

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

William Helmreich Oral History Collection

**Interview with Jerry Cooper
May 16, 1989
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Jerry Cooper, conducted by William Helmreich on May 16, 1989 as research for his book *Against all odds: Holocaust survivors and the successful lives they made in America*. The interview was given to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on Oct. 30, 1992 and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

JERRY COOPER

May 16, 1989

WH: You were born in which shtetl?

JC: ...a little town not far from Radom...

WH: ...did you have brothers and sisters?

JC: I have six brothers and one sister...I was the one before the younger.

WH: You were the second youngest of the brothers?

JC: Yah...

WH: How many of them survived the war?

JC: Nobody.

WH: You're the only one of six brothers and-

JC: ...on both sides, nobody, not a cousin, nobody, nobody.

WH: ...and your parents didn't make?

JC: No...

WH: Where were you during the war?

JC: Poland. I survived in Poland.

WH: How did you survive? Were you in camps, were you in hiding?

JC: I was in a camp...one year. I was among goy it was at the end already.

WH: When were you born, what year?

JC: 1920.

WH: That means you're...69...

JC: ...we were poor people...

WH: ...could you spell the name of the town that you lived in?

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JC: Skaryzow...

WH: Did you think, since you read it (Mein Kampf) before, and you knew about Dachau, did you think at any time of escaping into Russia?

JC: Escaping into Russia? I didn't know about Russia. I didn't know about Russia. Russia was far away from us.

WH: And no one thought about going to Eretz Yisrael?

JC: I was younger, but (inaudible)...besides, how can you--where you gonna go. You gonna leave your momma here, you know what I'm talking about, there's a certain-hard to describe it to you the situation. I was still in the world, in the Hasidische world...I was isolated...you know, you adapt. What I say, I want to survive, just-nothing in the world, you know, because I couldn't BELIEVE that evil shall overtake, you know, this is the end of the world. Why, in only that the Jew, which was no Jew at all, you know what I'm talking about, which looks like a goy, and acts like a goy, he had such a chance, and those which are so, those which are so you know the-typical, you know, the -kohen of Yisrael, you know, they get punished (inaudible)...

WH: When you think about this...today, when you have to explain it to yourself, how it's possible, for Jews who-that why, do you ask the question, Why did G-d single out the people who were the biggest tzaddikim. Who had the biggest mi?es, who were the finest people. You know the Jews who came here in the earliest part of the century, they were not religious, right, nobody wanted to go to the (?) so those who came from Poland in 1920—1910, they survived because they were here. But the frumme yidden, the religious Jew that stayed in Europe, they didn't make it...what do you think about it?

JC: ...people who came back like tigers, you know, I want to tell you something, the truth from my heart. Those which has a little bit, you know/ (inaudible) yiddishkeit, you know, a background, couldn't have done it what they did! Couldn't!...(needs translation) those which did not have to became banditin.

WH: And they survived.

JC: They survived...and you know. I escaped from there...

WH: From this camp?

JC: I did!...Yes! You know how? They didn't give us no extra (?quotas)..and the Captain...liked me. And one time, he was sitting on the stones and he came down...and (asked for a shoemaker-translation) and I jumped-(yes, I am a shoemaker-translation). It's a lie, you know, but you learn...and he brought me up to his house...it was a synagogue there. They took over the synagogue, they made an office, it was terrible. Oy, what they did! They

made the Jews urinate on the Torah, you know...anyway so he took me on to his office...anyway, so he talks to me, and he fed me, too, and he gave me a piece of egg he didn't want to eat it probably. And a piece of fish...he used to talk to me all the time...and when I go out after the work, he gave me a-that time only what I had is-an undershirt. That's all. It was cold! He gave me a whole loaf of bread, Army bread...and he says, 'Tell them that I said that they shouldn't touch you'....I came back to the larger...my two brothers were there...when I had the bread, you know what I mean? (needs translation) When I came in, the Jews were laying on the stones...they were thinking about food, anyway, it lasts five seconds. Five seconds it lasts. They tore me down on the floor, tore half my shirt, and the bread (inaudible)...and my poor brother. My poor brother came. 'Couldn't you save a crystal of --.' (JC's voice breaks down with deep emotion). 'Couldn't you save a tiny little piece of bread?' (Long pause)...So, I think, I think nothing. I don't want to hear nothing. I don't want to hear no explanation because I'm not-chasvesholem, I'm not (needs translation)...and that we lost completely. Never before in the history of mankind, was this what we saw. (needs translation)...and where I was there in the camp, there were slogans...A Jew is a Jew with the money, 'The Jew with the Money, Money, Money, Money, Money. As a matter of fact (inaudible)---even there, you know, with the great poverty, but yet some of the Jews which are-even in Poland, you know, they used to say 'Polish Streets are Jewish houses.' You know? They were the owners who they-you know?...the big difference,--we still were dancing to the Golden Calf more than anybody else. Of course we can't find historical justification. But don't forget, the average goy is not a philosopher. You understand what I'm saying?-He's a simple man---(inaudible-needs translation)...In Polish especially, they already looked at us with a microscope, to find something, to find something so-the justification would be what they always thought about us to begin with, do you understand?

