

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

## **William Helmreich Oral History Collection**

**Interview with Samuel Halpern  
February 14, 1988  
RG-50.165\*0042**

## PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Samuel Halpern, conducted by William Helmreich on February 14, 1988 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.

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**SAMUEL HALPERN**  
**February 14, 1988**

WH: What was the name of the town you were born in?

SH: Chorostkow.

WH: What is the date of your birth?

SH: July, 1920.

WH: The number of brothers and sisters you have?

SH: Four brothers, no sisters...I was the youngest.

WH: Do you have children?

SH: Baruch Hashem, I have four sons and five grandchildren so far, I hope to have more (inaudible).

WH: Were your parents Hassidic?

SH: Yeh, very much. My father was a (inaudible) Hassid, my mother came from ?Satamar? Hassidim. However, when she married my father, she also became (inaudible). But the ?Satamar? and the (inaudible) they were cousins. They came from the Rizzoner.

WH: What did your father do?

SH: My father was always in business.

WH: What kind of business?

SH: It was a general store he had. Groceries, textiles, leathers, and also in season he used to deal with the grain –wheat.

WH: Did you go to Yeshiva, cheder?

SH: Cheder and public school.

WH: Were you a good student?

SH: Naaaa. Not the best. I was a fairly good student. But not the best.

WH: Tell me a little bit about the community –how big was the town?

SH: The town was about 6,000 population. About 2,000 Poles, 2,000 Ukrainian, and 2,000 Jewish people. The Jewish people lived in the center of the town and most of them made their living doing business with the farmers. And the Gentile people lived around the town. It was built like a ghetto. The Jewish people were always together.

WH: Were the people in your family involved in a religious life in the community?

SH: Yes, very much.

WH: During the war, where were you? I mean this is a short question with a big answer.

SH: I'll try to explain the best I can. The war start 1939...a pact divided Poland into two halves. The Western part of Poland became Germany, and the Eastern part of Poland, Russia took. Russian stood in the Eastern part from '39 until '41. We were in the Eastern side and therefore we had from until 1941 we lived with the Russian people. The Russian people took away the businesses from the Jewish people and I was at that time 19 years old...we didn't have our business, but people still made a living. Some very wealthy people started to suffer, they took some even to Siberia. But they didn't kill people. They took away their stores, some of them lost their houses...but the middle class people were able to stay at home, and we weren't rich, we were middle class, my brothers and I had jobs and we worked until the war broke out between Russia and Germany. In June, '41 the war broke out and there, were –really we start to feel the war. The first day they came into our town they took out 36 Jews! Not question, 'Why?' Not giving any reason why they killed in town, 36 Jews on the day they came to Chorostkow. Most of them were close friends...killed good friends...when the Ukrainian people took over...and worked with the Germans...some boys start to ride to town and they called every Jew should come to the town hall. And many, many went. Luckily, my mother (lavshulim?) was a very smart lady. She said, 'wait let's see' and my brother and I, we went to the attic and instead to go, we start to hide, and we only looked through and we were able to see where people are going, voluntarily to the town hall. They surrounded them...and they start to beat them tremendous...and murder them...and they wanted to kill everybody. Luckily, that time...the Ukrainian mayor...he said, 'You can beat up the Jews but as long as I'm mayor, I wouldn't let you kill them.'...later on they organized a Judenrat in town. And the purpose was suppose to be in the Judenrat to organize how to manage, food to come in, the Germans would need workers...nobody thought they going to ask people to go to concentration camp in the beginning or even to go to be killed...I remember, they came to our house and I was that time, 21 years old, my brother, (zey geizehunt?) was 23 years, and they ask us to join the... Judenrat. I questioned what will be my job...He said, 'You'll have to bring people to go to work for the Germans.' I said, 'I'm gonna go and call my dear friends and tell them, 'you go to work and I'm gonna stay here? I don't want it! I would rather go to work for myself!' And, of course, we didn't accept it. But other people did accept it...in our town...Jews had to stay only in the center

and forbid us to deal with the Gentile people...Jewish people couldn't go on the market, they couldn't deal with Gentiles at all...about two weeks before Rosh Hashana, that time they came to the Judenrat and they told the Judenrat they wanted 200 boys to go to concentration camp. Supposedly it was suppose to be for 3 months work. The Judenrat delivered them. They came to us, and the last minute...my father had a friend in the Judenrat...and he told my father the only way if you wanna your sons shouldn't go to concentration camp, you have to let them work...(On) a big farm which the Germans took over...he also said, 'Look, in order to do this, you gotta pay for this.' Not for him (?chasvelaleh) but he had to give some other people. And whatever my father had he paid and at that time we were able –we start to work on the farm, and we did not go...that time in the concentration camp...we worked...very hard...but at least I was able to come home at night to sleep in our house, until March 19, 1942...a group of Jewish boys...and that day, March 19, they called, 'Everybody must go to clean up the road from the city of Chorostkow to the station'...there was a lot of snow they said they wanted to open up the road...we knew that we have to work because this was the occupation of the Germans, so we went. Had we know where we were going, of course we would have run away. And we, when we came there we were 84 boys from Chorostkow, we were there 10-15 minutes working on the snow, all of a sudden we notice we were surrounded by Ukrainian police...and they tell us to run towards the next city...more Jews came and together we became already a group of maybe three, four hundred...we had to run very fast. Whoever couldn't, got a beating or he was shot...the same day, in the evening, we came to...jail. March 19, 1942...in order to count us, everybody had to get a very good punch with a strong stick over his head...everybody came in, most of us got wounded, bled...every day they used to count us on the same way by beating, with no food, no water for three days... they put us in a small rooms...we were 60-80 people and there was no place where to sit down and to lay down. We only stood. Most of us thought that this is gonna be our end...March 22<sup>nd</sup>, they took us out...gave everybody a little piece of bread and a little bit of water...there were wagons prepared...cattle wagons...we were probably about 500 boys that time. They locked the wagons, and we didn't know where we going. People tried to jump, but we couldn't because there was no windows...they took us to a concentration camp (Kamuncka?)...this should take with a train in a normal way, three to four hours. It took us 18 hours, and we came to Kamuncka?...there was already in existence, a camp. There were Jewish people already from before....they had a small percentage of non-Jewish. The non-Jewish people had a red piece of cloth, square, we Jewish people, everybody got a yellow –some has a star –some had just a yellow piece of cloth in the front and the back. When we came there, and-there-there we, was, something which is terrible to describe. The conditions. No food, no place where to sleep, they pushed us in 3...(to) a bunk. And one little room this must be, 50-60...there was no food and cold and no sanitary –toilets and no way where to wash. For three months we didn't get any water at all to wash...we drill a well and we were able to get some water to wash...they took us right away the next day to work cleaning the snow...to help to build the road...the yelling, and the holloring, the the beating, and the smell from the dead

people which they were killing. It was so terribly –us, we thought we’ll never get out. And very few did get out. I was in this camp for 16 months.

