and they were loading us. We didn't know where they're going to take us. The driver, he was a Polack, when he was driving with us, he was laughing as we were going. I don't know how many people were on this truck -- about 80 -- and he said, "We are going to Our Father." So we were thinking they're going to shoot us someplace. Then they took us to Schindler. This was a factory in Cracow on Lipova 4.
- Q: What was the approximate date when you came to Schindler?
- A: I think this was in '43.
- Q: You say there were 80 of you who were on this big semi? Did you know why you got there?
- A: I don't know exactly. I was lucky. When the driver told us we are going to Our Father, everybody was thinking we are finished! And all of a sudden we came in this factory, and we saw this tall man. He was a beautiful tall man, this Schindler.
- Q: You met Oscar Schindler?
- A: Sure, I was his best friend.
- Q: Can you describe him for us? Tell me some more about him.
- A: Then I started working over there. When I came there was a lot of Polacks, they used to work in the factory. But they used to go out. The Jewish people, we used to have barracks, and after we finished in the factory, we used to go home to the barracks.
- Q: Now there was a men's barracks and a women's barracks. There were women working there?
- A: Yeah. Well, no. It was separate.
- Q: What kind of factory was it? What were you making?
- A: Pots and pans, metal. I used to work in the factory for metal. I done on the machine. And then all of a sudden -- then was a big kitchen. The Polacks, they used to eat lunch, he used to give lunch to all the Polacks. We didn't eat lunch. We used to have in camp, over there in the barracks, we used to have a kitchen. And all of the Polacks they used to eat in the factory. Those two cooks, Polacks, they were Jaska and Gala. I still remember their names. And then I met a Polish

girl over there. She used to taking care for pigs what Schindler used to raise. He used to have a big yard, All the iron what went from the machines we used to load on train cars. This was going on a long time. But I was feeding the pigs and I was feeling good. And then he asked me, Schindler, do I know to raising geese. I said, "Sure, I know how to raise 'em." So he bought geese and I was raising geese and feeding the geese with -- not with corn -- grain. And then usually used to come the whole bunch from Plaschau, from Jerusalemky, Goett and Jung. All the whole bunch they used to come and visit him. He was bigger, he was an Obersturmbahnfuhrer, Schindler. He told me the geese they will use when they will be fat. One time he told me that I should kill about ten, there's going to be a big party. So I killed about ten geese and took two boys and two women from the barracks, and they helped me clean them, the feathers. And there was a big party over there by Schindler, the whole bunch, the big shots from Plaschau.

Q: Now Schindler didn't wear a uniform. He was not part of the...

A: No, he was wearing a suit like I was. We cut the geese and everything, and he heard it, at the party -- Jung was drunk, a little guy with such a big belly -- and he wanted shooting somebody from us. So Schindler came to us and he said, "Run away! Leave everything and run away!" So we run away.

Q: Went back and hid in the barracks?

A: Yeah. We run away in the barracks and that's it. In the morning I come back -- I used to have a lot of meat, geese -- and took everything to the barracks for the women, for the boys, and give it to them.

Q: How were the pigs doing, though? Were they getting enough to eat?

A: The "pigs" was one pig. I fed her so she couldn't stay on her legs!

Q: Did he have a whole big farm there?

A: No, this wasn't a farm.

Q: Just a little garden and a few animals?

A: It wasn't a garden. This was on a different yard. We used to load all the iron that was from the pots and pans, they used to load from the barracks. The Jewish boys used to load. And this went someplace else, the iron. And then -- I don't know how long I was over there -- we heard, it was already about '45, the situation is no good. We gonna go to Czechoslovakia.

Q: Now wait. The situation was not good? You mean the Germans by now were losing the war, the Russians were coming...