WH: So, you were in the labor camps, in the larger throughout the war, where did you end up when the war ended?

JC: I end up not far from Katowice (?)...

End of Tape #1, Side A

Tape #1, Side B

WH: Where did you wind up in Germany??

JC: Stuttgart.

WH: What happened to you then, did you go to Israel?

JC: No.

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WH: How come you didn't go to Israel then?

JC: Because I was selfish. Because I-(inaudible) I don't want to hear nothing about Jews, about Judaism. I tell you the truth, here. I don't want to hear that...(needs translation)...there were Jewish girls with me, they told me that time, we're talking about it, 'cause I couldn't tear it out of myself, you understand, I wouldn't do it, but if they get married, they'll never have circumcision for the children. You understand? 'Cause they still have the fear that someday it's going to be- again...

WH: So, you didn't want to go to Israel, you had enough, you felt you suffered enough as a Jew.

JC: ...my two brothers died...

WH: So you decided that you're going to America...

JC: I decided, it was a mixture of pain...

WH: Were you in a D.P. camp in Stuttgart?

JC: No...I got a nice room...in a house with a German professor...

WH: ...how long were you there before you came to America?

JC: Two years.

WH: How did it feel to be with the Germans again?

JC: ...even today, I carry with me, this pain in my hearts...and the rabbis come and say because we sinned...mishegoss...

WH: ...so how can you believe in G-d any more?

JC: I'll be honest with you. I can't. Not that I couldn't believe—I'm not an atheist, because how shall I say? I believe in, like the Rambam says, (needs translation)...

WH: There's a man who wrote a book...he was in concentration camp...he said, G-d, if you have to kill us, okay. You decided that you had to kill us. But like this we had to die? Like animals? Couldn't you have found a better way to kill us?

JC: Well, I'll tell you something. I'm angry. I'm angry about it. Terrible angry about it. When I look around, I says, and a great deal to do has, our rabbis have misled me, constantly...(needs translation)...we were like sheep! All the stories what you read about heros, don't believe it! It's a lie...(inaudible) in Auschwitz too, I didn't see them (inaudible) in Auschwitz...the rest, nothing! We were RUNNING like dogs! To survive, to survive for

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what?... (needs translation)... (inaudible)... I'm angry! What do we do? What do we do? (needs translation) we participate, we dance with such an enthusiasm to the Golden Calf more than anybody else. You know what I'm talking about?

WH: Today?

JC: Yes! Listen. I bought with goyim, I'm the only Jew-work there. I'm one of the batlanim, the Jew, you know, the old.

WH: What do you mean?

JC: I had a grocery store, (inaudible) I was afraid to make money. I wouldn't do that because I felt guilty. I think that my purpose of surviving is not to amass my—you understand? How should I answer to myself, you know? And all of those who died so brutally, so mercilessly, and I should I (inaudible-make a million?)... (needs translation)... (inaudible) I work now with goyim. And what do you hear, here's the same story. I swear to you. Those which write articles in the newspapers, those who have made the plans for America, you know, they are alienated. They don't know the average (inaudible) human being in America. You know? (inaudible) I worked for the goyim. While they were here, --and I'm telling you because I'm the only Jew there--again, and again, 'You people just came 25 years, 30 years ago, to their own, the whole beautiful highway. My grandfather, my zaydes and bubbes, broke their neck! We have nothing! You know?

WH: In other words—they still hate the Jews.

JC: ...listen, you talking about human ingredients, in human behavior, Cain killed Abel because he was jealous! It's a normal behavior, you understand? The fact that 95% of us don't work, I mean, just dealer, wheeler, you understand? Millionaires! Do you underst--? You don't -- and when I say the garbage comes to conclusions, he's not the slightest idea, because he never met the bus driver that, you know, the roofer, the (?shtoles) the average guy. He only sees the girl in the office. 'Thank you, sir. Yes, sir.' That's nothing. This is a bobbemyseh, you know what I'm talking about?

WH: Do you still have the store?

JC: I don't have a store. I work for somebody because I lost it. I had a little store.

WH: Where?

JC: Here...and I had 8 holdups and they almost killed me, the shvartze. I lost everything.

WH: Do you think that what happened in Europe could happen here?