WH: And you thought, throughout that time -.

SH: I came in March. It was a few weeks before Pesach. Pesach I still didn’t want to eat any bread. And there was no matzoh. I eat, I remember –and there was very little food, anyhow –but I was able to get a potato, so I didn’t have to eat any bread...

WH: Who were the guards?

SH: The guards was Ukrainian guards, but the Germans used to come every day to check us. In the beginning I worked very hard...everybody got beatings, but I was young and strong and I made up my mind the only way is maybe to live through the war, if I’ll be recognized as a good worker. Which I did. I worked very hard, a few of us. This helped a little bit sympathy some of them had for a good worker.

WH: Did you lose hope during that time?

SH: I hoped always to live through, however, I was very, very much concerned...Hitler was in 33 months...he managed in the 33 months, to do such a fast job of every day, every day they were killing men, women, young, and old, children. And many times I was worrying and concerned who KNOWS whether somebody’s going to be alive to tell the story. Not thinking that, thank G-d, in 1988 you gonna come to my house in America and I’ll be able to tell you the story and for this alone I should make a sheheyanu. However, this is facts. We did not believe that somebody is going to be alive. I saw stories in concentration camps midt, I don’t think as not only Jewish people, I don’t think any people ever want beating, shooting, hunger, cold, this was life. (His voice drops to a whisper)...after concentration camp...many people were able to be brought out...in the meantime, there’s a very important story I’d like to tell you. It was the first day of Succoth in 1942...they came to our hometown... I was that time in concentration camp...they kill and beat up Jews, and the most of them they took to the railroad station...among them was my father and they took them to Belzec. Belzec is one of the death camps where over 600,000 Jews were killed immediately. They didn’t even let them work. This is fact. I was several times in Belzec checking, discussing with people, books about Belzec. Belzec, although it not being mentioned as much as Maidanek, or Auschwitz, or Treblinka, however, it was one of the toughest, it may be THE toughest – because very few people came out. As a matter of fact, I think only ONE of the 600,000 was alive –one survived...

(Note: Mr. Halpern today says: ...I go –I was there several times... my brother was several times there. We go there to say Kaddish...there is a monuments there. Several monuments. Six monuments in order to mention the 600,000. There’s one monument

which says (in Polish-), this means, 'On this spot Hitler killed 600,000 Jews and 1,500 non-Jews they helped Jews.' Most of the monuments in Poland, they say, 'PEOPLE were killed' but the fact there were JEWISH people who were killed. They don't mention Jewish. They don't. But in Belzec they do mention, because they did this right after the war in 1945, and that time there were still a group of Jewish people, they insist, and somehow 'til date, the monument still stays.)

SH: ...my mother and my brother paid in a lot of money, whatever they had to be able to get me out from concentration camp. But, they wouldn't let me out because I still was in good condition, and...they start to liquidate ghettos day by day...1943, which means, about six months after my father was killed, they killed...they took out 1,000 Jews and this time they didn't take them to Belzec, but they made them march through the city naked and outside the city...the big ditches were already prepared and everybody went to such a board, and they got a bullet. Whether he was alive, or not alive, it didn't matter. And in one day, they killed that time over 1,000...my mother was that time killed...so my brother was by himself, so he voluntarily came already to my camp. And my brother and I were together in camp because there was no place where to go...the ghetto...two months later they came and they liquidated. They killed everybody...by us, in concentration camp we worked hard, but we were still alive.

WH: Your brother couldn't have gone to the woods to hide?

SH: Maybe he could, but he wanted to be with me.

WH: He knew at least, he's alive.

SH: He is alive (inaudible). He came, and we know this can be only a temporary oasis, but every day what you can stay, there were no place to go...

WH: You were there for how much longer after that?

SH: My brother came to me right after Pesach, and we were there 'til July, 10<sup>th</sup>, 1943. This time they notice us, the Germans start to run the concentration camp...but, it was on a Friday night, we saw as many Germans and Ukrainians start to come closer, so a group of people, several hundred people, we were able to run away. We opened up the gate, from the other side, it was dark at night, and we were able to run away.

WH: You said a 'few hundred' ran away. How many were there in total in the camp?

SH: ...must be about 4,000...

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WH: So, if you were in the group of a few hundred ran away, is this because you seized the opportunity or because you happened to be in the place where they were opening the gate?

SH: Everybody was able to run away. This is something that is important to the story and should mark this down. It's a good question. I'm glad you ask me. People know, us there's gonna be they call this a '(axeia?)' How they gonna kill Jews. Yet most of them said, 'Where they gonna run –there's no place to go.' And they said, 'Shema Yisrael' and they they sitting there waiting –maybe they wouldn't –maybe they will. Now I'm gonna tell you, I was even –I did not run away too far. I ran close enough, as I heard when there were –I couldn't run too far, because I ran away at night, Friday night outside the barracks, and I fell asleep in the field, in such a high corn. And in the morning, I was woked up because I-I wasn't sure if they gonna kill. I figured if they wouldn't kill, I'll go back. If they'll kill, I'll run away further. In the meantime I fall asleep, and the morning, 4 o'clock, or 4:30, I heard already shooting.

WH: So, you knew.

SH: I knew. There's no place to go.

WH: You were with your brother?

