

INTERVIEW WITH MR. MARK MANDEL  
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Jewish Community Relations Council, Anti-Defamation League  
of Minnesota and the Dakotas

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY TAPING PROJECT

Q: And now, for the JCRC-ADL Holocaust History Project, the interviewer's Jane Katz, July 31, 1984, in Mr. Mandel's home. Now, Mr. Mandel, at times I may stop you, if you don't mind. I may interrupt you to ask for clarification of something that you've said, because it may seem very obvious to you, but this material is going to be transcribed by somebody who may or may not be Jewish, and the events will very likely not be familiar and the terminology may not be familiar, so I may ask you to clarify very precisely. If you are using any Jewish words or any foreign words that once again may not be absolutely familiar to the transcriber, I would appreciate it if you would spell them. So we'll just begin with some factual questions to pin this in terms of time and place, and then I will ask you to go on and expand on your personal experience. Would you tell me your name, including your Jewish name?

A: My name in America, I go under Mark Mandel. However, when I came to this country, my name was Moshe Mandelbaum. Prior to marrying my Jewish American wife, I want to say that we talked it over, and through mutual understanding, I had to change my name to be Mandel. And in 1956, my name became Mark Mandel.

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

A: I came to the United States February 3, 1955, at the age of 25.

Q: What country were you born in?

A: I was born in Poland, April 5, 1930.

Q: What was the name of your town or city?

A: I was born in Warsaw, Poland.

Q: And what about your parents? Can you tell me the names of your parents, your grandparents and even their parents?

A: I have the knowledge of the name of my grandparents only - not great-grandparents. My mother's father I never knew, but I am named after him. His name was Moshe Melech Rochenschwalb. Never did we come across another

person with this name. My grandmother on my mother's side, her name was Sarah Leah Rochenschwalb.

Q: Now where had they come from?

A: They were from Poland.

Q: Had they emigrated there from somewhere else?

A: No, they were to the best of my knowledge, born in Poland. My grandparents on my father's side, I knew 'em both. Their name was Isaac Mandelbaum and Zlata Mandelbaum. My grandfather died in 1935. And my grandmother was in ghetto Warsaw, and she was taken to the Treblinka death camp.

Q: Do you know at what point your grandmother went to Treblinka? Were you all deported together? Or did she go first?

A: No, no, no. She and my aunts, my sisters of my father, went together, around June in '41.

Q: I suppose as you tell the story of what happened to your family you will come to this at any rate. What did your parents do and what did your grandparents do?

A: I haven't got no knowledge what my grandparents on my mother's side did. However, I know my grandmother, she was selling milk. Delivering milk. My grandfather on my father's side was a tailor.

Q: So your grandmother had a wagon. She handled this by herself?

A: No, no. Carrying, you know.

Q: She transported the milk on foot.

A: Yeah, delivering the milk.

Q: She must have been quite a hardy and energetic person.

A: Evidently. She raised five children. But obviously, at the time when I had the knowledge, she didn't work anymore, but when she was a young woman.

Q: What about the languages that were spoken at home?

A: The language spoken at home, strictly Yiddish.

Q: Do you recall that your family was deeply religious at that time?

A: Deeply religious as I know it now, they were not. However, at the time when I was a child and growing up, we were considered very religious. My father didn't wear a hat; however, when he sat down to eat, he put on a hat. He did not work on Saturdays. We had, obviously, kosher homes. We didn't know nothing else. It was common, everybody was observant. There were more observant Jews.

Q: Were they scholars in any sense?

A: They were not scholars.

Q: Was there any involvement with the Zionism movement at any time that you can recall?

A: Well, no. But my memory of my parents, my father particularly, is that he was a self-taught person. Was very much involved in politics. When I say politics, I mean on current events. I remember people gathering around him, discussing events of the time. And I did not comprehend, but my sister - my older sister - is telling me now, that at that time, when the civil war in Spain was going on, there he was discussing it. But Zionist things we did not hear.

Q: Or any affiliation with the Socialist movement?

A: No, but he was a member of the organization equivalent to the Histadrut in Israel. A labor movement. My father was self-employed. He was a shoemaker. He was working at home.

Q: And he was able to make enough as a shoemaker to support the family? There were quite a few of you, I gather.

A: There were, yeah. Maybe at this time we can say how many there were. I had six sisters. I was the only boy. So there were actually nine people that he had to feed. We knew hunger.

Q: Well now, what did you do during the bad times when your father was not able to make enough for the family? Did you work as you were growing up?

A: No, I did not. I didn't have a chance to work, because you've got to understand that when the war broke out, I was only nine years old. So therefore I did not work; however, my older sister - we are five to six years apart - she did work and bring in and helped out in the house.

Q: What kind of work did she do?

A: She worked as a tailor, as a seamstress, I guess you call it.

Q: I guess, at that time, one almost had to work within the Jewish community?

- A: Yes, as a matter of fact she did work for another Jewish lady. And speaking of Zionism, this particular lady that my sister worked for, she was very Zionistic inclined. I know it now. My other sister worked in a store as a clerk. All in the same Jewish community.
- Q: Do you recall the feeling of being excluded from the rest of the community? That you were in a separate world? Were you conscious of that? You say you were quite young.
- A: Conscious of the fact, yes, we were conscious of the fact. The neighborhood that we lived, was literally a gentile - as we call it now - a gentile area in Warsaw. And yes, we feared always the gentile boys. They always used to attack us. And when one bully used to be on one side, we had to go on the other side. We felt inferiority - I did, even at the age of eight and nine and ten.
- Q: Can you recall the first time that you had that sense that you were in danger?
- A: I don't know about being in danger, but really being bullied, and scared to in any way provoke them. At the age, I would say, of eight.
- Q: And perhaps that was something that your parents instilled in you from early childhood.
- A: No, no. It came on the streets. Just from the street, from the experience living in the street, in the neighborhood.
- Q: Wasn't that pretty unusual for Jews to live in a gentile neighborhood in Poland?
- A: It was. Yes, it's true, it was very unusual. Obviously my father could not have afforded any better quarters, or been selective, so therefore he had to take whatever was available. And as far as this particular building that we lived in, it was one building on a relatively short street, maybe twice as long as this one. But within walking distance, there was a relatively Jewish population area.
- Q: I see. Of course, at that time, when your father moved to that district, he must have had a sense that Jews were not liked, but there was probably no awareness of the kind of threat, the kind of danger that was to come.
- A: He grew up with it. He knew, you know. And the reason, probably, that he took this particular apartment - it was a store front, there was a front room the size of this room - he probably took it because he was a shoemaker.
- Q: And perhaps hoped for some trade from the gentile community.
- A: Oh, I'm sure he did.

Q: I see. And were there experiences where the clientele treated him as an inferior?

A: No, but I tell you one experience. This is a really interesting experience that we had, that we witnessed, and that I recall, at the age of seven. Whenever there was a gentile Polish wedding, you could bet on it, there were going to be fights. They'd get drunk and get fights. And one time, we witnessed a fight among Polacks - gentle people - right in front of our door! They were beating each other up, and stepping on their faces, and we were so scared that we closed our shutters, we locked ourselves in, and we peeked through a little opening to see what was going on there. They didn't harm us, but just among themselves, it was very brutal. Until this very day, this very moment, my memory, that incident, how they were fighting among themselves - at that wedding, mind you. It was a wedding! Really! But didn't harm us, as I said.

Q: But what an education for a young boy as to the cruelty of the people around you, the people in your community. Did you attend a heder?

A: Oh, yeah. Sure. I attended heder from three till age seven. I attended heder in a small town where my parents come from, Deblin, at age three.

Q: They were born in Deblin, then.

A: Deblin, yes. And we lived there for a while, also. They moved back and forth, from Warsaw to Deblin. So I attended school, public school in Poland. When I started going to public school, I was taken out from heder and I didn't go back.

Q: So you did attend the public school then for a couple of years.

A: At age seven. Three years. I went three grades only, it was the first, second and third.

Q: Did you know the Polish language?

A: Yes, I did. I spoke Polish, you know. At home we spoke Yiddish, but with the gentile friends we spoke Polish, and in school we spoke Polish.

Q: And what was the treatment like in the school? Were you the only Jewish boy in your class or were there others?

A: No, there were others, and I did not feel - as a matter of fact, the first class of school that I went to was a brand new school built within walking distance, five, six blocks or more - no, I did not feel any discrimination or harm.

Q: Now let me just pin down the time frame here. In what year was there the first information that Nazism was rising and that Jews were under siege?

A: I didn't have no knowledge at all until the war, September 2, 1939. The war broke out and there was an air raid.

Q: So you were in school from 1937 to '39 and at that time things were quiet. No heightened persecution of Jews to your knowledge in Warsaw.

A: To my knowledge, I didn't know. In school or anything else.

A: And what happened when the outbreak of the war was announced?

A: Announced! Was obvious! When I found out the outbreak of the war, is when we had the air raid! There was an air raid in Warsaw. They bombed Warsaw. That street that we lived on in Warsaw, we lived by a lot of railroad tracks. A lot of 'em. Matter of fact they had a junction. So my father felt that this is going to be bombed first, which it turned out to be true. So we moved in with my aunt, more-or-less in the Jewish ghetto, although there was not a ghetto there, but it's where most of the Jewish people congregated. So we stayed with my aunt.