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JC: Yes, Don't you kid yourself for one minute! Chas yesholim. Don't, don't illusion, because—you could never see it. There was never enough assimilated Jewry in the world like in Germany. And you mention to German Jew, 'Yude' you insulted him. He didn't call himself 'Yude' -(? speak un Deutshe un musse glaouden?) you know. (inaudible-and needs translation)...a great deal, NOT this would prevent a Hitler, (needs translation), this is a unique in history, A very, very hard (?needs translation-tsayech?) you know what I mean? He was OBSESSED with this hatred for the Jew...(inaudible).

WH: The what?

JC: The repeat itself exactly like it was in Germany in '41...and the Jews were in a good position, I mean financially, you understand? This alone is (inaudible—needs translation? kinnesinner?) Do you know what I'm talking about? This alone creates an animosity! Why do you have more than I have?' In a way the Jew is different, you understand? Their lifestyle is different...(inaudible) but again, here I am philosophing, I'm intellectualizing, the average goy is not intellect-he comes to conclusions what he sees, you understand? With whom he comes and touch. The goy from Oklahoma, and he sees Milton Berle or Buddy Hackett, he says, Are those the children of (?Esav?) and Jacob?' And he says, My G-d! Nothing but filth, and disgust and -You know, Buddy Hackett, what the heck-you know what I mean? Nothing but sick--.

WH: Jackie Mason.

JC: Jackie-no! Jackie Mason still has the (needs translation—b'chillumalakin). He-no. No.

WH: His father was a rabbi. He was a rabbi.

JC: Yeh, I know, but he still didn't lose nothing. He doesn't embarrass me. No. The-Buddy Hackett embarrasses me...the other one Jewish, you know, they wallowing in filth, and-you know? Constantly be-schmutz and exploiting the innocence of others, and you know, what I want to say, in Germany, was the same thing. The so-called philosopher, intellectuals, mostly yidlach. What did they do? They spit on all the workers and the Germans. I remember there was a book (needs translation) 'It's not the Criminal What is Guilty. It's the Victim which is Guilty.'

WH: What?

JC: You had a mumbo-jumbo. You understand? Because the victim created the situation. You know? And the same thing what you go through today. Same thing what you hear, they say, 'Homosexuality is nothing but a different lifestyle.' You know? Don't kid yourself! The goyim (inaudible) after they read on the news, and they see who makes it, a Morgenstern, Gevelt, you know? You know what I am talking about?

WH: Yes. I understand. You're saying that if the Jews are immoral, the goyim see that.

JC: Yes! And not only immoral themselves, they the creator of the morals in morality. The creator of this filth in the media, you know, mostly Jews. And the films too. And who for the film makers, you know? The SCUM of Jewry!...I forgot to tell you...A German Captain, one time he called me...and in English he says, 'I got you!' 'What do you got me?' 'Yah I have a book!' What did I know?...He says, 'The book...the book, What makes Sammy Run,' and this book, he depicts Sam—the CUNNING, CONNIVING—the epitome of a lie, a cheated, you know, the (inaudible) of the wealth. You see? This is what a Jew writes about Jews! Huh? Now, what do you got to say now! I said...I know nothing about America...(inaudible)...are you going to put me in jail?...'No,'...

WH: Do you think that Jews are more conniving than other people?

JC: Well, of course they are. There's no doubt in my mind.

WH: Because they have to.

JC: (laughs cynically). Cause, now this is a historical reason, but fact (inaudible) we are a product from (needs translation-and inaudible)...besides, listen every discrimination creates more initiative you will see. If you don't let me into the draft to go to the window, to open the window, I have to get up. And I constantly, adapt, like a fox, you know. Our whole way in history, was only nothing by (needs translation) you know what I mean? To life, you understand? And because this has produced a product which is- it is not the goy...(needs translation)...(inaudible)...

WH: So, if that's-if what you're saying is true, the way you say it now, that means that those who survived, in general, were the most conniving. Were the most cunning. The cleverest.

JC: No...the clever died. I'm talking about, he had to use this kind of methods, you know, and I mean that-I would call it, not I'm clean, some of them be unclean, they beat other Jews, and you know. You know? They became highest themselves. You understand? Higher-higher, like a dog. Worse than a dog. Now, I'm not going to, I wouldn't make a summation as saying together those Jews were wonderful Jews, which, they were Jews which didn't want to eat nothing but trefe, chas yeshilem, even there-

WH: And they survived too.

JC: And they survived too. As a matter of fact, I would, if somebody would ask me, who impressed you more, and who showed more compassion, you know, who those which came and helping out, (inaudible-the ones from?) the warm, Jewish home. They had a little knowledge of our past...

WH: What do you think of these survivor groups...?

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JC: ...I never go. I never go. I NEVER go! Deliberately.

WH: Why?