SH: No. I was separate. And he was separate. We run away separate. I heard where they came around, the Germans, and they start to holler: eintratten los shnel! And start to beat them, and I already start to hear shooting. And I start to hear, people already, while holloring, and I just said, 'lay down,' and I said, 'Shema Yisrael' – and, this day, Shabbat, 7 days in Tammuz, 10 days in July 1943, this day was to me like a 100 years long. I heard where people were holloring, begging and they were shooting and this was going on all day long.

WH: You didn't move?

SH: I didn't move. Because they were shooting. And if I move, I'm definitely gonna to be killed. If a bullet will get me, (inaudible) but maybe they wouldn't, and while there were shootings because many people were on the field. And some of them got hurt. Thank G-d, I didn't get hurt.

WH: What happened at the end of the day?

SH: Ten o'clock at night, when everything was quiet already, and it was dark, I just got up, checked myself out-

WH: Make sure you're still there?



SH: I'll still there! Nothing is missing. And I start to go, I felt I have to go back home, close to home. I came on one Ukrainian, and I want to find out what happened, because I only heard, and he told me that 'EVERYBODY was killed'...I just decided that I have to go further and it took me three days, from Saturday night 'til Tuesday night, until I came...to a Polish family...they used to come to our store and buy...

WH: Would you say that your family was well-off?

SH: We were middle class. We had parnosos. Children had enough money to read, to dress ourself. We weren't wealthy. I was able, when I belonged to (inaudible) I was able to come in and pay our dues every month. And sometimes even pay for a friend, too, which a poor fellow didn't have any. But, we were far not wealthy, we made a living. We had parnosos. And this was important an achievement, to make parnosos. And especial when the boys could work, we were three boys. Lately, one of our -my oldest brother -I mentioned before we were four, but in 1929 my oldest brother passed away...t.b. -...we were three boys, my brother Avuchaim, and my brother Harry, which now lives in New Jersey. With me, he's my partner and my good friend. I'm very happy. Thank G-d I have him...when we grew up and helped my father in business, parnosos was already much more better. However, we still weren't rich, we made a comfortable living..

WH: So you went to this family -.

SH: I went to the family...and my brother was already there. He ran away and he came also the same day as I...

WH: Did you have an agreement that you would -.

SH: I didn't know. There was no discussion...this family used to do business. They used to come to our store and buy...I felt that this is a nice family. I may as well go to them. And my brother also felt the same way. My brother did not discuss. When I came at nighttime...July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1943, when the dogs start to bark...young Gorniak (Polish boy) came out, he didn't see me for a long time...maybe three years. And he recognized me, and he didn't talk to me (inaudible) showed me to go to the barn...and he showed me I should go up to the attic. Which I did. I was knocked out for three days. Very little food, and the raining, I slept outside, so I was knocked out, and here was fresh hay, and fresh straw. I said, 'Heh, heh, (needs translation) whatever will be, will be.' In the meantime I will be able to rest a few days. And while I rested somebody start to talk to me in a quiet way, says, 'Who is this? Who is this?' When he start to ask, I said, 'Who is this?' And this was already my brother and we start to hug and kiss. We said, after such a terrible axia? We did not discuss where we gonna find each other. And we found each other right here, and we hope we gonna live through the war. About 10 or 15 minutes later, young Gorniak's mother...she came up with fresh young potatoes, with sour cream,

with borscht, corned? borscht, such a fine (inaudible). I didn't eat this in concentration camp, I didn't eat this in ghetto for a long, long time. And she start to kiss me, and hug me. She said, 'Thank G-d you're here. I promised your mother. My mother wasn't alive. She said my mother 'came to dream to me. And in a dream she asked I should save her the boys and I promised I'm gonna save her and I'm so glad you are able to come.'

WH: Didn't you think that there was something supernatural -?

SH: I believe in G-d! I believe in G-d!...(inaudible) here a Gentile Polish lady goes over and kisses me and hugs me, and she says, 'There's a terrible war goes on. And we have to help each other.' I want you to know, those people kept us for 8 ½ months.

WH: At the risk of their own lives.

SH: They knew very well, that if we gonna be caught, we gonna give away their life. In order to save our life, we endangered their life. Because I have witnesses where other Jewish people were hidden by Pollacks, and when they were caught, they used to kill the Jews and the Pollacks, and they used to burn their farm. They kept us for 8 ½ months, they gave us food -better food than they ate themselves. They had a nice big farm...until Russian liberate us in March 22, 1944...we were liberated about 14 months before the war ended...what I did then? Then...Russia...made a mobilization, everybody from 18'til 54 must go in the army...in the meantime somebody told me that the director...from '39 to '41...I had a job...came back. I didn't have nothing what to loose. I wasn't too anxious to go to the army...so I felt I'm gonna go to him. I came in to him...he saw me, he started, he hugged me, he kissed me...he says, 'It's good you are alive' (in Polish) 'What's you're doing?' So I told him tomorrow I have to go to the army...he wrote on a piece of paper, he says, 'from tomorrow on, you are the Director'...from this and this factory. Now I can tell you this job it was recognized that time so important like Kissinger's job is, was like Secretary of States. Because not only I didn't have to go to the army, but I became (anacharnik? director) over a factory which had over 100 people. I had a right to pick people he should work in the factory...(which made) spirits...rubber tires...I worked there until May, 1945, the war end, and a law came out that anybody who was born in Poland can't leave Russia and go to Poland...I did not want to stay in Russia I put in an application to my director...that I want to leave this job and go to Poland. When I gave him this application, he tore it. He says, '...why do you want to go to Poland?' So I told him the truth. I'm not gonna go to Poland to stay in Poland. But here most of the family is killed and I cannot stay here but I have already that time a card from my uncle in America. I told him I have an uncle in America, and I want to go to Poland, through Poland to America. The prestige from America was always great in Russia. He personally loved very much America. And he released me. And after two weeks I left my position in Russia and I went to Poland...right away I started a business. We opened up a business, my brother and I...Hitler was very lucky to me personally I was able to

meet my lovely wife in ?Mittland? and we start to go out, and we start to make plans. Original we thought we gonna stay long time in Pole –in the meantime we heard they killing already Jews. They killed a Jew there, they beat up -.