It was a big complex, an apartment building, that we lived in. So we moved away from there to stay with my aunt, my mother's sister. The first raid, we moved out right away. So for about a week it was quiet. And my father and my mother decided, that we should go back home, that it was too crowded with my aunt and uncle to stay there. So he sent my older sister with her boyfriend and I. Went back to our house to clean it up to get it ready so the whole family can move back. This was in the morning. Around afternoon, there was an air raid again, and my father looked out from the window from my aunt's apartment building, looked in the direction where we lived, and he saw some smoke billowing. So he said to my mother, "Our house, it was bombed there." There were the police guard and everything, but he broke out anyhow, and he ran to the direction to our house to save us, my sister and myself. Mind you, I was only nine years old and my sister at that time was fifteen years old. My father never came back. My father got killed in the air raid. And of course to me and my sister, nothing happened. So at the age of nine I became an orphan. We lost our father on September 14, 1939.

Q: Was the body brought back home?

A: Well, there's a story about this thing, too. He went out, you know, and he didn't come back. so they looked all over for him. Everybody was looking for him. On the second or third day, my grandmother, my father's mother, came to my mother, asked that maybe we should go on the cemetery looking, 'cause the air raid was over. Of course, my mother couldn't come to think that she gonna look for her husband on the cemetery, because this was admitting that he's dead. So my grandmother and his sister went on their own to the Jewish cemetery, and lo

and behold, they found him there. We have no idea where he got killed and how he got killed, what he died of, but his body was clean and everything else.

Q: They had a mass grave, you mean? They had not yet buried?

A: They did not bury him yet, there he was, laying out, waiting for people to come to identify him. So as I said, my grandmother and my aunt, his sister, went to the cemetery, and as I said, they found him in the cemetery. Then they came to my mother and informed her that they found my father. So my mother brought his tallis, and I think two of my sisters, because at the same time, I and my other sister were still looking for him. Hoping. Not knowing. Meanwhile, he was buried in a grave, a mass grave.

Q: Was there any synagogue involvement for the family at that time?

A: No. We went to synagogue on the Holidays. And this was very traumatic for me, because I was nine years old, only, and I heard yelling and crying and screaming, and I couldn't comprehend that I can live without a father. I remember there was another air raid that night, and I can see it right now. And we survived!

Q: How did your mother handle it?

A: (Sigh) I don't know.

Q: Do you remember a lot of outward expression of emotion or was she very silent?

A: There was a lot of crying. But the same year, January 20, 1939 - we had six girls and one boy, seven of us - but on January 20, 1939, our youngest sister, she was five years old at the time, died of kidney infection. So in one year, my mother buried a child of five years old and a husband, from January to September, within one year.

Q: Now was your mother continuing to work at this point? Somebody had to support that family.

A: My mother did not work. My mother never worked.

Q: After your father died, who was supporting the family?

A: You're looking at him! (Laughs)

Q: You were nine! Quite a responsibility for a nine-year-old boy.

A: Well, I had sisters. We were all capable people. We all went out - we recognized the world - so at nine years old, all of a sudden I grew up.

Q: What did you do to put bread on the table?

A: I was stealing and begging and dealing and “hondeling” and we managed. We really were very resourceful children, very aggressive. We moved back after the war, when the Germans entered Warsaw. The war only lasted two weeks. The Polacks, they lost right away. The Germans, in the beginning when they came in, obviously they wanted to put up a good front - that they were good people - and they were passing out bread and soup. And whereas somebody had only one bread, my sister got two, three breads.

Q: Well, there were a lot of mouths to feed!

A: Yes, that’s right. As I said, we were very resourceful. We literally took in a live bomb in our one room apartment, took a live bomb. We lived next to a railroad station, and they bombed that thing, this is after the Germans came in, already. So there were some railroad cars, tankers. There was gas spilling out - gasoline! And we took home gallons and they were put in a big tub. We didn’t have no cars, but we sold the thing. But meanwhile, we had it in the room - open gas! Imagine what would’ve happened? Imagine now people bringing in an open tub, and filling it up with gasoline, and keep it in the room?

Q: I suppose it was the desperation of having to have a source of income.

A: So we did this thing. This is all during ‘39, when the Germans came in there, September, October, November. The railroad tracks were loaded with coal. My sister - Mindel Guttman - jumped on a railroad as it was moving, stealing coal - taking coal off, throwing it on the tracks, and my sisters and I went over and picked it up, and then she jumped off. We got coal to heat, and to sell. All of a sudden, we become very resourceful!

Q: So during times of adversity, one develops qualities one didn’t know you had.

A: Exactly. And this is what I learned later on in my life in kibbutz. That conditions form people. All of a sudden - the same young sister again - everything was heftler; heftler means “free-for-all.” It’s a Hebrew word, really. So one guy was carrying a big sack of 100 pounds of peanuts, in shells. My sister went over to this guy, she grabbed it away from him and said, “Why should you have that thing? Me and my sister don’t have anything!” She took it away! She dragged it home and we had this thing for a long time, sharing. So, yes, we became very resourceful. Then later on, I was dealing with the German there, and we...started being peddlers. The thing I remember selling, I was selling, I was selling cigarettes on the street. Then I was selling candles.

Q: And now these were things that you just picked up?



- A: So we bought the cigarettes wholesale and went out and we're sitting on the street and we'd sell 'em, my sisters and I. We're selling cigarettes and we're selling candles. And we're selling soap. See, my sisters and I, we looked what you call like Aryan, like the Poles. A lot of people could not identify us as being Jewish. This was really probably where we survived, because we had advantage over a lot of other people that they looked obvious Jewish. My sisters and I did not. And of course we spoke the language and a lot of people didn't recognize us. So we'd pretend we were gentiles. We led a double life.
- Q: Had you thought of leaving that neighborhood at that point, once the occupation started and life was so tough? Or was that impossible?
- A: Thought? We were forced to leave that neighborhood. One day, it's early 1940, there was a directive from the Germans that all Jews living in this and this area must leave, just vacate. This was the start, the beginning of forming the ghetto.
- Q: This was the first time that you had direct awareness of what the German occupation meant to the Jews?
- A: Exactly, exactly. This was in early '40s. As I said, there was a directive issued - published - that all Jews living in a certain area must leave. So we left. We packed up our belongings, and we found an apartment in a Jewish area where mostly Jewish concentrated. And there we were. At that time they only had barbed wires, where Jews could live and where Jews could not live.
- Q: Now how much were you aware of at that point? In terms of what was happening in the outside world. Were you listening to the radio? Were you getting reports of the war?
- A: We did not have a radio. Intellectually I didn't have no idea. Mind you, I'm talking about a boy of ten years old. I was not aware of the world, what the world is, what the politics are, nothing. All we knew is that we are Jews and we are treated inferior compared to the gentile people where we lived.
- Q: Were you aware of the formation of any underground movement?
- A: No.
- Q: What happened after that then?
- A: In 1940, things were getting progressively worse and worse and worse. The Jewish people were deprived more and more of things, materials things, food. And we were rationed, you know.
- Q: Your food was rationed.

A: Yeah, food. But, as I said, we were very resourceful. Right away we started “smuggling,” you know, “dealing.” We looked like Aryans, so even though there were some various wire barriers, immediately we started going over on the gentile side - the Christian, the Aryan side, as we would call it - and buying stuff there, bringing it back in ghetto.

Q: Weren't those borders patrolled?

A: They were patrolled, but you'd be surprised what I used to do. Later on I'll tell you some stories that, to this day I don't believe the things that I did! This man sitting now, he is so composed, at the age of ten, eleven...

Q: Tell me.

A: I'll tell you when we get there. We've gotta cover '40, '41 and '42, and all this stuff there. There's a lot of things to tell.

It was getting worse, progressively worse. Even though we were so successful and productive and things, we still were very, very poor. It came to a point that we had to burn the furniture - in late '40 - in order to keep warm. We moved in in a really large apartment. It was on a roof, a large room under the roof, little windows, attic type. A large room we lived in, my sisters and my mother, and another woman lived there, too. There were a lot people burned their furniture in order to keep warm. Little by little, you know, taking it out of the crates. But at the same time there, all of my sisters, one by one, came down with typhoid. My mother was the only person, she didn't get it. And she cared for us. And we all came out okay. But each one of us had typhoid.

Q: And I don't suppose there was any medication available. The body heals itself.

A: I haven't got no knowledge or recollection of ever going to a doctor. But all my five sisters and myself, we all came down with typhoid. And again, the ghetto was progressively worse and worse. Then we abandoned this apartment. In 1941, things were getting worse. Then they started already building the wall. They built a wall. And they built a bridge. They did not have any transportation in the Warsaw ghetto. What I mean, transportation by trains. In Warsaw, a beautiful city, and all their trains, but in the Jewish area, they did not. So they created some horse drawn trams, built special for the Jews. And they were resourceful, the Jewish people, too. They had rickshaws.

Q: They built their own rickshaws?

A: They built their own rickshaws, and that's how their transportation was. So, really surprising, life went on, the police and the people. And as I said, we were going back and forth. We were smuggling. Oh, I have many experiences there. If this should come to a book, should know that they built a wall right in the

middle of nowhere. Evidently the Germans somehow decided, "This is going to be the Jews," and they built a wall right in the middle of the street. On one street that I lived on when I was a young child, Pawa, one half side the street was Christian, and the other side were Jews.