JC: Because what they did (needs translation)...in other words, they-you see, (needs translation) and I still quote our sages, are beautiful and warm you know, even through generations and generations. And a lot of them, we still could learn. (needs translation). One of the people, G-d (inaudible) doesn't like, these people make fun-and exploit the other-somebody's (inaudible-? shame?), by his own game, you understand? And those, I call them 'Holocaustnikkers (inaudible) of the day.' It's nonsense. One time we had a gathering, you know, and it was unbelievable. Unbelievable! There was so much food, everyone was dressed up. I says, 'Oh, my G-d' (his voice drops in utter disbelief). 'This is a (needs translation-chittel haShem).' You understand what I mean? (needs translation) I said, Even the goyim of Hiroshima, when they go there, they take off the shoes. You know, in the (needs translation-?...eretz). And I tell them, 'And you come to this place, you show (needs translation)...' Those Jews! Died so-such, these was your mothers! Father and mother! How can you eat? How can you fress der heit? And then they (inaudible) that Benjamin Meed, with his-shake it, -and kiss him. What the hell! What the hell!...(inaudible)...he's nothing, he amassed a lot of money. And there's another, Jack Eisner, A goniff! A nundevait! He was here in Atlanta...

WH: He lived here?

JC: Yes! A goniff! And he literally tricked some poor Jew, and the other one has died. He's a swindler!...I went on his speech, I was so insulted! He brought a young shisksaleh, ofsketof shisksaleh. You know what I mean 'ofsketof-a sexy. She was singing, 'Ghettolezi.' And I said to him...his introductory, he said he makes fifty million dollars. 'Nu, how could a (needs translation-yidden ramos?) like you make – what are you trying-besides, whom do you telling this? The goishe world? People with millions of worth, -making, just making a living, (needs translation-ga ye du dress un kopt?)?' By the way, you have to tell it- I ask him, 'Is this to be proud about it? (needs translation). 'Akk! You don't know what you're talking about,' he says. He doesn't want to have conversation with us, 'shut the hell up!' And I shut up already. He's the worst one.

WH: But Ben Meed though? Is he in the same category?

JC: No...

WH: ...do you think that people in the later years, that the survivors, that they recreate what happened, and it comes out a little different? In other words, that they may exaggerate the heroism, or-

JC: The heroism? No only exaggerate, but it's a lie! I never saw it! (needs translation)...we went to the shreter like the lowest of the lowest of the lowest.

- WH: ...what's the point of keeping up the religion if the religion makes you into a coward?
- JC: not the religion make me a coward.
- WH: You said, that those who were more assimilated-fought, were more like goyim. Before, you said that the rabbis, 'they told us we shouldn't fight, everything is a (t?proster?), right? (inaudible)...that didn't get us anywhere, right?
- JC: That's what I ask myself, day and night.
- WH: So what's the point of the whole religion, if that's the case?
- JC: I don't know. I don't know what the point of whole religion, but, how shall I say,-I-my son is a frummer Yid, you know? I tell you about it. I never discussed this with you. I don't want to take it up-(needs translation-telling a story-Gemara-)...I answer you plain and simple. Many times I said to myself, (needs translation) I don't know, but leave us alone! I'm tired...(needs translation)...
- WH: Do you think that American Jews can really understand what happened there?
- JC: No. No. No. I'm sorry. Not only they didn't understand here, but I want to go back for you. I don't want to daven. I (inaudible) go to shul on Yom Kippur. I come, but when I come, my heart pains me, and I cannot-and it goes against (needs translation) AGAIN, and AGAIN, AND AGAIN. (needs translation). I can't. I had to be a liar, you understand. I cannot (needs translation) and it hurts me, and on the other hand...(inaudible) (needs translation)...we have to have a spiritual guidance and otherwise, you see what happened to those, with the drugs. When there is emptiness, there is dead. There is nothing. Do you understand?...well, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to disappoint you.
- WH: You didn't disappoint me. I haven't finished yet.
- JC: You talking to a Jew-I tell you the way I feel...a book doesn't go by I wouldn't read, a film doesn't go by that I go see...my wife, I tell her, I says, 'I feel guilty to my people what I did. Why did I survive? Why did I deserve? I was there-I was actually what they call Roshe, I was the Roshe, (?and they were the tzaddikim) and I survived...(inaudible)...
- WH: Why do you feel like a Roshe? Do you feel that they were better than you?
- JC: Compared to them, because you see, I was not frum. And they were the epitome of whatever you call a tzaddik, you know? I mean it...this was the epitome of piety. The epitome of innocence! And compared to them, I was the Roshe. I sinned.

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WH: ...I know the story...about Oprah Winfrey...so then if that can happen, there is no question that everything can happen again. Right?

JC: ...and my personal belief is that the average American, after my experience in the world, the average American is a good person, you know? He's not too shrewd, you understand?-

WH: He doesn't know from (phochness).