End of Tape #1, Side A

**Tape #1, Side B**

WH: From the story you told me, where a few hundred ran away, and the other thousand said, ‘Shema Yisrael’ there it took an action on your part to save your life.

SH: I always had in my mind, during the German time, I will not sit and wait until they come and shoot me even if I see he comes, I’ll run! (inaudible)...from the 300 I want you to know, it is important to tell, from the 300 that are on their way from about, oh, the total must be close to 4,000...10% run away but there was no place where to run! There was 2,000 kilometers away were the front –and where we ran, the Ukrainian police and the Germans were running, trying to catch us. The fact is, where we were liberated only 8 ½ months later we start to look around, how many people were saved. And we find ourselves about 35-36 people from this entire camp from Kamunka were alive. From our shtetl of Chorostkow, which was over 2,000 in our shtetl...100 were left.

WH: It seems to me, that it’s quite a coincidence that of the very few people who made it, who ran away, you and your brother both made it –I’m wondering, did he also have the answers like you? ‘I’m not going to sit around and wait until the Germans.’

SH: ...yeh...we always talked about it.

WH: Did this have anything to do with the way your parents brought you up, their attitudes or the type of people your parents were?

SH: No, I would say it’s ‘mazel’ – just thank G-d we were lucky. We were able to run away. Not because we did something. I just did not want to wait like when I saw this coming, I always run away. The time when I was suppose to go to concentration camp, I mention, I got a job...in a farm to work. In camp, himself, whenever was, I tried to do things not be ready –tomorrow they should shoot me – and I worked hard and somehow I built up a little reputation in camp, ‘cause I’m a good worker and this also helped a little bit.

WH: Every day of course was a struggle.

SH: EVERY DAY, every minute...

WH: People in the camp must have mentally given up at many points at which you didn’t give up.

SH: I worry, if somebody gonna be alive, I told you about it, but personally, I said I'm not giving up. I'll always do something. I'll do my best to run away. If I'll be caught, I'll be caught, but at least I would not wait. If I would see he's coming after me, if I cannot fight him, I would try to run away.

WH: So, after all this happened, you went by Poland and you had an uncle in America.

SH: 'Yes...my brother and I opened up a wholesale –flour, sugar...kasha, and all this and...we had a good business. I planned to stay there. But when I found out they start to kill Jews in several places. I decided in December, 1945 that we're gonna leave.

WH: How did you do that? You were married?

SH: No. I made arrangements that she and her mother...and my brother and I and cousins and some other friends. We paid them. We had money because we were in business already, and we thought we'd be able to go –legally. We wanted to go to West Germany. But this was false. They fooled us. (His wife says, They were inaccurate...the transport, whatever people had registered under, who had visas to go into Germany, but when we got to the Czechoslovakian border it turned out, that they did not obtain a transit visa to Czechoslovakia. So the Czechoslovakian authorities said, ' You cannot go through -'.') We somehow, with very big difficulty came to Western Germany. We had friends in a camp. (Fairmount?)...When we came in there, and I saw people are still going with a can to get a little soup in the kitchen, people still sleep several families in one room. I didn't like it. I had some money with me. I felt already I am a liberated man and I don't want to stay this way...I found an apartment...community of 500 Jewish families...and we arranged, -got married, and we start to think about it, 'Yes,' we want to go to America, possible to Israel, we thought. But, if until we will go we want to live like human beings, we don't want to stay in a camp like many, I would say probably 90% of the survivors lived in a camp.

WH: And you didn't?

SH: We didn't. We took an apartment and we looked around for a business...in 1946 we opened up already a business in West Germany, and thank G-d we were able to make not only a good living, but we were able to help other people. We were Zionist, my brother and I. We organized a Zionist organization in Berlin...the Jewish people came, and we helped...that time we used to go illegal to Israel. We helped many people to go on the Exodus...G-d helped us, we had a son, Freddy was born in 1948.

WH: In other words, you were already there for two years.

SH: Yes, and we had a very fine business...my brother got married in Germany...we took care of the family life, took care of the Zionist organization.

WH: At this point you couldn't come to America yet?

SH: No. No. We registered ourselves immediately, but it wasn't so easy. It took us three years...

WH: Why did it take so long? The affidavit took so long?

SH: No. America, they wouldn't let in. There's a new law came up with Truman came out with a new law, and he allowed us people -.

WH: D.P. people?

SH: -If we can come in. But until this law they wouldn't let in -only you had to have like a son could come to a father or to a mother, a brother to a brother. To a sister she was very close she was -an uncle was already...it took time. It was very tough to come to America.

WH: What about Israel? You said you had thought about going?

SH: When Freddy was born I changed my mind because I -felt I went through such a terrible war and the conditions were still in Israel very tough. My uncle, was ready. 'Come, you can always go to Israel from America,' and I decided I want to go to America and if I wanted to go to Israel, I'll always be able from America.

WH: So, you got to the United States. The boat left from where? Bremerhaven?

SH: Bremerhaven. From Bremerhaven we went with General Eltinger. This was an army boat. It took us nine days to come to Boston. And from Boston -we were an hour in Boston and we came right away to New York.

WH: What was the trip like?

SH: I was mostly sick. My wife was pregnant with our second son, David. And I thought I'll be able to help out, but I was sick, very much and she was helping me out.

WH: You got seasick?

SH: I was seasick, yes. And I still till today I don't like to go on a boat. But we came here and I came here, and I start to -I saw the realistic of America, I couldn't speak English. My mouth was completely closed. My wife spoke a little English, but very little. But I

couldn't speak at all. Because in Germany, while she was able to go to a teacher and learn some English, I was busy in my business. But I had some money, not too much, about \$6,000 that time I came already to America. And for \$1,000 we organized ourselves a little apartment.

WH: Where did you live?

SH: In the Bronx, on Webster Avenue near the Concourse.

WH: When you came here in the beginning and took the train to New York –did your uncle meet you?

SH: I came to my uncle, yah, and my uncle gave me a very fine welcome. I slept over one night at my uncle and I thought that my uncle had such a big apartment. When I came in, my aunt gave us a beautiful dinner and she gave us a bedroom and we went to bed we thought this was wonderful. But when I got up in the morning and saw my uncle and my aunt sleeping on the chairs, so I said, 'No, I don't want to do this.' The next day I arranged with myself a furnished room, and we went, and later on after a few months we were able to get a small apartment.