- A: Yes, they're coming closer and closer. He wants to liquidate the factory here in Poland. We went to Himmler and said he has to have the same Jews that have experience with this kind of work. Other men and the ladies, they used to work in a different factory, ammunition.
- Q: Were you making ammunition?
- A: Not me. The whole was 1,100 people, 400 women and 700 men.
- Q: Because in the book, Schindler's List, the author says you made mess kits for the army, pots and pans, but he says that you never really made ammunition.
- A: Made ammunition, too. And it came to the fact that he came back and he said that we are all going to a different place, to Sudetenland...Czechoslovakia...Sudetenland.
- Q: Which is where he was from.
- A: Yeah. So there was a list from 1,100...400 women and 700 men. You know, even between Jews, there used to be a lot of bad Jews over there in Plaschau. Used to be a Matzle Goldberg, used to be a Kerel, used to be a Schmeling. Anyway, when Schindler made the list from all the 1,100, who should go to Sudetenland, we went to Germany, to Grossrosen. They took a lot of Jews from Plaschau, and we went together. The big shots like Matzle Goldberg, he was knowing the place we going was Brno, Brinitz. And everybody want to be by Schindler, so what he (Goldberg) done, he sold. From the other group he took two to change, took out somebody from Schindler and put in from the other group. He took for this two \$20 gold pieces.
- Q: So you could buy a place on Schindler's list?
- A: They took me from the list. Well, Schindler didn't know they start to sell to the other group, taking from out from our list.
- Q: Did you know?
- A: I didn't know, but I found out, and I went to Schindler. This was in Grossrosen. I said, I am not on the list. They took me out from the list. And he said, "Where is that damn Jew?" and he took this Matzle Goldberg, and he said to him in German, "If you take that Jew's name off the list, I'll kill you." Then I went back, and I came to Sudetenland.
- Q: You got back on the list. How did you find out?
- A: I found out. (Laughs) So I came to Brinitz. Then I went in the kitchen.

Q: You became a cook?

A: Yeah. I was working in the kitchen. When I start to work, in the kitchen, was a lot of Jewish boys. They used to come with a different Sturmbahnführer. His name was Leitputh, and he put them in the kitchen, too. So Schindler came in the kitchen, he threw them out, and he put in our people. So I was in the kitchen the whole time until the liberation the 8th of May, 1945.

Q: How many of you did he know personally?

A: A lot of them. Before the liberation, for instance, he went to town and he bought horses for us. If he found out -- the big horses, the Belgian horses -- if he found out there's a farmer, there's a horse broke a leg, he went right away and he bought the horse and he brought it in the kitchen for us to eat.

Q: You ate horsemeat?

A: He bought for his money. We were lucky we used to have horsemeat! This is indescribable, what he did. And then he was knowing the war goes to the end, and he was a little bit afraid. In Sudetenland, in the same town, was a lot of linen-weaving factories. They used to make the best linen, like for sheets, the best in Czechoslovakia. And he went around, I would say about four weeks before liberation, with big semi-trucks and he took out from all the factories all the materials. Material for men's suits, all kinds of materials, he took to our place. He called us and we had a meeting in the factory with him and he said to us, "I wish this, that I should live through this whole thing like you're gonna live."

Q: Why did he think he might not live through it?

A: Well, he still was an Obersturmbahnführer. Anyway, at the end, when the Russians came in, four boys went with him and they told the Russians what he done for us, and he was free.

Q: How did it happen, the liberation?

A: We was waiting, and all of a sudden the Russians, they came in.

Q: How did you know? You were waiting, you said. How did the word...

A: All of the Obersturmbahnführers what used to be in Plaschau, they came to Schindler, to Sudetenland. We was thinking as they came, they're going to finish us. And he was hiding 'em under his shoulders.

Q: And you didn't have radios or anything? It was just a rumor? You were guessing?