JC: (kochness) this was-I considered the beauty of it, you know...

WH: ...how did you get here (to America?).

JC: ...a family, which lives in New Orleans found out that I was survived alone from my family...

WH: Were they relatives of yours?

JC: No...they were from the same shtetl...and they sent out an affidavit for me with the HIAS...

End of Tape #1, Side B

Tape #2, Side A

WH: ...You came in (what year?).

JC: 1940...

WH: When you came into New York...what do you remember about that? What did it look like? What were your impressions?

JC: The impression (short laugh) was-to tell the truth. Remember, this is-on the waterfront. I looked on the people, they were dressed with these jackets and I said to the refugees there, (needs translation: the zuminzion?) 'the gangster!' You know, from gangsters. You know.

WH: They looked like gangsters.

JC: Yah, with the half faces, you know...

WH: ...were you happy about coming to America?

JC: ...we couldn't wait for a minute. By the way, in Germany there-before we left, we had it good, you know. Very good. Packages from every side, you know, and the Germans were

like butter, you know what I mean 'butter?' Every German saw us, would bend down, 'Good morning!' you know?... (needs translation). But there were decent men. We had decency, you know. 'How could you see them? How could you be with them? (needs translation: trefen-) they steal the eyes on these people, you understand? We felt it. You know? But in America, what my impression, well, I was-I didn't like them when I got off from the ship and I saw the faces. You know? Nobody came to-most people had mispochen, you know, all of them, with the cousins, and so on.

WH: No one came to the boat?

JC: No. Nobody came...

WH: So what happened?

JC: I just stood there alone and I felt bad, of course, like-but, and then they took us to HIAS...it was a building on Lafayette...they gave us a cot and something to eat-and if Hosea Williams, had to eat this kind of meals, he would march from here to Washington!...from here to Washington, over discrimination, dehumanizing, there. But we were happy...we were happy that we were happy, and then we walked out to the street, and everything looked strange to me. Don't forget, you come from Germany, everything is tic and tock and everything is nice, but the people coming for a quatoyant.

WH: What's a quatoyant?

JC: To rent a room...so, a Jewish people from Brooklyn, they Russian Jews...and they saw me alone, and they ask me, 'Are you alone?' So his wife says, 'Come on. I want to help.' So, 'alright.' So he took me there, and I had to fight with them. 'How much a week.' And I says \$35 a-month...and I said, 'Okay, okay, I'll pay.' And he says, 'No, no.' Very nice people. Very nice people...I was half an hour there, I rest, and he want to show me-he put on the radio,-A Yiddishe radio! Oh, my G-d! WEVD.' I couldn't know-then it were a hassan! Oh, my G-d I says, 'This here is a shulayim' 'This is a -uch! G-d bless America!' I couldn't believe me. He says, the father, the son couldn't speak Yiddish. 'The father spoke a little bit Yiddish, and everything I didn't understand, he spoke to me, 'Dad, what does it mean?'... the hazzan was BEAUTIFUL, and it was, you know, so-soft and genteel. And all of a sudden I hear-(needs ... translation...?derhuminyor?) I said, 'Frank, vos is der honiyor?' What is a 'honyor?' 'Dad! Tell him, how do you say it Yiddish?' A honiyor? A killer? I said, 'What is it (needs translation). So, you know, (inaudible) all of a sudden, it (?sunk in?). So I said, 'What is this?' So he said, 'It's a commercial!' 'Vos is a commercial?' 'Dad! Explain to him vos is a commercial. It's a commercial, is a commercial!' And it was so strange thing, I said, (inaudible) I felt almost sacrilegious, you know. How do you mix those-(needs translation)...

WH: You didn't have commercials in Poland on the radio?

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JC: No...first of all. I didn't have a radio in Poland...

WH: Where did you live here?

JC: ...in Williamsburg...

WH: What did you do first? What kind of work?

JC: I worked in a shop, in a metal shop, I don't remember...in Brooklyn...and by the way, I saw the first holdup in my life, you know? And I went to HIAS and-I saw, from the HIAS there's a side street, there was a liquor store there...and I saw a man taken out you know, by stretcher and put him in the police...and I watched. There was a lot of people. The man saw me, and he says, 'What are you staying here? It's dangerous! Why don't you go!' '(inaudible) greener,' you a 'greener?' I said, 'Yes. What is this?' He said, 'A holdup.' So. 'Vus es a holdup?' 'A holdup is a robbery...' So when I took the Daily News, I saw...Holdup. Net \$25,000.' I said to myself, 'My G-d! What a brutality! For shameless! 'Net!' They talking about like a business! Net. (needs translation) Terribly disappointed. Terribly disappointed. I spoke with other ones, the same way. I felt an emptiness. You know? Later on, years changed, we had to learn...(needs translation)...to love America, yep, and I still do.