One night I got caught, I could not get through across the border. The border was watched by a Jewish policeman, Polish police, and German soldiers. The German soldiers had weapons. The Polish police had a weapon, too. The Jewish did not have no weapon, only a stick. I used to manage to go through with merchandise, and come back and forth, but this one evening, no way. All the guards were so tough, I just couldn't go through, and I got stuck on the Christian side. And there I didn't have nowhere to stay and no home to sleep with. That night I was smuggling candies - caramel candies - to be sold in the ghetto. And I had those pump pants, like the old time golfers used to wear. And I had 'em full of candies there.

Q: Like knickers?

A: Knickers, yeah. "Pump pants," they used to call it. It was easy to run across when there was a lot of traffic, but the later it got, the traffic slowed down, and it was harder to sneak through. So that one night, I spent in a burned, bombed-out building. A whole night. Stood up in a corner a whole night. At the age of eleven. And none of my sisters were there. I was the only one. Imagine what went through my mother's heart. But next morning I forgot about everything, and I got through. Everything was okay. And we were starting all over again. This went on most of '41. And systematically, the German, without known to us, kept on taking Jews out to Treblinka, to those death camps.

Q: Did you say, "unknown to us?"

A: Unknown to me.

Q: You didn't see it happening to your neighbors.

A: I see it happen, but they had some tricks, and it's known how they did. They promised people, 'cause they were hungry, the promised people they're going to give 'em a pound of jam and a bread, if they're going to come to the station. They're going to relocate 'em. We never fell for it, you know. But at that time, I think, my grandmother died of hunger, in the ghetto, my grandmother on my father's side. And we moved in with my mother's sister, in the same apartment. Her husband left her to go to Russia, but never came back. Evidently he was murdered on the way to Russia by the Poles. And she was left with one little girl, four, five years old. So two families lived in one apartment. But my aunt did volunteer to go to that train where they pass out the jam and bread, and she was never seen since. She was taken away to Treblinka with the child, and my other aunts and uncles and cousins. So we were left alone, my mother and my five

sisters. But during late '41, early '42, two of my sisters went away. They worked on a Polish farm, really a ranch. For a few months they worked there.

Q: These were Poles who wanted labor, so they were willing to take Jewish girls?

A: No, they didn't go there as Jews, they went there as gentiles. And they worked on that farm, which we would call a ranch. Then, sometime early in '42, they came back, to Warsaw ghetto, to see my mother. My mother always stayed in the ghetto. But we kept on going back and forth, dealing. I want you to know here an experience that I had - how I used to smuggle across. See, the ghetto was divided. There was what's known as the "Large Ghetto" and the "Little Ghetto." In order to go from the Large Ghetto to the Little Ghetto, for the Christians, they used a train, a streetcar. So the Polish streetcar went by maybe two blocks in the Jewish ghetto in order to go back for them. So I used to go in, on the Christian side, with merchandise. As the streetcar was going through the two blocks in the Jewish ghetto, I went down that step and I jumped off! And many times my sister - we had some signal - my sister was riding the streetcar, she had a suitcase of merchandise, and as the car went by, I jumped on the streetcar, she handed me a suitcase of merchandise - flour, sugar, different things - and I jumped off. And one time police were chasing me and I disappeared! This is the kind of experiences that we had. Again, you have to realize that I was only 11, 12 years old.

Q: That helped you carry it off, I suppose. A child could get away with things that an older person couldn't.

A: As a matter of fact, one experience I had at the same time, I got caught by a Polish policeman, smuggling - by the way, we called it "smuggling in order to survive" - as a Christian, as a gentile. And they threw me in a prison, in a jail with a bunch of drunks, at maybe 12 years old. And I was only afraid they're going to ask me my address, where I live. Fortunately, after I spent a whole night in the jail, the next morning they let me go.

Q: You didn't have a Jewish accent that gave you away?

A: No, see in Poland, there isn't such a thing as an accent. No, because I was raised among gentile people.

Q: You were bilingual from early childhood.

A: Yeah. Just like a lot of American - well, I shouldn't say a lot. Like my kids don't speak Yiddish. No, we spoke Yiddish and Polish. I can tell you that my mother never spoke Polish. My mother did not know how to speak Polish. My mother never went to school. Neither did my father go to school, because when they grew up, school wasn't compulsory. So they did not speak Polish, but we didn't have no problem with the Polish language. And I had a Polish name, all of us.

Anyhow, towards early '42, things were getting much worse in ghetto. There was less and less and less. And less people. The ghetto was getting smaller and smaller and smaller. One experience that I had, this was when my sisters came back from that ranch. We had some gentile friends of the same age. When I say, "we," I mean my sister Etta and I. So one day we were over on the Christian side, and went into the ghetto to buy some stuff. This was early '42. The Germans happened to block off our area to take all these Jews and send 'em away, so we got caught in this area. When I saw "we," I mean my sister and I and those two gentile friends, a boy and a girl. These two gentile friends knew that we were Jewish! But we'd helped them, we were friends with them, and they didn't harm us. So when the Germans caught us, my sister and I and these two kids, they're going to shoot us! With a gun like this! So the kids start yelling in Polish. They said, "Sir," he said, "We're not Jews! We are not Jews, We're not Jews, we're Christian. We're Christian, we're Poles!" So the soldier said, "Okay, show me!" Meaning to show 'em the genital. So he let down his pants, you know, and he showed 'em. So my sister, she was going to say, "Okay, I'm Christian, too." As I said, I'm not a great believe in the Almighty, especially now I'm less so, from the experience I went through. But at that time, when he came over to me and held the gun and said, "Okay, show me," I showed 'em. Knowing at 12 years old that I'm circumcised, and knowing that the difference that the gentile people are not circumcised and the Jewish people are circumcised, with my finger, I pulled over the skin, I showed it, and he said, "Okay, get the hell out of here!" Evidently it did not show. And we ran so fast!

Q: Well how do you account for that?

A: I'm telling you! He got blind!

Q: He was blind or he chose to let you go?

A: No, he did not choose to let me go. If I would be "Jewish," I would not be sitting here with you and telling this story.

Q: You really feel it that strongly.

A: Oh, 100%!

Q: It has nothing to do with humanity.

A: Absolutely nothing to do with humanity. Blind! Nothing to do with humanity, because their purpose at that time, they were there to kill those Jews that had come up, and to empty that whole block and send them away! No humanity! Absolutely not! He was blind, due to what I did. And this is God's honest truth! At 12 years old I did it. And we just ran so fast! But we were so aggressive, we didn't go on the Polish side, we stayed over and we bought some merchandise.

Q: You never missed a chance!

A: Never missed a chance. But as I said, the ghetto was getting smaller and smaller. We kept squeezing. So one day, we decided to take my mother and my two other sisters. One of my sisters, Masha, was not as aggressive as we were. She looked more Jewish than we did, at least a physical appearance, more Jewish than my other sisters. So therefore she always stayed with my mother. And she was a little handicapped. She had one short foot, she was born like this, so she stayed with my mother. And at that time I had another young sister, Riva - Riva Kabort, she's in this country now - she was at that time maybe nine years old. She, too, stayed. Only two of my sisters and I were really doing all these things. It was only Etta, Mindel and myself that did all the dealing and all the smuggling and all the working. The other ones didn't. Ann didn't, either. And on the last day we decided we're going to leave the ghetto and go to the town where my parents come from, Deblin. So one day earlier, I smuggled my older sister, Ann Ptaszek - that's her married name - I took my older sister over into the gentile side, and I must say it at this time, the place we put her up, with Polish Christians, they knew that we were Jewish. There were some good ones. They knew we were Jewish. Her husband was a policeman, very nervous. He, too, knew we were Jewish. We didn't spend much time, because he got nervous and he told us to leave. I went over the following day, we were going to bring my mother and my other two sisters, Marcia and Riva, over and take a train and go to Deblin, not knowing that this town already was Judenrein. They took all the Jews. Judenrein means "Clear of all the Jews." As I said, our intention was to go to this town where my parents come from, 'cause my parents had their brothers and sisters. Not known to us, there were no Jews, no more. There, too, they were sent away to the death camps. Nevertheless, this morning, we got up, and my mother told us, "Okay, kids, you go ahead." - we knew where we're going, where we're gonna go through to the Aryan side, to the Polish side - "and I'll come along." This was the first time that we took our little sister, Riva, with us. Etta and I and Riva went over, and we were fortunate enough that we just happened to go right through without ever anybody noticing us, or any problem.

I want to digress a minute, because I'm thinking of that place where we went through, which was Leshinal - the spelling is not real important - in Warsaw. Probably late '41, early '42, a German guard that was guarding the gate, from the gentile side to the ghetto, one Jew was walking by, innocent, nothing, no bothering anybody. He called the guy over and said, "Come here." I don't know what he asked him. And he said, "Okay, go." And he went over. Shot 'em just like this. Then I noticed he went over again to make sure that this guy is dead! Went over, shot him in his head! For absolutely no provoke! No reason! And then a cart went by. They threw 'im on the thing, just like merchandise. Something like that. That's what I witnessed from the German, and now they're gonna tell us that this thing didn't happen. They treated them just like mud. A Jewish person walked on the street. Called 'im over. Shot 'im. Shot 'im once. He fell. Went over again. Shot 'im straight in the head. Then they picked 'im up.