- A: No, no. all of a sudden in the morning we heard the Russian, they are here. They came in and gave us a whole day free and we can do with the Germans what we wanted. So we caught all the bad guys. We caught right away the Jews, the young guys what done bad, and they finished them right away.
- Q: You did it yourselves then?
- A: I didn't. Nobody done it to me, you know. Was a lot of people over there from Plaschau what used to have bad times. I was lucky. I was always lucky. I went with one eye in camp. I didn't know what hunger is. And I gave people to eat.
- Q: So what happened, then, after the war was over and you were liberated? Then what did you do?
- A: Schindler said, "You can take the materials, everything. How much do you want? It's better you should take with you if you're going to leave. The Russians are going to take, anyway!" So I filled up a big sack with all the materials. I wanted to go home, see whom I got, so I went to Cracow. I sold all the material so I got some money. I used to go with my wife, we used to know each other, but I didn't get married. I didn't find nobody in Cracow, so I came back to Sosnowiec, where my wife is from. I went through the street, and all of a sudden I saw her holding two little pots and pans, going to the committee for a little bit to eat! So I met her! She was with a cousin, staying in a relation's house on Radomsky street, and I went over there. I was living over there. The cousins were very religious so they want I should get married right away. So January 27, 1946, I got married.
- Q: When did you meet her?
- A: I met her in '45.
- Q: So then she wasn't one of Schindler's...
- A: No. She wasn't far. She was in Sudetenland, but I didn't know about that.
- Q: How did she survive?
- A: Over there in Sudetenland, the same thing, the Russians, they liberated her.
- Q: But she was never in a camp?
- A: She was in camp. She was at a different company. Her company was Bausch.
- Q: So then she was a worker too. And you met her after the war.
- A: After the war when I came back and I sold my stuff, I came back and I met her and we got married. It was the first wedding from the Holocaust people.

Q: Did you go back to your home town?

A: I went back. I bought turkeys for my wedding, in my home town. I didn't want to go back. I heard a lot of people went back and the Polacks, they killed them. So I didn't wanna go back. I bought the turkeys and we went home.

Q: And there was nobody there?

A: No.

Q: Where were you living then? Were you in a displaced persons camp? Or were you just living in Cracow in an apartment?

A: I wasn't too long in Poland. I wanted to emigrate to the United States. The same thing my wife. She was sick, she couldn't stay on her feet. She couldn't even go to the chupah. We couldn't emigrate to the United States from Poland, so we wanted to go to Germany. We smuggled into Germany through Czechoslovakia. We came to a town where we have to go through the water in the nighttime. We paid this guy, that he should show us where the water should not be too deep. On this side were the Americans, and on this side was the Czechoslovakians. This was in February. We went in the water and my wife, she couldn't stand in the water, and she started swimming, and my brother-in-law's brother -- he passed away in Israel three years ago -- he caught her when he saw her start to swim and he was holding her until we went through the water and was going in the forest, in the snow. We went to a house and dried out, and we were already on the German side. We came to Bodenwaldhof.

Q: What did you do there? How did you live? Who took care of you?

A: What do you mean, how? (Laughs) I met people. I came to Munich. Before I came, my wife found a sister, with two children, in Lanzberg, Memmingen, in Germany. She lost her husband in camp. She met a cousin, and the cousin used to have a sister in France, so she decided to go to France. I remember I was one day by my sister-in-law where she used to live, and in the morning she packed and she went. I was a child when my sister went to Argentina in 1927 and I didn't remember the address. Usually in the Old Country they used to have addresses written down on a Jewish book on the table. So I was laying in bed, and when I woke up, all of a sudden I remember! I had an address for my sister! At this time from Germany it didn't went the mail, so in the morning I said to my sister-in-law, "Anna, I know that from France the mail goes already all over." So I give her the address and she wrote to her a letter that I'm alive, and all of a sudden came back a letter from my sister that she is alive. The first time I went there was in 1966. So I came to Munich, and I was in Munich, I think about eight years.

Q: And you worked?

A: I used to have a little store, selling different shtick, American stuff -- coffee and cigarettes and this and that. And I lived private.

Q: Then you knew German too?

A: Sure I knew German. Every Jew knows German.

Q: What was it like living in a German city, as a Jew, right after World War II?

A: At this time the German was different.

Q: Did they know you were a Jew?

A: Sure. I used to live by a German. He was even a Nazi! The Jewish Committee got me the apartment. I didn't pay nothing. At this time they used to be afraid of a Jew over there. He was happy that a Jew lives by him.