WH: You love America?

JC: Yes! yeh.

WH: You think that it's the best country?

JC: In the world! Never in the history-never in a Jewish history, was not (needs translation-?amalkous so chesid?) I like America. Yeh. It's the first time in my life I felt like a human being. I felt like I'm not a stranger. The average American doesn't have the-you know this (?buruzzul chauvinism?) You know, my uncle can beat your uncle, you know, who the hell are you? You know? You understand? No, you don't, no. You believe in let live, (needs translation) this is the average guy. You know? He doesn't have the viciousness that the Europeans had at that time, you know. Oh yes, and even still today, I have a greater knowledge...the Golden Age of Spanish...even then was not such a (needs translation)...Jewry has not achieved such a -.

WH: Did you feel this way when you first came?

JC: No, no. I didn't understand it and I didn't like it...

WH: How did you meet your wife?

JC: ...near HIAS...there was a luncheonette...I met her there...American girl...

WH: She knew Yiddish?

JC: A hissel ...from the Bronx...then I was in (needs translation) seventh heaven...she was born in America, but she had the conception of a European person, you know? She knows literature very good. VERY good...(needs translation).

WH: When you came to HIAS I know they offered a lot of services. Did they offer any psychological counseling for people who had gone through the war? Nothing. No social workers to help?

JC: (laughs). Listen, I decided not to talk to those people, I swear. One time there was a Radom-gathering from the ?Landsmanchev?. I went there...in the Bronx somewhere...I knew it in (from) the home, when a (the) boy came to America. Years ago there was a kid who went to America, a goniff, a (/buzitzer?) a hoodlum, a bonditt...a momzer...(needs translation:...go to America...) so I was prepared not to,-anyway, I came in...and then started up, the testimonial dinner, but they told me that the ?gontser macher? is (needs translation)...

WH: A wagon driver.

JC: Yeh...he is in the trucking business he is a big (?gavier?) and he told them, spoke in English of course, a bissel Yiddish (needs translation), 'mishpocheh,' ;Yom Kippur, 'Mazel Tov,' (needs translation) anyway, so he says, 'Those people have a hard time talking about the Holocaust.' I said to my friend, I says, 'He has a hard time? You know, it's like losing a football game.' This is what I thought. And then, before he came, this is the first time I got involved in testimonial dinners, and then, 'Oh my G-d, (inaudible),' 'Ladies and Gentlemen, I like to present to you (needs translation)...the punchline, after this, we were drinking...and the Auxillary Ladies came over and listened to the conversation. How can I forget this? One woman said,-'All what they had to do, if they had a good lawyer!' (needs translation)...'what do you mean a lawyer? You have a lawyer, you have to have money! They didn't have no money!' (needs translation) I said to my wife, 'I'm never going back there.' Imagine!

WH: They said that the Holocaust would have been avoided if the Jews had good lawyers?

JC: Yes! They didn't know!...she thought that if we had (laughs)-she thought she's in America, if we had a good lawyer we could have solved everything. And the other one answered, 'Well, they couldn't afford it.' By the way, that time, the Holocaust was not knowing. Not yet. They heard something, you know, (?bubbemyseih?), you heard, you know maybe it's true, it's not, you know. The American -masses did not know yet. It was not publicized like it is. Later on it started.

WH: Did anyone ask you?

JC: Yes...(Mr. Pasternak?) he'll ask me. But I noticed-they were not impressed too much...he asked me why, and this was my personal view. When I was watching television there...all the television was about killing, shooting, killing, and robbing and killing and killing, you know? So, I said to myself, that's why I think the dead is not so electrifying for them. Because that's what they are fed. They're fed constantly with it. And I said to myself, why is it-I ask, what is the matter with those people? Why are you obsessed with violence? And they answer is, 'Well, America was born of violence, because of the guns, (needs translation).' Well, again, who would ask? I have not come into contact with a person with intellect, you know, I came in contact with (needs translation...gornished) He doesn't even read the newspaper. He reads the comics, and the sports. The Jews too!

WH: If the Holocaust had not happened and you were 15, 17 and you could decide what you wanted to do with your life...what do you think you would have wanted to do?

JC: When I was young, I would like to be like you, a writer.

WH: ...you read a lot...

JC: I cannot read no more. I lost my-.

WH: You don't see so well.

JC: Nothing can be done...do you notice a certain pessimism in me. That a certain bitterness which you can understand, but there's more to it. I have to tell you. You don't put it on the-please. (tape stops. Starts and needs translation).

WH: When you came here, didn't you have ambitions to do something?

JC: ...I wanted to make a living...If I go into business and I get rich, I'll be the same Jew, this-what I will-perpetuating the (needs translation-?clolei?) the stigma. (inaudible) I would just-justifying with the accusers that there's nothing that would-.