WH: This was '48?

SH: No, '49. And, in order to learn English, I went to work for a company called Daitch Shopwell...I worked there for a year time, and I open up a little bit my mouth, I was able to understand (inaudible) English, too.

WH: You didn't go to night school?

SH: After a year, no I did, at nighttime we used to go to Fordham University. I lived very close, Fordham-Fordam Road. Nighttime we used to go four, five times a week, I used to go for two hours to learn English. And daytime, it helped to make a living.

WH: I'd like to know if you could remember when you were on the boat...what was your first reaction when you saw...(came to New York).

SH: When I came in the nighttime, we came at nighttime and they wouldn't let us out for whole night. Just till the morning. And we –I saw thousands of cars are going. Well, in Europe we didn't see cars. If a car used to pass through it was a big deal. And here I saw thousands of cars are going –I thought that everybody was a wealthy man. Everybody very smart. I was very much impressed. What do you know. We were young, hopeful and thanking G-d we were alive! And planning, and, and thank G-d, G-d was good to us.

WH: What was your first impression of Americans?

SH: Very much. I was very pleased that I came to America. Because I came in, things what was very important in Europe, I saw is not important to have. To have an apartment where you have already hot water and cold water and bathroom facilities (inaudible) was normal for the average American. In Europe, in order to have such an apartment, you have to be rich.

WH: what about the people? The people on the boat?

SH: The people on the boat were most of them were D.P.'s, Jews and non-Jews and of course I always like to talk, to find out, and I was friendly, and I am friendly. The atmosphere – people were nice to us. On the boat there was not too much what to do, especially if you didn't feel good. But when we came out my uncle gave me a very fine welcome. And I went to work. And although I-I worked very hard, but I didn't mind. I didn't mind at all to work. But, I felt that this is the place which I wanted.

WH: When you were working for Daitch, you eventually went into business for yourself?

SH: I worked with Daitch for a year and a half. After a year, I start to look for a business...I left about \$5,000 in the bank. And I start to look for a business, and I took in another fellow which also was a survivor...his name was Julius Israel...he and I, used to Sunday, we didn't go to work, we used to plan how to go into business. In the meantime my brother came. So my brother, and I, and this Israel, bought one store on Broadway and 41<sup>st</sup> Street. We bought this store for \$36,000... and we start to work very hard. I already knew a little bit of business. My brother just came from the boat. The other fellow (inaudible) knows a little bit. And we start to smile nice to the ladies, we gave them good service, good prices. I think we considered ourselves business people who know how to run a business and we did our business 50% more than the owner before who sold us the store. And after a year and a half we paid off the entire mortgage. When we paid off the mortgage I felt already strong. One time our driver...tells me a Safeway going to be closed because the store is for them too small. 'would you like to see it?' I said, 'yes.' He took me over...I took a look, I see the store is a bigger store. I walked over to the manager and asked him how much business the store does. He told me, the store is doing a nice business. I find out it's doing as much business as my store did. The size was about the same, so I went right to the landlord. It wasn't so easy, but finally, the (inaudible-? landlord) and I signed the lease...meantime I needed some money. Eleven o'clock at night on Channel 7, Citibank advertise that any businessman needs a loan –he should come to Citibank. I needed money. Monday morning, I came up to Citibank. They called themselves that time, National Citibank –I came and I told them –I heard you advertise you wanna give loans. I have one store that is already completely paid off, I want to open up another store and I need some loan. He didn't mark down anything. He asked me my name, where I have the store, from where I come, how long I am in the country. He didn't mark anything down, but he did remember because I know he asked

me which one am I doing business. Later on the wholesale people told me, that he did ask about me. And they told him, that I run a business proper. And I pay my bills. He told me, 'Mr. Halpern, why don't you come in Thursday. Thursday, we'll see what we can do for you.' I came in Thursday, and the check was ready. He gave me the loan whatever I needed. And we opened a second store. And a year later a third store. By 4 years we had already 4 supermarkets. We were considered a chain.

WH: What was it called?

SH: Thrifty Supermarkets. The first one called Food (inaudible) Supermarkets. And three, we had 'Thrifty's.' We had three on Broadway, and one in the Bronx. And, as we felt we had already some money, maybe my brother and I had already a hundred thousand dollars. We felt =we start to miss the Shabbas. My brother, he start -we always had kosher when we came here to eat kosher. We always davened, but Shabbos I had to work in the store and I didn't like it. And then, Jewish people used to pass by the store going Shabbos davening. From davening, my brother suffered terribly and I suffered.

WH: Where were you, in mid-town?

SH: Broadway...122<sup>nd</sup>, 141<sup>st</sup> and 148<sup>th</sup>...and I said we have to do something to go into business where Shabbos you should be able to go davening. So, we looked around...(inaudible) we wanted to buy out Manischewitz...just a business, you know, before we came, we only looked how to make parnosos. Not to work for somebody. To work hard, but to work by yourself. I didn't want to -I felt, that to work for somebody like I'm a slave again and I didn't want to be a number like I was in concentration camp, a number. I wanted to be -I should be, somehow (inaudible) if you work for somebody in a factory, a thousand people working five hundred people working, I felt I'm a number there. I didn't like this at all. And finally, I start to look around. I found some people, they are in the building trade, and I drove out, and looked up, and I saw, 'What 'cha doing?' You watching, and it's a business like any other business. Of course we went very conservative. I had that time, with my brother, with my partner, we had four stores, so we sold one store. And we got out \$40,000 and we went and we made, and we bought with some other partners, 39 lots. (inaudible) And after we finished one job, we saw we can make a living. We have to sell off the stores.

WH: These lots were for stores?

SH: One family houses...

WH: You didn't really have direct experience in the building business...?