Q: So you lived there for eight years while you were waiting to get your visa to come to the United States? It took you all this time, planning to leave?

A: It took a long time until I got all the papers. I went through Hanover and I came with a G.I. ship to New York.

Q: This was already, then, '54?

A: In 1951.

Q: So then you came to New York. What did you do then? You and your wife came together; did you have any children yet?

A: My son was born in Germany. He was four years old when I came to New York.

Q: So you came to New York, and here you are in this strange big city. You don't speak the language...

A: Well, the Joint Distribution Committee, they asked me what kind work can I do. I said, "I'm from the leather." So they sent me and the second day I got a job in a factory, pocketbooks and men's wallets.

Q: This is something you had done as a very young man but you hadn't done it all through the war...

A: Listen, what you learn when you are young, you still can remember. I was eight years in New York. My brother-in-law, they sent him to New York too, from

Germany, and the Joint Distribution asked him what he can do. And he said he knows about cows, horses. So they sent him to Minnesota, to St. Paul. He used to work here in St. Paul in the stockyard, I don't know how many weeks. He didn't want it, he wanted to go by himself, so he asked people where is a good town so he can buy a farm. He went to Stewartville, not far from Rochester, Minnesota, and he bought a farm and started to deal with cows. So he was dealing with cows and I still was in New York, and in 1958 he came to visit me. He said, "Why do you want to sit here in New York?" I was already a partner to my boss -- he was a bachelor -- but I used to have trouble with him. And I didn't like it, sitting inside in a shop a whole day. I like to be outside. So he said, "Come over. Maybe we going to buy something together." My wife wasn't too happy. I was going around and I met Rabbi Eisemann. He said, "You wanna move to Rochester? I give you a kind of suggestion." I said, 'what kind?' "Well." He said, "Minnesota has 10,000 lakes. I sell you a thousand." (Laughs) Well, I came and we was looking around but we couldn't buy nothing, so I went back home. But my head was all ready to come back, so I came back and we was going around and all of a sudden, a day before I left, came a guy and he offered a business, a trailer park. It took about five minutes, we bought this trailer park! I was in Rochester 25 years. And that's my life.

Q: So then you and your friend, your brother-in-law, bought this trailer park?

A: No, he's still in the cattle business. Me and my wife, we used to have 120 units, 120 families -- 80 permanents and 40 travel units.

Q: So then you didn't move to Minneapolis until...

A: It came to the point we wanted to sell, so we sold it. When you're in a place 25 years, well, I saw what's going on, how they're managing it, and I didn't like it, so I don't want to stay there any more. So that's why I came here. It's a year. On March 7 last year I came to Minneapolis. And to Rochester I came in 1959, so it was almost 25 years there in the trailer park. In 1978 there was a flood in Rochester. It was flooded.

Q: Were you involved with the Jewish community in Rochester?

A: Oh, yeah. I was involved in the Jewish community. I was social director in the (Mayo) clinic. I used to be interpreter in the clinic for Jewish people that came from South America.

Q: You speak Spanish too?

A: Yiddish and German, a little bit Spanish. I was social director of the Jewish community in Rochester about 10 years. The B'nai Brith paid me.

Q: Social director for the B'nai Brith? Or social director for the synagogue? Or for the clinic?

A: There was a rabbi, and I was the social director. A lot of South American and Central American Jews used to come to Rochester as patients to the clinic. We used to have a good time. They used to come to the Center. Then they told me I should make a Jewish delicatessen store. I made the store. I lost \$45,000 and I closed up.

Q: So now what are you doing in Minneapolis?

A: Now? I'm not doing nothing. You got a job for me?

A: Why did you move up here instead of staying in Rochester?

A: I miss Rochester. But don't forget, I'm 72 years old. I still could stay in Rochester, taking care of things, but we start to fighting with my partner and I couldn't stay any longer.

Q: And so here you are. Where does your son live?

A: My son lives in Plymouth and he's got an office in the Midland Bank in downtown Minneapolis.

Q: What business is he in?

A: He's a lawyer.

Q: So this is one reason you came to Minneapolis.