Threw him. Discarded. And also, I witnessed a scene. When the German picked up, as I told you earlier, in the Warsaw ghetto, they loaded up a whole bunch of old people, sick people and infirm people from probably old-age homes, put 'em on a cart, went in the cemetery, in the same cemetery, by the way, that my father is buried. I looked out through our window. I saw they lined them all up by this grave with machine guns, and they cut 'em down. They shot 'em.

Q: And you witnessed that, yourself.

A: I witnessed that myself, with mine own eyes, at age eleven. I looked up from the house, I could see it, it was right across from the cemetery. That's a fact. But anyhow, going back to the day when my mother said, "Okay, kids, go ahead. I'll come, I'll follow you." Well she's following to this day. You don't understand that? I'm still waiting for my mother, here in 1984, to follow me. What happened, evidently, we missed by literally minutes, because if we would've been minutes late, if we would've stayed and insisted to go out at the same time as my mother, I wouldn't be sitting here and telling this story. Because evidently, as soon as my sisters and I left the street, Germans came over and blocked the whole street. That's how they did it! They came over, they blocked. They come here, and they come here, and they block off the whole street. Barricades. And they evacuate all the people. Put 'em on trucks. And they brought 'em to Treblinka.

Q: But you didn't know at that point that this was happening.

A: I did not know about it. We were not aware. I did not know about Treblinka or anything else. It's, sure, just after the fact. But literally minutes, maybe seconds, maybe half an hour, but our luck, the reason I'm sitting here and able to tell you that story, is the fact that my sister and I went over earlier. And we're still waiting till this day for her to come, to follow. So this is a story. Just at that time, we lost my mother and one sister. To the best of our knowledge, they were taken to Treblinka - to the death camp. Treblinka is a very well-known Polish place where all the Jews were. At that time, we were left alone. So there were four of my sisters and myself. And we were staying with gentile friends. But it was getting more and more uncomfortable there. Less and less people. Some people already knew that we were Jewish, you know. We had some gentile friends that knew we were Jewish and they were blackmailing us. And it was getting a little harder and harder. And was no reason anymore to stay in the ghetto, because they were liquidating the ghetto. I'm speaking already summer of 1942. So we decided to go on our own to this town, Deblin, where my parents come from - where we had relatives - not knowing there's no one there. But I have to qualify that. So we bought tickets - railroad tickets - and we went on a train and we went to Deblin. When we came to Deblin, my sisters and I - I think it was about 50 miles southwest of Warsaw, 50 kilometer miles - then we found out that most of my relatives and cousins - I had many, many cousins - were already sent away

to the death camps. There was only left three uncles, really. Two uncles were my mother's brothers. One uncle was a brother-in-law to my mother. A week before we came, one of my uncles, my mother's brother, was shot in the same fashion as I've just described that person. They had put the Jews in one corner of the little town. The town was as big as a few streets. He happened to sit outside after the hour - maybe at five o'clock. So a German went by. And whenever somebody's name is Pederson, automatically, I refer to that incident - the name Pederson is, how should I say it - that name brings right away a flash point. As a matter of fact, I just played golf with a fellow named Pederson. The name Pederson is very, very unique to me. Because it flashes back to that incident, although I didn't witness it, but my uncle knew the German's name. He was a Volksdeutch. He was Polish and German. Volksdeutschen. They were just like an American would go to Israel and be an Israeli citizen and also be an American. See, they were always going to be Germans, okay? But they were Poles, also. Volksdeutschen. Poles that claim their ancestors were German. And as soon as the Germans came in, they claimed, "We're German," and they collaborated with the Germans. Anyhow, his name was Pederson. So we were told by my uncle that this Pederson, the German, went by and my uncle was sitting on this step of his house. He came and he just shot 'im. No reason. Of course, we didn't see 'im.

So we were in Deblin. As I said, there were hardly any Jews left. Two of my uncles. There was a large military airport there, which was German. Later on, they formed a camp, a Jewish labor camp, where we were for two years. So they decided to eliminate most of the Jews. Only enough to keep in that camp. So within a week or two, when we came to Deblin, they closed off the town again and chased everybody out. And I got caught in the march, with the whole bunch of Jews, to the train to be sent away to Treblinka. There were Germans marching us, like cattle. My sister Etta, she was walking on the sidewalk as a Christian. In Poland I was named Manjek. I told the Germans there that, "I'm not Jewish! What am I doing here! What do you want from me? I'm gentile! I'm gentile!" I said, "I'm not Jewish. What do you want from me? Please let me go! Please let me go!" Again, this is God's truth, I don't know whoever watches over us - he let me go, and I left with my sister. And those Jews was sent over to that railroad track. And my uncle was working there, too, and he was taken away. That night, I spent the night in a cement mixer. And I sat in that cement mixer a whole night just thinking what's going to happen to me the following morning - that the people were going to come to work, turn on that mixer, and there's gonna be soup out of me. This was at the age of 12. Obviously I didn't give 'em a chance to do that. Early in the morning, as soon as the sun came out, I climbed out of that mixer, went back in that town. See what the Germans also did, when they cleared out the Jews from Hungary or from other cities, they brought 'em to Deblin, also. The following morning, I saw at least 500 Jewish people dead - Hungarian, primarily. I jumped over their corpses, laying out. They were all shot. A minimum of 500 Hungarian Jews. And at that time, Deblin is completely Judenrein. They completely cleared out the city! And whatever



Jews were there, they sent 'em to that labor camp in Deblin. This labor camp was next to a railroad station, on the outskirts of Deblin. Not walking distance, because we marched everyday to work from the airport. There was a military airport. So that night, we smuggled in, forced ourselves in. We bring ourselves to be in this camp. And the reason we were in this camp, my uncle, my mother's younger brother, was there, and one of my cousins. They were already in the camp working there. So this same night, when they liquidated the city of Deblin, they also came to the camp and weeded out some people. At that time I separated myself from my four sisters. I somehow smuggled myself into the camp, before my sister had a chance. The camp was fenced over - barbed wire fence. And barracks, there. Ran into a toilet. There was a public toilet, a long barrack, a toilet. This was daylight yet. And I sat in the toilet while all the people were taken out, weeded out.

And I stood in the toilet and seen a German, marching back and forth, because they had surrounded the camp. Thinking, at all times, ach! If the German would have to go in and relieve himself, and he sees me there? Would have shot me on the spot. So the whole night, all I was seeing is the German coming in and shooting me in the toilet.

Q: But it didn't happen.

A: Obviously, I'm sitting here and I'm telling you this story.

Q: Another stroke of luck!

A: Literally, you know. I'm a believe in shiksal. Don't ask me to spell again. Shiksal in German means "destiny." I firmly believe in destiny. At the same time while I was sitting in that toilet there, waiting till that thing gets over, my sisters - all four of my sisters - were laying in a dumpster, one on top of the other, outside of the camp! And this lasted for quite a few hours till sometime at midnight. After that thing was done, over, I came out to see if the Germans left. I came in the camp. My uncle wasn't there no more. He was taken away. My cousin was taken away. And my sisters climb out of that dumpster and come into the camp. Nobody there! The only person we knew there is my uncle's brother. The brother was not an uncle to me, because there was my mother's brother-in-law. But there was a brother and he really took care of us. And we had my aunt, at that time my aunt. Her husband was taken away and she was let alone there in this camp. Maybe I should clarify how I happened to get in and why we got into the camp!

As I said, earlier, that we came back to Deblin hoping that our family is still there, hoping that town is still there. But when we came back, the facts were that Deblin was made judenrein, meaning they took all the Jews. They cleared out the town of Jews.

Q: And then you explained that there was a work camp on the outskirts of the town.

A: There was a camp on the outskirts of town, while the town was still in effect. There was some labor camp! We knew that my uncle - my mother's younger brother - was in this camp with his wife. When there was no more town, no more houses, no more Jews, we didn't have no place to go but either go to the camp or go someplace else. So we chose, on our own, to go to this labor camp.

Q: My question is, you were quite successful as passing for Aryan. Why did you not choose to mingle in the gentile population? To go to another town?

A: I cannot tell you "why." We didn't sit and figure out, "What should we do now? What should we do then? What will our course of action be?" The most natural thing it was to come - at that time, my uncle was considerable older than us - hoping that he'd be the leader of the family. So it was a labor camp. We didn't give it any thought.

Q: And yet you had full knowledge of what happened to Jews who were together.

A: We did not have full knowledge, no. We did not.

Q: But you had seen so many slaughters of Jews.

A: I wouldn't say actually slaughters. We saw a lot of people going away. Actually killing, I saw two incidents, plus taking the old people. But, no, we did not know. You've gotta bear in mind that I was at that time 12 years old. You've got the mentality of a 12-year-old child. And my oldest sister was at that time maybe 17 years old. So therefore we did not sit and plan strategy. Everything was according to our destiny. This happened to be the destiny. And we did not dwell on it. The most natural thing is to go to unite with my uncle. We went to this camp on our own. And that's how we got in the camp.

So after the Germans left, they took along with 'em a whole bunch of Jews and loaded 'em on trains. My uncle, he had a chance to jump. Some people jumped off the train. They knew where they were gonna be taken. He did not want to jump off the train. We heard that from other people that he said, "I have to go see what happened to our families." He was a hero.