SH: It's a business like any other business. I think the most experience I gained in business is in my father's business which I sold one dekker of feffer, one pound of salt, one pound of



sugar, and to go to the store, or to help sell, to buy some wheat, grain from the farmer. Business is business. If you know how, this is business. You have to do, just like a writer knows how to write, like a doctor knows how to cure, just as a musician knows how to play, (inaudible) You have to try to buy and sell. You buy for at least you can, and sell as maximum you can as long as you can make a profit. The same time, it gotta move, if you cannot take this price, you take this price, as long as you not losing, and thank G-d, G-d was good to us.

WH: When you were here, did you talk a lot about the Holocaust? Did you talk to people?’

SH: Yes. I always did. I remember when I came in 1949, I was going, that time I lived for a while in Brooklyn. I was going in a bus in Brooklyn. In 1949, I was only two or three months in the country, to Daitch, to the Bronx, because I worked in the Bronx. On the bus were 99% Jewish people and (inaudible) worked together with me, and one lady said, (inaudible) ‘Oh, no, times are no good we cannot get any overtime. During the war, times was wonderful years. My husband used to make overtime and he bought me a mink. And he bought me a mink coat.

WH: To America?

SH: To America. And she start to praise the war years and I got very much upset...and I said, ‘In the time when your husband were making overtime for you to buy a mink coat I was in concentration camp and they used to kill us and instead you should think how to help us! You were happy that your husband is working overtime’ and she also start to praise very much Roosevelt. She said how Roosevelt was a savior. Roosevelt, was the one where saved the, the Jews, and saved America, saved this, so I got upset, I says, ‘Roosevelt should be, uhh, Roosevelt, because of –Roosevelt could have saved a million Jews or more and he didn’t save’ –those people wanted to kill me on the bus. ‘What do you mean, I said something against Roosevelt?’

WH: Mostly American -.

SH: Mostly Americans. They ALL Americans. But then was Roosevelt, was a, was a G-d. Roosevelt. And here a greener boy comes over and he tells them that Roosevelt is not good. I said Roosevelt should be tried the same way as Hitler.’ This is the way I remember I told them: ‘Roosevelt and Churchill...(inaudible) ...because if two fellows are watching the third one –three fellows are going together, and one is being attacked and, and these two are watching and not helping, they should be tried the same way, I said. When the, when the Nuremberg where they had the trials for the S.S. they should have had Roosevelt and Churchill the same time...(inaudible?pardoned?) because they could have saved the Jews and they didn’t. Those American Jews looked at me, ‘Wha-wha-kind of chutzpah this greener boy!’ But I told them. I always used to talk. I talk to my children, even, and some, not every survivor has talked about it. I took my sons –my

two sons already I took them to Auschwitz –I took my older son, my middle son, my younger son, I took into Auschwitz . Now, of course, after the liberation. And I showed them. I give them books to read. And I want them to know about it. I think they should all know.

WH: What was their reaction?

SH: Their reaction. I think it's every child of a survivor knows, feels the same way. I think the survivors that speak to the children, the survivors tell them not exactly. Just like you know.

WH: Did you ever have, like, you have memories of what happened, right very clearly. Do you ever find that you have nightmares? Do you ever dream about it?

SH: Yes. Sometimes I have a (inaudible? memory) they are still running after me and I wake up.

WH: More now than when you first came here?

SH: No. no. It gets less and less. But I still have them. I think it used to be more before.

WH: When you think of the achievements that you made here in this country, what are you most proud of?

SH: Proud, most proud of the family. Most proud of the family. Thank G-d I was able to raise a family, and this –thank G-d for everything. Material things is material things. I'm proud. But the most I'm very proud. I'm proud also because I'm doing (inaudible-?favor). This I'm very proud. We do a nice business in Israel. And the Israeli business, the people in business know about it. Not because I'm telling it. The best place for an American Jew is to do business in America. Yet, we are an exceptional –very few Jewish people. I'm talking wealthy people who want to invest as much money in Israel what we invest. And not because of (inaudible? charity run?) But we run this as a business. It's got to make business sense. But, the most important thing, we are proud, we have several hundred people working today for us in Israel. And whether we make money or we don't make money –let the people make a (inaudible? honest?) living.

WH: That's very nice. Where –what, in building?

SH: We have buildings in Israel. We have –apartments and two hotels and we have some business in Israel.

WH: You would say, you said you were very conservative when you started in business. Would you say you are a cautious person?

- SH: Yes I am. For example, when we, I told you I'm conservative but I didn't mention –I'm glad you asked me –for example I didn't sell off the four stores and leave it and go out. What I did, we sold one store and my brother stayed still in the store with other people. And I went, and I bought some (inaudible). We sold the other stores that came with the four. I always tried –and G-d forbid if I would loose –I have a way to still to what to come back. I had a family to support and I wanted to be careful. The family shouldn't, they shouldn't –stay without any.
- WH: When you think, if you give advice to other people –let's say, you give advice to your children. Do you think it's more important to have a job that gives you, for instance, security, or a job that is challenging?
- SH: Challenge, I feel. (inaudible) Security is one thing, but challenge is very important. Security is not for everyone. I mean, certain people cannot challenge. You'll find out a 100 boys from the same colleges to the Army –90 will stay soldiers –9 will become officers –one will become a general. You –not everybody, but if you don't challenge, you wouldn't go too far. (inaudible) Until today, if I wouldn't take certain risks...
- WH: So, in a sense, a lucky person makes his own luck?
- SH: I believe in G-d. I feel that G-d helps, but even G-d says, You do and I will help you.
- WH: You said when you were hiding, with the Gorniak family, you said that you felt that you and your brother (needs translation) to go through the war, do you feel in a way, or did you feel in a way, that having lived through the war, it's almost as though G-d was smiling on you? That you led a charmed life?
- SH: I always feel that way.
- WH: Do you continue to feel that way?
- SH: Till today, I feel G-d helps me. I always used to. When I didn't have my tfellin – (inaudible) but yet, I davened whatever I knew by heart and I didn't have a siddur at that time when I was in hiding and I pray to G-d, and I, I always hoped that I'm –until today! Anything -.
- WH: Did you feel during the war that G-d abandoned the Jews when you saw all the terrible things that happened what was your reaction? I mean, a lot of people ask this question, since you say you believe...