WH: Money-grubbing.

JC: That we are nothing. We were like Marx calls us, you know, the 'Yude (?globben g'danksia...?-needs translation).

WH: Get his money...money is his G-d.

JC: Yah, that's what he said...by the way, what do you think, you think that a goishe world is stupid, here with the Boesky's, and the other one...Millikin...You ask me, I said to myself, what is the solution? What can be done? The only thing what I see, my G-d, you cannot go on and say that we are the best. We are preaching-racism! We are preaching alienations of

other people. Gottenyu (?) I met wonderful non-Jewish, good people...if anybody would know, they would kill them! They sacrificed their life-not their money! And the ugliness of the Jewry what I see here, is horrible! Obsessed with so much guilt (needs translation). Nonsense! Come on! (needs translation).

WH: Your other son became a doctor?

JC: Yah, my son is a wonderful, wonderful (needs translation).

WH: How did he stay religious?

JC: ...yeshiva, we were the first ones to put him in there...Rabbi Feldman has a great (translate-influence)...and Rabbi Cohen is a fine man...

WH: ...and your son went to Yeshiva University?

JC: Yes...and he lives now in Monsey...

WH: So everything didn't turn out terrible. I mean you have naches from grandchildren...?'

JC: Well, of course...but the only thing you know, well, there's a certain alienation between me and him, you know...in his eyes I'm-

WH: Not frum enough.

JC: Not frum enough...

WH: Does he feel because you know about religion that you should be-?

JC: Yah...(needs translation).

WH: But doesn't he understand what you went through?

JC: Alright. But it depends if you speak with people...(needs translation-inaudible).

WH: Well, not everybody sees it that way.

JC: well...(needs translation)...those which doesn't have it, you know, they pessimist, and they're-but pessimism leads to despotism, you understand?

WH: Do you think that G-d had anything to do with the fact that you yourself survived?'

JC: No way. No way. If there is this, -(needs translation).

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WH: Why you and not someone else, you mean.'

JC: (inaudible) How can you give a logical interpretation to kill those so brutally, and let me live? For what? (inaudible) I cannot take it, I'm sorry.

WH: Some people believe that.

JC: It's easy, it's easy, you know. They don't want to face it, you understand? They trying to live, you know, try to (needs translation...)...and the more primitive the person is, the more happy he is. Plain and simple...(needs translation).

WH: ...these guys who make a-I didn't say a celebration of it but-

JC: It is a celebration.

WH: But I wondered to myself, to make a dinner in the Waldorf Astoria?

JC: (inaudible) And the crime is double!

WH: Why?

JC: First of all, they do it to themselves. What about what they do to the others? By doing so, they exclude people like me. I have no money to go there...you making your own little clique...and you know, where they starting up you see and the PRAISES that they give the (needs translation-rachel yidelach?...wonderful!) I would not have against if somebody is a great inventor. You understand? You done something. (needs translation) What did they do? What the (hochmar)? (needs translation).

WH: somebody got screwed.

JC: Of course! (needs translation...)...and if they succeed, with the (inaudible) in their pockets, why should we give them all the honor too? Isn't it enough that they have all the goodness-the (translate) with all the (?) cars, and homes, and you know-is this not enough? We have to give them the honor too, you know? You understand what I'm saying? Terrible. Terrible.

WH: I always wonder how those people survived during the war.

JC: It was terrible things that some of them did. You have no idea, you have no idea. In my shtetl...I didn't see it, but some know it and talking about it. He hanged his father.

WH: What happened to him?'

JC: He survived...he lived in New York...

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WH: ...in the last 40 years, what do you take the greatest satisfaction in?

JC: To be honest with you, I always, whatever I did, I was (not?) trying to help another Yid, you know?... (inaudible)...in a certain way I'm prejudiced. What I mean by prejudiced, I mean I'm not-objective. I'm subjective because I feel like a shuttle is going with me constantly, you know what I mean? You know what I mean? And this saddens me. It doesn't leave me for a moment. And I feel like a certain fate comes (inaudible) behind me. The story with my kids, you know. This which did not give me a chance to relax... (inaudible). And on the other hand, I feel-how shall I say? A certain guilt, how could you (inaudible) enjoy, and what happened to your parents and family (inaudible). You know what I'm talking about? How did you do it? And why did you leave them? Why didn't you go together with them?

WH: Could you have gone with them?

JC: I was too much of a coward.

WH: ...you lived in New York after the war, how long did you live there before you came to Atlanta?

JC: A year or two.

WH: How did you come to Atlanta? Why Atlanta?