Q: Your uncle was taken from the camp by train, so that was a deportation.

A: Yes.

Q: How did he get out? Just jumped?

A: He did not get out! He didn't come back! He was taken away to Treblinka. We heard that thing from other people, that he had a chance to jump off from the

train. He didn't! Because he wanted to know what happened to our sisters and mothers and everybody else. He did not wanna do it! Deportation! The Jews were deported. That's exactly the word I was looking for before. So we went out, more or less, on our own, voluntarily we went to this camp. Later on we became laborers. I happened to be assigned to what we called a bunker. In order to preserve potatoes for the German army, they dug out some huge holes, with bulldozers. And they put the potatoes in there, layered it with potatoes. Then we put straw and then dirt and then straw and dirt. Then later on, during the winter time, we pulled them out. We sorted them out. The potatoes went for the Germans. This was my assignment. Two of my sisters worked in the greenhouse.

But I want to tell you an incident what I did! What a tough little kid I was in camp! As I said, there was a German military airport. Obviously, the war went on. I don't know whether these planes were shot down or disabled or crashed, but there was a lot of aluminum. Planes were made out of aluminum. And during my free time, while I was in the camp on the airport, I jumped in a plane, stole a big huge pipe, gave the pipe to a sheet metal man, gave him enough material so he can make two or three pots. I got one for free, and the rest of 'em he fixed and sold. That's how resourceful I was. And I also went around picking up cigarette butts, where the Germans were. Selling this tobacco to the people that smoked, we got money and we bought bread. During my breaks, while we were working there, I went to the Germans. Cleaned their houses. Fixed their homes. Polished their shoes. I spoke German, you know. And we survived.

Q: You learned German through these years of traveling.

A: Yeah. And we were resourceful. There were no problems, really. We were not hungry as others, as we found out later on. We had bread and water and soup.

Q: And you knew how to take orders when you had to.

A: Yes. And my little sister in that camp, Riva, she did not work. She stayed in the camp. A little girl. And we brought home the potatoes, we smuggled potatoes and stuff. And she was cooking for us when we came home. We had supper. It was a labor camp - truly a labor camp - but one day, one guy was stealing something and the Germans came to punish. So they called everybody out at night, and they hung two people - right in the middle of the camp. Two young guys were hung. And one incident, also, that happened in the camp, a guy smuggled something in, so they shot him right at the gate! And all those people that came in - from work - to the camp, had to walk over this guy as an example. Shot a man. In this camp we were till June, '44.

Q: Before we leave this camp, I'd like to ask you what were the physical circumstances of this camp - the physical setting. You mentioned that your sister cooked! Did you have a separate area?

A: No. This camp consisted of four barracks. One barrack was just women. The other three barracks were for men. There were bunks. Long bunks, you know. There was no privacy. But, as a child - a child of 12 years old - I spent most of the time in the barracks with the ladies. I slept with the women. Towards the end - I would say sometime late '43, early '44 - I was asked to leave the barracks with the women and I was sent in to sleep with the men.

Q: Were there any non-Jews in the camp?

A: Only Jews. As a matter of fact, this camp, believe it or not, I did not know at the time, but I know now, there were even some children born.

Q: Were there any medical facilities?

A: No, not that I know. There was a public kitchen there, a huge kitchen. And a stove. With everybody who had something to do, they could go and cook, and that's how my sister was.

Q: In some camps, when a woman became pregnant, she was immediately killed. Did that happen there?

A: At the time, I did not know, but afterwards we found out that a Jewish girl was pregnant - fathered by a German soldier. And they had twins! Believe it or not. And he took care of her. We didn't know it at the time. There were some children there, to the age of five, four, three. And as we go on, I'll tell you an incident what happened as we came to the new camp. So there were some children in this camp. It was really truly a labor camp, you know. And, as I said, it was relatively isolated. We didn't have no contact with the world at all. Certainly I didn't. Maybe other people had some access to other things, but as far as I was concerned, we were the only Jews left in this world. So, we worked, every day. We were going to work in the morning, come back at night, and sitting around. And that's all. There was nothing else to do. And this was till '44. As the Russians started the second front, and they started advancing, the Germans decided to liquidate, to keep moving on. Maybe there were about 600 people in this camp all together. There weren't many. It was a relatively small camp. And they loaded us on the railroad cars with open doors. We were not cooped up, but nevertheless, we were just like cattle. With guards sitting there. And we stopped on the way. The next camp was the town Czestochowa. This was a holy town. Matter of fact, the Pope - Pope John the II? - he was just there. So we were brought to this camp. We found out also, in this particular town, there were three other camps. As we were unloaded, they took everything away from us! And as I told you earlier, in the Deblin camp, the labor camp, there were some children the age of three and four. So there were a total of 15 children among the 600 people. When we came to this camp in Czestochowa, we were lined up. I was lucky, you know. I was sent right into the camp, among

the laborers. Whether I was big enough or small enough, I don't know. I was fortunate.

My sister, Riva, at that time she was 11 or 12 years old. She happened to hold a baby - somebody else's child - in her hand. Wasn't hers. She was ordered to drop this child! To give it away! She was sent into the camp with the laborers - even though children children of her age were taken away the same day and killed. So 15 children that survived Deblin, when we came to Czestochowa, were all killed. My sister Riva's luck was the fact that she held the child, somebody else's child, that's why she survived.

In this camp we worked. Again, there was a converted stable, a barn. Bunks, four stories high, and there were 600 of us in there where we slept. We lived there in this camp for six months. I happened to work nights. We produced in this camp bullets for the German army. Not the shell, but the bullet part, the thing that kills. The department that I worked, we were washing the bullets. And my sisters working in a different department. And my younger sister, Riva, that she never worked in the other camp, in this camp she was walking around the floors and picking up all the scrap and all the metals. The reason we stayed there for six months, 'cause the Russians decided to stay at the Vissla River in Poland.

When they opened up the front, January of 1945, the Russians kept on advancing. But before I say this thing, I should tell you a week earlier, before January 17, 1945, what the Germans did. They called everybody out in the big yard, and they said, "You, you, you, you, you, you..." Loaded 'em up. Took 'em farther away to Germany. I was fortunate. They didn't take me. On Tuesday, January 16, they called us out again, another group. They said, "You, you, you, you, you...you're going!" And they marched us into a huge warehouse waiting to be loaded on the train. This was Tuesday, January - and I tell you why I remember it - January 16. They put us in a huge warehouse.

I did not know what happened to my sisters then. We were very fortunate, all the time I spent with my sisters, but I didn't know whether they were taken out or not, because they took the men separate and the women separate. At this time I want to tell you what heroic sister that I had, my sister Ann. If they were going to be publicized, she should get the credit for it. Now remember, I had four sisters. My younger sister at that time was 12 years old. My oldest sister at that time was already 20. So when they lined up the girls to be taken away to Germany further - because the Germans kept on taking Jews further into Germany, for laborers - so when they called out my little sister's name, my oldest sister stepped forward - because she know that the Russians were coming. She stepped forward, her and my other sister, and we all were in this barrack. And my younger sister, which she should have been there, was left in the camp. If the Germans would be lucky, if their luck wouldn't've run out, chances are we

would be more in Germany, and my little sister would've survived because my older sister stepped forward instead of her.

The warehouse was cement. I said, "Kids, we not going. We're going to be liberated here. Here we're going to be liberated." All of a sudden I became political, already! Saw airplanes flying and bombarding and everything, so I was going to dig out a huge hole there from this cement and hide ourselves, so we'd survive. We knew the liberation was coming at that time. But as it turned out, I didn't have to. A few hours went by and the Germans didn't come in, didn't come into this warehouse and scare us like they did all the time. The railroad car was already waiting for us to be loaded. "Cause there was a factory, they had some tracks. So hours went by. No soldier. No nothing. Then later on towards the evening, was getting dark already, one German, what the called the master - the foreman - came in and said, "Okay, go back in camp." They still stood with guns, but, "You can go back in the camp." And within an hour or two, they ran away, the Germans. Because they did not have time to take us away, on 17th, Wednesday, we were liberated by the Russians.

Now, we start a whole new "meisse." The night that we were liberated. Out of anger, we went into the headquarters of the German leader and we burned his house. I got his hat, but later on somebody took it away from me, too. We raided a warehouse. I brought two cans of honey, and I saw somebody carrying two bread, and I went and I told 'em, "Why should you have two breads and my sisters don't have nothing!" I stole away from him. This was in the night of the camp. This was Wednesday the 17th. There was a very stupid part, on our part, to do what we did, but as it turned out, it turned out to be okay.

Early in the morning we saw the Germans were in there. My sister and I and her boyfriend, we took a bike - he had a bike - we loaded up with some food or something. I gave a can of honey to my other sisters. And I left three sisters behind in camp after the liberation. Started marching again, further to Poland, back to that town Deblin. By foot!

Q: You wanted to know if there was anybody left! Why did you do that?

A: Instinct. Going back. Run away from the front farther into Poland. Maybe he knew more that the Poland is liberated already. Of course, I did not know. I was 14 years old at the time.

Q: Well, what about the Russians who liberated you? Did they give you nothing?