SH: I believe, but, uhh, the question in my mind came true –where is G-d? (inaudible) When I saw people going into that –such a fine people, great people, rabbis,...(inaudible). There are the question of, ‘Where’s G-d?’ But (inaudible).

WH: But you asked the question.

SH: The question came.

WH: But you still believe.

SH: I still believe.

WH: Some people stop believing after they ask the question.

SH: (inaudible) I always believed because I had situations where I –I felt, you know, depends how you look at this. I remember running away from concentration camp and I didn’t know how to go. I didn’t want to go with the villagers because of the police. German police. Ukrainian police. So I went with the fields and I didn’t know, should I go right or should I go left. In the meantime –a pigeon was going in a certain direction. I said, ‘I don’t know whether to go right or left. I’ll follow this pigeon.’ And for a long time this pigeon was going to the front and, I was going and this was the right direction.

WH: So you believe that G-d took care of you?

SH: I believe that G-d took care of me.

WH: What about your children?

SH: My children all went to Yeshiva...

WH: Where did they go –(JAC)?

SH: (J.A.C.?) They started out, the two older ones started out in Broyer’s Yeshiva when we lived in New York. But later on when we moved to New Jersey, they start here, at the Jewish Education Center (?) in Elizabeth. And the younger one, of course started and completed, and they all of them completed at least 12 years, with kindergarten (inaudible)...one married a rabbi’s daughter, he’s very, very frum, the other one is, ahhh, they have a very fine girl (inaudible) he goes to an orthodox shul, he doesn’t eat trefe, I don’t know, I think Shabbas he already takes the car. He drives over but he wouldn’t go to a Conservative shul, he goes to an orthodox shul.- And he sends his children to Yeshiva which we are very proud of, so -.

WH: You have two other sons -.

SH: The other child is still in New York. The one lives in New York, they are not married. And they, on, 54<sup>th</sup> Street near 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave., and one lives on Park Avenue near 22<sup>nd</sup> Street.

WH: What kind of work do your sons do?

SH: Business. (inaudible). The younger one is still in NYO, the youngest, and the oldest one just finishing up now school...(inaudible).

WH: All four of them went to college?

SH: Yeh...

WH: So, they identify Jewishly. Did you spend a lot of time with them when they were growing up?

SH: Not enough. No. I have a little guilty conscience. I should have spent more, and I tell THEM to spend more with their children –because I came, as I tell you before, a greener and I couldn't speak English and I didn't want to be number, a factory worker. In order to stay in business, I wanted to achieve very much. And it's not only that you start a business and the business is going good –it's 'Oh, this greener made money as a good business and he lost it –I want to watch it' and I'm still, 'til today, the business money I watch out with it. I work today just as much as I worked 40 years ago. And I like it. I like my business.

WH: Are they pretty independent, the kids?

SH: Yeh.

WH: Did the two oldest ones –did they marry survivor's children?

SH: No.

WH: They married American children.

SH: They married American children. However, I remember when they used to play basketball, baseball, they used to play in the neighborhood –boys in the neighborhood – survivor's children and American children. First they start together. Before you know it they team (inaudible) the survivor's children are together and American children –my sons had quite a few friends both of them. American and non-American and survivor's children. They all American, but the really closest, the really close friends are the survivor's children.

- WH: How about you, yourself. Would you say all your close friends are survivors?
- SH: My survivors are my closest friends. I have many American friends but the survivors are my closest.
- WH: Do you think American Jews can really understand what you went through?
- SH: That's a very tough question. (His wife says: they cannot because we didn't understand either).
- SH: I cannot blame them for that...
- WH: What about your kids? Do you think they cannot understand?
- SH: (His wife says: 'They are trying to grasp it. It's a very difficult thing to grasp...
- SH: They killed Jews in Chockroff (?)...people know, right the next day, somehow, we know they killed them but we didn't want to believe it. It is almost like, if a man is sick on cancer. You know he's sick on cancer, he knows he's gonna die, but yet he hopes tomorrow is gonna be a new medicine that's gonna come out and he's gonna be cured. Most patients, believe, until -(inaudible) everything is alright, that they already, (inaudible) but in the beginning, they still believe, there's probably gonna come out a new medicine and is gonna be cured. We hoped. Yes, it did happen in Chorostkow, but Chorostkow probably is gonna be saved. And what happened? They wouldn't do -they wouldn't do it probably, America will come and attack Russia and will attack Germany and they will win the war. This is human nature. People don't want to believe this.
- WH: Speaking of human nature, do you think what happened in Europe could happen here?
- SH: Yes, it can happen.
- WH: Tell me what you think about it.
- SH: I feel that it can happen. It may not happen tomorrow. It may not happen the day after , but if the change in politics can come up, and this can happen some time (inaudible) (by) some IDIOT like Jackson...but if somebody comes out and starts talk against the Jews and he wins, then things can happen. In the normal -it's a little bit better in America than in Europe because in America, we have many (inaudible? refugees?)...in Europe there were only Jews against Poles, Jews against Germans...(inaudible). The second one to attack, there was the Jew. In America they have schvartze, the schvartze (inaudible? the schvartze helping us out??) Rather they should criticize everything what the Jew does, they criticize the schvartze...(inaudible) and we have 50 -60 different nationalities and this is good. But here, it can happen.