A: Yeah. Without that I wouldn't come to Minneapolis. I got a lot of relations in Brazil. I got two nephews in Brazil.

Q: You had been on Achsherah, and you'd talked so long about going to Palestine -- did you consider going to Israel instead of coming to the United States after the war?

A: I would go to Israel. But my wife's sister who used to live in France, she married a guy from Israel and she went to Israel. She got cancer and my wife went over there. She was there about four weeks and I was by myself in the trailer park. She didn't like Israel. She didn't like the people. There in the hospital they treated her badly. If not for my son, I wouldn't stay here, I would move to Brazil, Buenos Aires.

Q: And you have grandchildren too?

- A: I have three children.
- Q: And you didn't have any other children, just the one boy. One more thing about living here. Are you involved at all in the Jewish community here?
- A: Yeah. I'm in the Keneseth Israel (synagogue) I'm going to the JCC (Jewish Community Center). And I belong to the B'nai Brith. My health is not good. When I was in the park, I was healthy. Then I was much too busy. I was 20 hours with people, and it was too many. I'm going next Monday for an angiogram. I don't know what's gonna be.
- Q: Now we get to the philosophical questions. You might want to think about it for a minute before you start to answer. Can you tell me what it's meant to you to be a survivor? You smile...
- A: Well, you got characters from our people -- some survivors --they can take it better than I. Can you imagine to be eight children, and not to have nobody? I got only my son. You know, a daughter-in-law is not a daughter. We are by ourself.
- Q: But out of eight children, there's you and your two sisters who did survive.
- A: No.
- Q: But there was one in Israel, who died?
- A: No, no, no, no. I haven't got no sister what's survived.
- Q: I thought it was your sister in Buenos Aires.
- A: She passed away in 1978.
- Q: But she did live through the war.
- A: Only two nephews what survived -- one survived in Bergen-Belsen and one in Mauthausen -- they are in Brazil.
- Q: Oh, I see why you'd like to go there. Another question here: if you can, could you tell me how you feel about human nature, about non-Jews, about Germans? Do you think about that at all?
- A: I feel much worse about the Polacks than the Germans. The German people, they didn't recognize a Jew when a Polack wouldn't holler, "Oh, a Jew!" They wouldn't recognize! The Polacks they are blond, and the Jews they are dark complexioned, and the Germans they are dark complexioned too. So the Germans

didn't recognize a Jew when the Polack wasn't hollering, 'That's a Jew!' I wouldn't go to Poland for no money. That's a bloody, bloody land for me.

Q: Do you think they've changed?

A: I don't know if they've changed. The Polacks they are Polacks. That's it. They are not in bad shape now, maybe they are a little better. Anyway, they got Judenfrei over there.

Q: Then there is this question: Has your belief, or the way you practice Judaism, or whether you believe in God changed?

A: That's a big question.

Q: Well, you belong to the Orthodox synagogue...

A: Sure, I belong. I ask a lot of people questions. I ask questions even the rabbi. I said, 'Rabbi, tell me. Every nation in the world got sin, every human being's got sin. The Jewish people, they used to have sin. But why, when it's a God, why didn't he send a miracle? Why was he waiting that six million Jews was killed? Why didn't he do a miracle about two million killed? That He could see such...the best people in the world, religious people...that they could see this, and they could see young children, shooting them, putting them in the ground...I don't know. I don't believe it.' He says, "There's no answer to this, I can't give you an answer."

Q: Rabbi Herzog says this?

A: "I can't give you no answer?" It's no answer.

Q: I think you're right. There is none. Do you have any photos, mementoes, things that you could share with us if we're going to do a book or an exhibit? Did you bring anything with you?

A: What do you mean, photos?

A: For example, photos of you as a young man. Wedding photos of yourself and your wife.

A: Sure, I got photos here.

Q: (Looking at photos) When you were talking about your wife earlier, I didn't realize that you had known her before the war.

A: My parents, they used to have orchards in the summer. The whole family, they used to live in a big city and they used to come to use over the summer.