A: I did not see a Russian when they liberated us. When dawn broke we ran out - I ran out - from the camp. I did not see a Russian liberator actually in the camp. But later on we saw Russian, as we were going deeper.

Q: So you really weren't certain of what Russian rule would be like at any rate.

A: No.

Q: Whether or not you wanted to be associated with the Russians.

AP: No, we did not know. I stayed with the Russians only for six months in Poland. Maybe should be enough now. We start with, from this point, we continue some other time because now is a new chapter.

Just the experience, the experience of my sister and I and her boyfriend when we left the camp. As I said, our first impulse was to run away from the camp, run deep into Poland. Why, don't ask me, I have no knowledge. But I should go back one minute further, the resourcefulness on my part. (Laughs) What I did prior to liberation. We had again, a public toilet. For the public in the camp while the Germans were there. And I felt, you know, that the Russians were coming and the Russians going to liberate us, and it's the end of the Germans. So the way the toilet was built, there was a big huge boxes. I was going to go into the toilet - not in the toilet, in the building. In the toilet where, actually, the toilet goes down. Hide myself inside. And I was gonna take another guy into it to do the same thing, too. I felt that we were going to be liberated.

But now going back that morning when we left the camp with the bike. As we were walking, walking, deeper and deeper, we saw an awful lot of Germans already killed. We walked through a forest where we saw a German burned. Tanks were running over them.

Q: Germans were burned, you said.

A: They were burning. Evidently there was a front there. The German soldiers were burning. Probably from the tanks or something.

Q: They were burning? Or they were burning the countryside?

A: Burning. They were burning. They were burnt bodies - burning.

Q: So they had been attacked.

A: They had been attacked. Soldiers, soldiers. And we saw some German soldiers fleeing out with a tank. But I have to tell you, at this time I experienced, maybe the second or third day as we were walking - we were walking all the time towards the town of Deblin - we had an experience that my sister almost got killed by a Russian. Not because of Jewish, because of the drunken Russian thinking that she was a young lady - a very attractive girl. And he cased her with a gun in his hand. Maybe he was drunk. Fortunately, she ran into a farm, and she hid, and survived. She could've got killed, not because we were Jews, because of some drunken soldier.

You know, all the experiences we were going through is as though somebody was watching over us.

A Russian truck gave us a ride. We hitchhiked, so he picked us up, my sister, her boyfriend, and myself. It was an enclosed truck, and there was a big, huge oven in there, too. So with the bike we sit in this truck and we were going. There were some antitank holes, ditches. You've got any idea what they are? They're real big, huge holes where the tank falls in. Would you believe it that our truck fell into this ditch? And we climbed out. Nothing happened to us. That oven that was in there could've crushed us to pieces! So we climbed out and we continued going on foot. And we slept in the Polish farms. One night my sister had a terrible scare. I happen to have a tendency to speak in my sleep and dream a lot. So we spent the night there in a Polish people's farm and we were very careful not to tell them that we're Jews. We still were afraid. Sure enough, I spoke at night Jewish! And evidently that Polish farmer heard me speak a foreign language. So in the morning the gentile woman says to my sister, "What did your brother speak? We heard him speak something, but it wasn't Polish." So we said, "It wasn't - he spoke German, because you know we were in German concentration camps and he learned the language and he spoke German." And they served breakfast, and we were on our way.

We came in a town - a larger town in Poland - at the railroad station. And there we congregated among Jewish people. We kind of had a feeling of intuition that the other person might be Jewish, also. So we had a signal among ourselves, among Jewish people, how to identify whether another person is also Jewish or not. The signal - the password, I should say - was "am cho." Every Jewish person knew what "am cho" means. "Am cho" is a Hebrew word, which means "our nation." So we'd ask "am cho?" and if he said, "yes," we knew he was Jewish. So sure enough, in that railroad station, we came across some people, and we said, "Am cho?" They said, "Yes." And then we got to talking and we found that they're Jewish. But they were liberated six months prior to us. And as it turned out, they knew my mother's cousin. We found out that my mother's cousin lives in Lublin, and we took the train there, my sister, her boyfriend and myself, to the city of Lublin. Lublin was liberated six months prior to us. When we came there, I went up to my cousin's house. His wife's nephew was in an orphanage home in Lublin, and he suggested to me that I should be admitted to that orphanage home. And sure enough, I went out with that other boy - this was in January of 1945, in Poland - and I was admitted to that orphanage home.

My sister found an apartment. There was a house there, refugees, the people that just came out from concentration camp. Not known to us, my other three sisters left on their own also, with the same intention, coming back to the city of Deblin, where my parents come from. They also walked. On the way there was an air raid by the Russians. They were not quite sure whether we were liberated or not. And bombs fell and my sister, my older sister, was wounded. Shrapnel



hit her in the head and on the back, and one young lady was killed right next to her. And of course they went on and they ended up going to the town of Deblin without them knowing that we were already in the town of Lublin. But after a while we all got together again, all my three sisters came to Lublin. Two of my sisters came also and joined me in that orphanage home. My older sister went to the building where they housed all the Jewish adults. In the orphanage home we were there for six months.

At the time I did not know but the woman in charge of the orphanage home which she was a Jewish person but it turned out she was a Communist. So the intention of the home was maybe obviously to make us Communist Jewish youth. The Russian scouts, you see some of them with the red shirts and ties. Anyhow, while we were there we were fed, we got new clothes and we start to learn, but we really didn't spend too much time.

There were some other children that are survivors. I think there were at least 30 or 40 children at that orphanage home. I found out that some children of the orphanage home meeting secretly someplace, some older children. And I was curious to know where. As I said they were meeting secretly in somebody's house. So one day a friend of mine and myself followed these two people from the orphanage home where they're going and we followed them through streets back and forth. Finally we confronted them and found out they were meeting secretly through a Zionist organization. The Zionist organization tried to recruit children to come, recruit them to go to Israel. We confronted them and they didn't have no choice but to take us in. We were very happy they took us in. At that time they inspired us, indoctrinated us. Our goal - as a matter of fact, I would venture to say that at this time even I didn't know then 99.9 percent of all the survivors that survived the concentration camps, their goal was to go to Israel. And when I found this thing out, that there was a secret organization, that they organized children and wanted to bring them to Israel, I joined the group.

After a while they organized us and took a group of people, and from there we went to Germany but it was a really long process. It took a really long time. We went from one town to a city, to another city, to another city. As a matter of fact we got all a whole bunch of youths and adults also from Poland, survivors from concentration camps, and they put us up in railroad cars - not passenger cars - but regular railroad cars that were open. We were supposed to cross the Polish border going into Czechoslovakia. From Czechoslovakia we went into Germany but on the border of Poland and Czechoslovakia our train was stopped. They told us to say, if the Russians would come in and ask us to say who we were, we were supposed to say that we were Greek Jews, liberated from concentration camps and going back to Greece. At that time I didn't know how to speak Hebrew so we spoke some words from the prayers to confuse them.

But we had a very, very dramatic experience ... when I say we, I mean my sisters and I ... two of my sisters who were in the orphanage home and myself, Etta and Riva, so when we were stopped we always feared when the Germans, we didn't know what they were going to do with us. So we ran away from the train. And they chased us, and they caught us. Again they put us in police station and they questioned us. It was a really very very dramatic experience - one of the experiences I'll always remember the rest of my life.

They asked us in Czech, "vodkady," which means where are you from. In Polish, vodka which is a drink so I said at that time, everytime I have the opportunity I say this joke about it, I said, "Sir, we don't have any vodka!" He wanted to know where we are from.

We were let go and we went back to Prague, the main city in Czechoslovakia. From there we got organized again, we were regrouped again, ...

Q: Do you know the name of the organization?

A: It was a Zionist organization.

Q: Was it one of the international Zionist organizations?

A: It was a Zionist organization. I think we spent about two, three days in Prague, Czechoslovakia. We were regrouped again, and this time with trains we went to Germany. In Germany we came into a camp, Landsberg. We spent in this camp only about, maybe two, three days. Out of the whole groups they took about 20 children age 12 to 18. And they sent us to a sanatorium in Germany to get well. In that sanatorium we were for a few months. We were under the auspices of a Zionist organization, what party, we don't know, but it was a Jewish Zionist organization with the intent to send us to Israel. Then the same group was sent to a town in Germany by the name of Feldafing. And there we were organized as a kibbutz, and we were taught Hebrew and Zionistic ideas, and writing and reading. Our goal was to go to Israel - two of my sisters and myself.

My other two sisters, meanwhile, married and they had husbands.

Q: Were you able to get any information about any other surviving members of your family?

A: Others, no. I'm glad you asked that thing, because most in our minds, we always were hoping that we're going to see my mother survive, or my sister survive, or my cousin survive, or uncle survive. So whenever the survivors got together, "Did you know of him? Did you know of him? Did you know him?" Our hope was always there. As a matter of fact, while you ask this thing, till this very day, although I know it's never going to happen, whenever we travel to Israel, I always hope that we're going to see a face that we're going to recognize as from my

relatives - this this very day! I have it always in the back of my mind, knowing that it's never going to happen.

And I have another experience of mine in Israel, as an Israeli soldier in Haifa.