- WH: They don't like us too much, do they? The schvartze.
- SH: Nobody likes Jews. Because, also a reason, the reason's because the Jew is a little bit more independent. The Jew helps himself a little bit (inaudible).
- SH: (his wife says: 'The Jew is more disciplined. Am I making sense?')
- WH: Yes. One of my questions is: 'Why the Jew survived for so many thousands of years. How are we different. How was it, that after everything that we went through, and we went through more terrible things than any other group of people in recent history, I mean, what happen to us with Hitler and Auschwitz, how did we find the strength, after everything we went through, to come here, start our lives again, to learn to hope, to love, to live again, to have children, to raise families, how are we optimistic enough to be able to do that after seeing so many terrible things –how is it possible to recover after that?
- SH: (his wife says: 'The natural power of life...')
- SH: (inaudible –and needs translation)...I feel the only way to survive, because of the religious, strongly religious, and when they weren't religious, they became one. (difficult audio) We would be today, a nation almost (inaudible –gestiner?)...However, the majority what we lost, the reason we such a small nation, because, through assimilation. We lost most of the Jewish people, because they assimilated. And here in America...(inaudible) we lost because they assimilate. You see, the Reform Judaism, very fine people. The average Reform Jew is a good Jew. He doesn't like to go ( his voice heightens and then lowers) too much in to shul, and he doesn't –but he's a good Jew and he helps Israel. What happens is that the third generation of every Reform Jew becomes a non-Jew. I say, 'every,' maybe it's a little bit exaggerate but I –70-80% which I notice, very fine Reform Jews, a grandfather who is a Reform Jew, the son doesn't go –marries a shiksa, and, and, and his daughter is already a –granddaughter is already a, a non-Jew. The only discovery the Jews, but maybe we don't exactly agree with them. The Jews like you grandfather. And my grandfather. My father. This is the Jews they holding back, because we had trouble, (needs translation) what came 350 years ago. He took away a majority of people, and later on we became non-Jews. Hassidim saved a lot of Jews. It's important the Jews of Boro Park and the Jews of Meier (?) Shareem, we don't agree with them but yet we need them. They help us a lot. The Jewish people were, when they talking a hundreds of years. Now, your other question was, 'How come the survivors are able to organize themselves, and to have families, and to have business, and to have jobs.' I think the Jew is a little bit, (needs translation) we are a little bit, we are the chosen, better. We came here. First we try. It's the same as I did. It's –most of the people. First we want to establish how to make a living. Then we start to establish ourselves, we start to making a living. We start to, 'How can I go Shabbas davening?' 'How can I send my children to Yeshiva?' 'How can I help the other one who doesn't

have it?' 'How can I help Israel?' This is the way Jewish people, we were taught. (Mosheh Rabbeni) taught us 4,000 years ago, (Rabbeni?) taught us that we have to give charity, that we have to run around the streets to find people to give charity. Moshen Rabbeni (he says, 'Rabbweni' instead of Rabbenu') taught us how to give charity. We were always, we were always in the forefront. The leaders in the world were Jews who was –Jesus was a Jew and he proclaimed that we have to give charity. Karl Marx was a Jew and he was a wealthy Jew, Karl Marx. He didn't come from a poor family. And Karl Marx came out and he said, 'We cannot say one should have a lot and the other one should starve from hunger.' Karl Marx came out and he said we have to help the man.' We, Jewish people have been known to be leaders, and we have known to, to, to help the, the one who need it. And I think what we did –we maybe look only on the wealthy one and the more educated, but we still have unfortunately, quite a few Jewish people they still suffer, they still don't make enough money and we don't look a them. You'll find in Boro Park people who still working for \$200 a week and (inaudible) people live there, they still go to work in factories. You don't talk to them about that. The Jew is proud. You'll find probably a smaller percentage on welfare Jews than any other one. But, also, something has to do with –just because we went through so many things, through the 1,000 of years, and lately the last 130 years, we are (inaudible) and I think, what we did here, (inaudible)...everybody, you'll find from the survivors, you'll see, there's about 140,000-150,000 survivors, how many became wealthy?

WH: Not too many.

SH: Not too many became wealthy. (inaudible).

WH: What do you think was the difference? People you know. The peoples whom you meet at dinners. Who give charity. Who are able to give. Do you see in any way any difference between them and the other people in terms of what their goals were and what their ideas were?

SH: (His wife says: 'Maybe it's the same as any other...(inaudible)...it's just that the Jews were different.') I see Americans, some of Americans will say, I make a comfortable living, why do I have to work hard to pay more taxes? Why do I need it? My sons will give me a thank you? I'll have to help them to go through school. Education to give them, and I still work. This all goes with the greener too, with survivors. A few of us, don't want any charity. If have to pay taxes, then we have to pay taxes!! I'm proud to pay taxes. I, thank G-d, pay big taxes. And I'm very proud of this. But to me it is a challenge. I'm thank G-d, now 67 years old, I'm gonna be 68, G-d should give me healthy years –I don't even plan to retire. I could have retired 10 or 15 years ago. But this is the way we feel. To me, the business is a challenge, prestige. If I can, if I retire I maybe wouldn't be able to give as much charity. This way I can help my people –they need my help, which he is not in a position to get. 'Cause, if I retire, and he wouldn't make it, there's some kind of (inaudible) that's gonna be like this. If I make more



money, I will spend more money. And I'm not the only one. Most people think the same way. But, uhh, you say why one succeeded, and the other didn't succeed, this does not only go to survivors. This question can be for everybody. You find in America, American people, they're here several hundred years here in the country, and some did make it and some didn't make, much,

SH: (His wife: 'This is so.' She asks the interviewer a question: 'You became a professor of a prestigious college, how many boys went to school with you, how many of them became successful and prominent as you?')

WH: It's a good question. The only thing I can say is, that in doing the interviews with people, and talking with survivors, and thinking of my own community. A lot of the children did do well...statistics...that the children of survivors are the least assimilated of Jewish children in America...survivors and their children have the highest rate of identification with Jews of any part of the Jewish community. They seem to be carrying it on to their own children also. You told me yourself, that your grandchildren will go to yeshiva, right, that they are religious. I think, to me, to the world, to America, it's got to be remarkable that after everything that you went through that you tell us, that you say you believe in G-d, that you daven every morning, and that's a very, very important thing for other people to know...(inaudible) when the Viet Nam war happened here, what did you think? What was your reaction?

SH: I'm gonna say -it's a good question! In my house, my two sons, Freddy and David were that time in the college.

WH: Where were they?

SH: Freddy was in the University of Pennsylvania, the oldest, and David was in Boston University. And the colleges were of course against Viet Nam. And we were with them. College boys. And we felt exactly the way - I was a patriot. American patriot. I love -I still love America because I remember how it was to live, NOT in America. Not even by Hitler, but even before the war in Poland that we had very little to say. And here, thank G-d, we are, we are free people, when we are 'free.' We MEAN IT free! And we are successful, and we have a good life, and I'm an American patriot. And to me, I thought that whatever my president thinks -.

Conclusion of Interview