- Q: You mean people would come to rent? To camp? Families?
- A: Her mother used to come to us to bring from the big city stuff like a peddler.
- Q: What kind of things did they sell?
- A: Like somebody needed pens or somebody needed shirts, she used to bring from the big city. It was a small town. She used to give, to pay off. They couldn't afford to go in a hotel so they came to us for the whole summer. We used to have two bungalows in the orchard. We didn't charge them nothing. So we knew each other a long, long time.
- Q: So that's how you met your wife. So then how did you meet her after the war? Somebody told you she was there?
- A: Somebody told me that she is alive. I met her on the street in Sosnowiec and she was waiting with pots in her hand, going to the committee for a little food...
- Q: And you recognized her right way. That must have been quite a reunion.
- A: Sure! She used to stay with cousins. The cousins, they are now in Israel, in B'nai Barak. They are very religious.
- Q: There is a book called Schindler's List. You say that it is not accurate.
- A: I tell you, you interviewed me, I can't remember everything. You have to sit with me two days until I tell you everything. This guy, maybe he interviewed somebody, but that's...I started to read the book, but I didn't like it.
- Q: In what way?
- A: It's not right. A lot of things are not right. He didn't know a lot of people what used to be there.
- Q: You mean there were other people that were there?
- A: Well, he (Schindler) took over the factory from a Jewish guy. His name was Banke. And this Banke was all the time the chief in the factory. He got nothing, Schindler got the whole factory.
- Q: But Schindler kept him on. Are you saying then that Schindler was not a 100% good person?
- A: What do you mean 100%?

- Q: Well, he saved so many Jews' lives...but...
- A: He was still a German. But when they would find out he is for the Jews, they would kill him! He was for us, not for the German. He was an Obersturmbahnführer and he went to Himmler and said he has to have the same Jews.
- Q: Did you ever talk to him about why he was doing this?
- A: I didn't talk to him. After World War II, I was going from Ravensbruck to Munich and I met him. We were sitting together and I told him, 'I've got half a sack of coffee over there,' and exactly then came the German police and he saved me maybe 100 pounds of coffee.
- Q: So then you saw him after the war?
- A: Sure. Then I heard he went to Israel and he got \$25,000 right away from Joint Distribution.
- Q: Was this to reimburse...
- A: No. He is buried in Jerusalem.
- Q: I didn't know that. He didn't live in Jerusalem after the war...
- A: He lived for a while, and he's buried in Israel.
- Q: Did you ever talk among yourselves? Do you remember trying to figure out why this man was like he was?
- A: He was smart. He told me one time, 'When Hitler wouldn't start with the Jews, Hitler would win the war.' That's why he walked on two sides. He was better for the Jews, alike for the Germans. He couldn't be bad for the Germans. If they would find out that he give to eat, the Jews, the Germans they would kill him. It made no difference he was Obersturmbahnführer, he would go in jail and they would kill him.
- Q: It says in the book that he was arrested three times and each time, with connections, he got out.
- A: That's why he was afraid.
- Q: But you think then that the reason he helped the Jews was really just that he thought the Germans were being foolish to waste their efforts on the Jews?
- A: He was knowing that the Germans they're going to lose. He was a smart cookie.

Q: But it's almost like you're saying that he didn't do this because he was a good person, he did it because he was a smart person, he did it because he figured the Germans are going to lose.

A: (To Mrs. Kaminsky) Did you get the mail?

Q: Your wife doesn't want to be interviewed?

A: No.

Q: Have you read any other books about the Holocaust?

A: Nobody hears what they got to. No, I don't want to.

Q: Are you going to see Shoah? The movie?

A: I think so.

Q: One more question. What did I forget to ask? Is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to talk about? About your life as a Jew in Poland? Something else that happened during the war?

A: I don't know if I should be doing this...

Q: One of the things it says in the book is that things were much worse for you after the factory was moved to Czechoslovakia. That there was much less food, that among the women, particularly, there was a lot of sickness.

A: That's not true. Just like I tell you, he went and he bought for his money horses for the kitchen. I was in the kitchen. I cooked. I know.