Anyhow, we were in this camp for a while in Feldafing, in that kibbutz environment, and our goal was to go to Israel. I was very dedicated! I wanted to go to Israel. They selected a group of people from this larger group, a small group of 10 to 15 people - the most able ones, the most adult ones and the older ones, and they were sent away to Israel - illegally. And I couldn't wait, so I left this camp, and I went to live with my sister in a suburb of Munich. And I went to school there, started school, at the age of 15, 16, already. In April, '46, evidently the Jewish Sochnut, which was a Jewish organization that would send Jews to Israel, the British government allowed a thousand surviving children from the concentration camps to go to Israel. And I was so happy. I was so thrilled, you know. And I came home to my sister's and told her, "Guess what! You're going to find me," - and there's the joke on me to this very day - "I'm going to Israel and you're going to find me there with a shovel on my shoulder and building Israel!" So this was at the age of 16. And my brother-in-law always reminds me of that thing. And I left my four sisters without any fear at the age of 16. Went to Israel on my own. And they were left behind. But we knew, I knew, they knew, that their intention then was all of us, we're going to go to Israel.

So on April 9, I left Munich via train to Marseille, France. There they were gathered, the whole 1,000 children were gathered there. From there we boarded a ship, Champaleau, and we sailed for Israel. You heard of Mufti? Grand Mufti of Jerusalem? Grand Mufti of Jerusalem was on the same ship that we were on. And we stopped in Tunis, at which he got off. And then we stopped in Alexandria. Then the next stop was Haifa. And on April 27, 1946, we arrived in Israel, Haifa - legally. I was fortunate to enter legally with the blessing of the British government. Then we were brought into Camp Atlit, which is very known in Israel. And we didn't have no choice where we're gonna go. Everything was assigned for us. I didn't know what party I belonged to or which party I had to choose from. So out of the group of children, they took 15 children and they assigned us to the kibbutz by the name of Kfar Menachem. As it turned out, this Kfar Menachem, the kibbutz, was in the south of Israel. And the kibbutz happened to be a Hashomer Hatzair, a left-wing-oriented kibbutz.

We came there. We were the first 15 children, known as Youth Aliyah. And we were assigned teachers. Then about two weeks later or so, another group of children joined us, and we were a total of 30 children - boys and girls. A half a day we went to school and a half a day we worked. We had our choice of what kind of work, what kind of occupation we wanted. Obviously everything is related in the kibbutz, because a kibbutz is self-sustaining. Work on a farm, construction, in the barn, in field, tractors. I chose to be a builder, because I

wanted the feeling that I build with my toil and my sweat - to build a country. So I chose to be working in construction.

So half a day I work in construction and half a day we learned in school. So really, my formal education that I got, in Israel, was a course of two years, and I consider that the equivalent of a high school education. This was my formal education, because in Poland I had only a chance to go through the third grade, and from '39 to '46 I hardly went to school.

So this is the experience we had in Israel. In 1947, I joined the Haganah at the age of 17. This, too, was a very dramatic day in my life. I remember vividly that one early morning, in the kibbutz, secretly from the British, because the British were still in Israel, we were training to be paramilitary people, with old rifles. But finally we graduated to the point that we could be allowed to join, officially, the Haganah.

And one early morning - real early morning - we got up, and we drove to another kibbutz - Kibbutz Nekbah. It was further south from my kibbutz. We spent the night there. The following morning, as soon as the sun rose, we lined up in front of rifles and we give the oath, to be a member of the Haganah. it was a very proud moment in my life, knowing that we put our life on the line for israel.

We spent another year in that kibbutz. By that time we were 18 years old already, and it was 1948. And in 1948, you know, they were talking about the independence of Israel. So there were 30 children. Ten of us volunteered to go into the service. Twenty from this same children went and start a kibbutz on their own. But I was among the 10 that volunteered to go into the Israeli navy. At the time, they didn't have a navy yet, but the group that I belonged to was the nucleus of the Israeli navy, and I served in the Israeli navy till 1950. (Shows photo.) I don't know if this is of any interest. This was just two years ago, we were in Israel.

Q: Well, after having been a displaced person for so many years - for most of your life - how did it feel being in Israel, a country where people had a language and a culture in common?

A: Very much proud! As a matter of fact, one day when we had to go out to battle - I'm talking about during the '48 war, I was in the War of Independence - and before you'd go out to battle, they'd ask you something, "In the event that you get killed, who should we notify?" And I didn't have nobody in Israel. I said, "I haven't got anybody." In the Haganah, with absolutely no fear, no fear to put my life on the line for the State of Israel, so I felt very good, very proud. And I was real sad to find out that my sisters came to the United States, instead of to Israel - not because they wanted to come to the United States, they were very apologetic to me and asked for my forgiveness why they came here, not because they wanted to come to the United States, they were not allowed, they couldn't

have the opportunity to come to Israel (Palestine), because of the British. So it was a really sad moment, you know. We very much looked forward to all my sisters to come to Israel and settle in Israel and have a home of our own.

Q: I see. The reunion was delayed. But there must have been a strong sense of community in Israel in those early days.

A: Very much so. Very much so. I really loved, and I was a very dedicated member of the kibbutz. I was not a materialistic person, although you cannot tell it by now. A very dedicated member of the kibbutz and of Israel. Worked hard. My goal was to build Israel and for Israel to prosper. But things didn't quite work out, the way we wanted to.

Q: What happened?

A: As I said, I was in the navy, participated in the War of Liberation. And after the war, I went back to the kibbutz that that original group formed. Remember now that we were 10 of us joined the service and 20 of them were left to go form a kibbutz of our own. And I was assigned to this kibbutz in the Galil, northern Israel. And our kibbutz was supposed to be a fishermen's, cause some of us were in the navy, we so were supposed to be fishermen. I looked forward to go be a member to the kibbutz, go back to the kibbutz. And I was there for a few months. Meanwhile, in '49 my sister immigrated to Israel with her husband and three children. I asked the kibbutz to give me a leave of absence so I can go, having a close bond to my sisters - all during the concentration camp, and through home, we were a very close family - and with that close bond, I asked the the kibbutz to give me a leave of absence so I can go and help out my sister. Well, they refused. The committee on the kibbutz refused to give me that permission! So I felt the love and dedication, the devotion to my sister, was obviously greater than the commitment to the kibbutz then, and I quit the kibbutz. I went with my sister, and moved in with her. We had a one room apartment on a roof in Yaffo, the Arab city of Yaffo. And I went to work - construction - again. And I helped out my sister, I gave her all the money, and made sure that she's comfortable. But my sister, it turned out, didn't stay. She could not adapt herself to the climate and to the economy of Israel. And these were awful bad times. So in 1950, they decided to leave Israel, and they went back via Italy to Germany. They went back to Germany with the three children. I stayed in Israel. I did not return to the kibbutz anymore. I went on my own. I worked in construction.

Meanwhile, I was left alone in Israel. Two of my younger sisters - the two sisters that were with me in the orphanage home and in the kibbutz - immigrated to the United States. And in '49, a third sister that was in Germany, also immigrated to the United States. And they settled in Minneapolis. The older sister was married, she had a child, she came in '49. The first two sisters, they came in 1947, also in April. So there were no more hopes that they're going to come to Israel. And my fourth sister, who was in Israel and went back to Germany with

the intention, also probably, would go back to the United States. I found myself alone. All those years, hard years, during the concentration camp, during the ghetto, we were always together, and here I was, all alone there, and my sisters were here. So my sisters started to make arrangements to bring me across, bring me to the United States. It was very difficult to do it. Very difficult. We found out, In Israel, which has always combinations to do things, that there's some people, they were what you call "machers," which means "arrangers" - that there's a way of leaving. Israel was not against letting people out. But in order to leave Israel, you had to have a visa - where to go. So we found somebody that makes some of those arrangements, that for \$400 he can arrange some papers for me to come to Canada. This was in 1951. And I didn't have that kind of money. So I wrote to my sisters in the United States - three of my sisters. There was always the thought of people in the Diaspora that the Jews in America - everybody's a rich person. I thought my sisters are very rich! Little did I know that they were very poor, they worked very hard for their money. And as a matter of fact I found out later on, that the \$400 I'd asked to send for me, they had to go borrow it.

But you know, our love and our closeness among ourselves were so close, they did. They borrowed the \$400, and they sent the money away to a person in Canada without knowing who they are or anything - I sent 'em the address - and they sent me some piece of paper, and through that I had a visa to go to Canada. So another fellow and myself got those papers and we came to Paris. We found out they were all false! They were all false papers! So the \$400, in effect, was wasted money. We came into the Canadian embassy. "We don't know you. We don't know."

So we found ourselves stranded in Paris without knowing the language, without money, without being able to go to work - anything. We were there for about six weeks in Paris. Meanwhile I saw Paris (laughs) - as a poor boy. I knew that one of my sisters - the same sister that was in Israel - went to Germany, Munich. From Paris, we couldn't've asked to come to Germany, because they wouldn't let us in. So we went up to the Austrian ambassador in Paris, telling him that we want to go to visit our graves in Austria of our relatives. So they gave us a visa - a stamp. We took the train in Paris to go to Austria, but in order to go to Austria, you had to go through Germany. So here we went on the train, our passport was fine, we had a visa to go into Austria. But while the train stopped in Munich, we just forgot about going to Austria! In Munich we got off the train and we came into this camp, it still was a D.P. camp, in Farenwald. So we got off the train there, and we came into that camp. My sister and my brother-in-law with his children were there, and we got in there. This was March, April of 1952. And there, too, I was very resourceful. I wanted to learn a trade, so I joined the ORT organization in this camp. There was a lot of youth there. There were about 600, maybe 1,000 displaced persons yet in that camp. And everybody was waiting, not any more to go to Israel, but to go to America, Canada, South America. And I joined the ORT school, to learn a trade. As a matter of fact, I

have a diploma - I was a tool and die maker. But I didn't stay there too long. There was some opportunity there to earn money by being a furrier, doing some furs, so I went to work for a fellow. And within a month or two, I went out on my own and I had my own company. And I had two, three people working for me, and I did well there. I really did. But our goal was to go at time, already, to America. And my sisters here tried everything. As a matter of fact, that got the auspices of Senator Humphrey to help. And I came to this country on a preference visa. You know, to "unite the families."