JC: ...well I didn't learn a trade and I had to make a living, and meanwhile I got married and she got pregnant, you know. I was rushing, I wanted to have a child, you know, (inaudible) and I was working where they make salami...and one day I met a Jewish man, which was my foreman...and he says to me,- my wife named me 'Jerry' you know, because you could call me 'Gary' which is Gershon, but (inaudible) ridicule, everybody, Gary Cooper!-...and the people in the packing company is the same like the waterfront type of people.

WH: Rough, tough guys.

JC: Pollacks and Jews and Germans and every word was sh..and this and this and he told me, 'Listen Jerry, this is not for you. He's (you are) a gentle person, (needs translation). My kids have here in Atlanta grocery stores, and when I go on vacation, I'll take you with (me).' ...this man, he was my foreman...and this is the way I came to Atlanta.

WH: What did he say, he'll give you a job here?

JC: 'No,' he says, 'My kids have grocery stores here, and (and if you will come) they will help you, they will put the money in and you will buy a little grocery store, you wouldn't have to-you'll make a good living.'

WH: So that's what you did?

JC: that's what I did.

WH: Are you sorry you came to Atlanta?

JC: No, I couldn't survive in New York, I'm not the type, you understand? (inaudible).

WH: When you came here, did you have friends here who were survivors also?

JC: Yeh...

WH: You came here...in 1955...to New York in 1950...

End of Tape #2, Side A

Tape #2, Side B

JC: ...most of them here are millionaires. Most of them...they came here, they had a little grocery store in a shvartze neighborhood, they had the wife and the children, they were together so they didn't have no expenses. Then they made the money twice. They made the money what they made, and they didn't spend it because they didn't go nowhere. Seven days a week. They lived upstairs. And the store downstairs. So they made money by not spending it...and what happened, Atlanta was one of the luckiest cities in the U.S....they bought property...I know some of them spent \$25,000 and sold it for 6 million...(inaudible)...

WH: ...and they started an organization here...and in a way the organizations at least remind people that there was a Holocaust?

JC: Absolutely! And I mean, let's not take it away, there's a few of them which are-(inaudible)...(translate-maidelech mensch)...this is an attitude. Give them covert, all of a sudden you know, they were gangsters, (inaudible)...(needs translation).

WH: Your own child, Steven, did he feel that you were over-protective of him...?

JC: In a way, yes, but my wife is not a survivor, my wife is a different person and she is-I was the one more.

WH: How did he respond to the fact that you survived?

JC: Well, he doesn't (inaudible and needs translation).

WH: You didn't discuss the war with him at all?

JC: A little bit, not too much. The answer is, (needs translation)...you know the expression (translation) 'Everything G-d did, he did it for the good of it'...(inaudible)...then he was in Detroit. He became with the ?kohelell? There in Detroit, this is where he got married. An American girl...

WH: Does your other child live at home?

JC: Home, yes.

WH: I want to-.

JC: One thing I'm angry about you know, do you ever read Isaac Bashevis Singer? He's good, you know-he's a bonditt, he's good. He's a master, he's a painter, he's a wonderful-everything what you read about him is true. He comes from my milieu, you know. (inaudible) I saw him here, he knows me.

WH: So what are you angry about?

JC: (short laugh). Well, G-d has given (inaudible) such as gift, such a golden pen, I mean, he could have made this how the-our, how this tragedy (?here?) apple pie. Nobody could have written it like him. Of course he wasn't there, you don't have to be there, you understand? (needs translation...commentary on book)...

WH: He's wallowing in it.

JC: He's wallowing in it...drowning in-...(needs translation) and what I'm angry about him, he could have done it. Nobody, he was a master, he is a master.

WH: ...if you were working in the grocery, very hard...and then the business didn't-you didn't have enough time, or a lot of time, to spend with your child.

JC: Nothing, nothing.

WH: It was a 7 day a week business.

JC: Yah...my wife helped...

WH: ...did you belong to any Jewish organizations during this period of time?

JC: No.

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WH: You never joined any Jewish organizations? I guess, my question is, that because of your background, it's a strong background, I thought that maybe you would be interested in it...to be a part of it.

JC: ...shall I describe to you the mentality and the way of thinking of the (talks about other people –needs translation)...

WH: Do you know Goodfriend?

JC: Yeh. He's a politician.

WH: He made a politics out of this. He made a business out of it.

JC: -he's a 'Holocaustnik' you know? (needs translation)...I couldn't do it.

WH: ...what do you think about Israel?

JC: Whatever we have, all the power we have, should be for Israel.

WH: Have you ever been there?

JC: Yes.

WH: What did you think?

JC: I was impressed, I mean, I saw it. I mean, I (inaudible) only was impressed with, I was in kibbutz, that's the only real-the rest I wasn't...(needs translation)...I still believe that the greatest (inaudible) is because we were aliens...(inaudible) and this is the reason why-.

End of Tape #2, Side B
Conclusion of Interview