Q: And so you came to Minnesota at that point.

A: Correct. So I'm getting there! On February 3, 1955, I was granted a visa to come to the United States. This was my first time I flew, from Germany to New York. And from New York I took a train and came to Minnesota. And that's how I got here. But my sister with her husband, still remained in this camp there. But two days before our wedding, my sister and her children joined us. So we were all united - except her husband. Her husband remained yet in Germany, but within six weeks to two months he joined us here and we were all united again. All of us.

Q: So you met your wife in Minneapolis.

A: I met my wife in Minneapolis, yeah.

Q: As you look back on that experience, what does it mean to you to be a survivor?

A: What does it mean to me to be a survivor? I never look at it in this way - what it means to me to be a survivor. The unfortunate part was the fact that we were born Jewish, and just because we were born Jewish, there was a Hitler that persecuted us. But I never look at what it means to me, you know. We had to survive. It was not the survival of the fittest. I'm sure there were a lot of other people as smart and as strong as I was or my sisters were. I mentioned it earlier in the interview that I definitely am a believer in "destiny." I had so many cousins - literally 20 to 30 cousins. I had aunts and uncles. They were as smart as I am, as old as I am, I'm sure as strong as I was. They did not survive. Why I survived, I don't know. I don't know.

Q: Now your early upbringing was as an Orthodox Jew. Have you returned to Orthodox belief? Or to traditional Judaism?

A: I never considered myself an Orthodox Jew. I never said that we were brought up Orthodox Jews. The Jewish people in Poland where I grew up, everybody was Jewish! We did not know to eat "hazer" or to work on the holidays. As I see it now, our home was a "traditional" home. If they would be here today, it would be considered a Conservative home. We were very traditional, observant Jews.

As I said, I never wore payus, that the Orthodox Jewish children wear. I never wore a yarmulke at home. I went without a hat. As I mentioned earlier in the interview, my father didn't wear a hat. The only time he wore a hat, when he sat down to eat, and of course when he walked out. So we were not considered Orthodox. And I'm sorry to say - I'm not sorry to say, I should say - I never would consider myself religious, because I always questioned: Where was God. When I saw really pious, religious Jews, rabbis, observant, how they were humiliated by the Germans, then I questioned: Where was God?

However, I'm a firm believer in the Jewish people, the Jewish nation, the survival of the Jewish people. That's why I have a very tough time about intermarriage. I do not accept intermarriage. I do not accept conversion. There isn't such a thing. And I have a great conflict with myself with these things. I don't accept them. Although the rabbis disagree with me, I don't accept conversion. I consider myself very nationalistic.

Now, people may ask, they say, "What are you doing here? You were such a big hero. Why are you not there?" Many times I have an inner guilt feeling why I am in the United States. I really should be in Israel. I really never, never, am 100% here. I wish the destiny would've been that my sisters would've followed me. And we all would be in Israel, because for generations - for 2,000 years - the Jewish people dreamed and hoped to have a land. Now they have this land, and they don't go, and I'm sitting here. I'm a paradox. I really feel about that.

Q: You said, "My sitting here is a paradox."

A: Yeah. That's right. I really have a conflict with myself. So I try to make it up with money, but it's just not enough. They really want the people there.

Q: So after what you went through at the hands of the Germans and the Poles, I suppose you ended up with a pretty negative view of human nature?

A: Very negative. Now let me tell you something, and it should be published. They should know it: that the Poles - the majority of the Poles - did just as much damage to the Jews as the Germans themselves. I'm glad you brought this thing up. Many Jews, many thousands of Jews, were killed, murdered, by the Poles after the war - after we were liberated. It was natural among people - my sister experienced it, too - it was natural among people to come to small towns to see if anybody survived. And when the Poles found out that "Yunkesmiehl" is in town, they came and they murdered them. They killed them! My sister, a friend of hers went to the town, and they killed her father. We were fortunate. That's what I say, that "destiny." I don't know how we survived. And as far as the Germans, I could never, never, never forgive the Germans. Never till the day I die! But they say that we shouldn't be filled with hatred for this generation. It's not their fault, this generation. I personally can never, ever, ever forgive the



German people for what they done to us. 'Cause just because we happened to be Jewish, there was a Hitler. So I'm very negative.

Q: So as far as your connection with Judaism now, do you consider yourself an observant Jew? I know you have a strong connection with the synagogue and with Jewish organizations, but it's still a "cultural" connection with Judaism, isn't it, rather than a belief in a Supreme Being?

A: Yes, correct. We are not observant Jews. But I believe in the Jewish people, culturally, I like the Jewish history, I speak the language - Hebrew, I understand of what we daven. But even though I go to synagogue and sit and pray and know that I'm davening in, deep in my heart I do not believe in a ...

Q: In a Supreme Being.

A: I do not believe it. Sometime I question it, how it happened? I don't know, but I don't believe. No, no. It is a conflict, because had there been one, He could not - a rabbi would say here, could tell you a million stories and excuses why it happened - but He could not permit this thing to happen. He should not.

Q: As your children were growing up, did you share these memories with them?

A: No, and I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I didn't. Not that I didn't because I didn't want it. Unfortunately, they didn't have the patience, you know, to sit down and hear me out.

Q: So in a way, they've been free to form their own conclusions about the world around them.

A: Yes, that's right. And it's sad, it really is sad, you know. I wish they would take the time. And I wish they would sit down with me and say, "Dad" ...My children are old enough. And I think I've failed in that sense. You cannot impose on anybody, because to come and sit down and listen, you've got to be interested in it. I wish they would solicit me telling, and say, "Dad, please tell me what you went through." And I'm comfortable to tell the thing. For that same reason, to remember them. But unfortunately, I'm sure many children, most of the children from the survivors...

Q: I think they have a hard enough time coping with their own lives to know the truth about this particular episode in history. It's something they'd rather deny.

A: They shouldn't. They shouldn't. Out of curiosity themselves, from an intellectual point of view. Here they have a source - ready source - to listen, to hear. And no way to pass it on. Well, our kids do know that I'm a survivor, that their aunts are survivors. And what my wife mentioned yesterday, what we have instituted, quite a few years already, we started small, but now, every year, on January 17,

our family gathers together. And when I say, "our family" it's my four sisters and myself, and we have since then grew to 55 of us - very close - brothers-in-law, sister-in-law, children - and dead children, already. So, despite what Hitler wanted to do, we survived. And now from the five, there's already 55 of us, and hopefully even more. And every time when we gather, we speak about our experiences. And we tell this story, what happened.

Q: So your children have absorbed something from this.

A: We maintain, and hopefully some day when they're maybe a little older, they'll find the time and sit down and listen to us.

Q: Well, I thank you for a very interesting story. You were telling me about your pledge of a large sum of money to the Technion in Israel.

A: I have defected, I came to this country. This country was very nice to me, very good to me. In some way I'd like to pay it back. And I recently pledged \$100,000 to the Technion of Haifa. Why the Technion of Haifa? Because I felt education is a very important thing - for humanity, the people. The fact that I was denied education, I want to make sure that some needy person shouldn't be denied that education. And if I can't do that thing, I at least do it with money. I'm a success in this country, I'm very thankful, and I pay it back.

And speaking of paying back, it just occurred to me, most of the people that came to the United States were helped by the HIAS. You know what HIAS is. To the best of my knowledge, I was the only person here among the newcomers, what we call the newcomers - the émigrés to the United States, the survivors - I'm the only person that had paid back - was asked and paid back the cost, or fee, to bring me here.

At the time when I was earning only \$2.00 an hour, I received a letter from the HIAS organization: "Dear Mr. Mandel: We understand that you're working now. We would very much appreciate the fact that if you can pay us back so we can help other people..." And it was a very legitimate request. And I paid back my share to the HIAS - even then. Quite a few years ago. And I also paid back my sisters for that \$400 that they sent.

Q: You certainly don't take your survival for granted.

A: I don't take my survival for granted, no. Having a good living, my goal in life is to make so much money, to be very philanthropic, to build an orphanage home in Israel. But right now, meanwhile, we are already supporting one, I think. The Shaliach - this means an emissary from Israel - was in the JCC, and we got to know 'em, and I told him also, a lot of people I tell my goal in life, what I like to do, and he said, "I have an excellent idea for you. Now in this Kibbutz Sasa in Galil, is what you call Pinot Anne Frank - Anne Frank Haven, they named it - and

a lot of deprived children, children from broken homes, go there, and as an orphanage home, and they offer them an education.” And we send money to that school, too.