

Nathan Krieger

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Abstract

Nathan Krieger was born in Wojnicz, Poland on February 21, 1917. He never knew his father, who left Poland for America in 1921. Nathan was one of six children, and the only one of his family to survive the Holocaust. When he was twelve years old, he worked as a tailor's apprentice, and later became a tailor. He got married in the ghetto(?) in 1943.

Nathan was interned in Auschwitz from 1943 to 1945. At the beginning of his internment, he was forced to do hard labor, and due to malnutrition, he had become a Muselmann. Before he was selected for the crematorium, he was chosen to work in the camp kitchen, peeling potatoes. A Jewish leader helped him acclimate to new foods, so that he would not get sick. He then started working in the vasherei (camp laundry). The rest of his group of 500 were sent to the crematorium.

After Auschwitz, Nathan went on the Death March from January 18 to April 15 1945 from Poland, through Germany, into Czechoslovakia. There were originally between 12,000 and 13,000 prisoners on the march, and only about 100 of them survived.

After the war, Nathan was reunited with his wife, who had been in Auschwitz and other camps. They were in the DP camp in Landsberg. In 1949, they came to the United States, where Nathan found work. He started his own mens' clothing business in 1955. He lived in New York, and initially built his business in New York. After that, he commuted to his business near Atlanta, Georgia every week. In Georgia, Nathan experienced anti-Semitism. He treated his employees well, paying them more than they would make in comparable jobs. At one point, he experienced a nervous breakdown – according to his doctor, it was because he was too happy.

Nathan and his wife raised a family in New York. He believes that the Holocaust could happen again. He is also concerned about the attitudes of Jewish people in their relationships with others.

Tape 1, Side 1.

NK: Lately now I'm getting better already, but in the beginning I was very depressed and I took a book and I started to read, my mind was someplace else, before, when my wife was alive, I used to love to read for hours - all kinds of books. Mostly I read history

books, and about Israel, novels. Any book that came out about Israel, I was always interested because in my younger days, I was a Zionist.

WH: What town were you born?

NK: Wojnicz, 1917. (Poland).

WH: After you were liberated?

NK: In 1945, we came back to Poland, to my town. I was liberated in Czechoslovakia.

WH: This card game, you started it in 1946?

NK: We were with two, three couples in Germany after the war, very close to each other. And then when we came here, we all came here in 1949, so we continued.

WH: When you get together, what do you talk about usually?

NK: No matter what we talk, it comes out, the concentration camps. But, my wife was with the sisters, there are two sisters, she was with them together in Auschwitz, and I was with the two husbands in Auschwitz.

WH: How long were you there for?

NK: From 1943 to 1945, in 1944 I was already a Muselmann and I was in [illegible] for the crematorium, and I remember like today that was on my birthday, February 21st, they picked up the 500 people to the crematorium, the Germans, picked [illegible] people to go [illegible] this was just for the outside world, for the Red Cross. You know, they picked thirty people to peel potatoes in the kitchen, where they used to cook for the Germans. And I was picked between the thirty people. I was swollen, and I was tall, and I always kept myself clean, so I looked a very, very healthy guy, but I was all swollen already. I couldn't walk, hardly could walk and between those thirty people, when they took us out and brought us in to the kitchen to peel potatoes, they asked who is a tailor, so I was a tailor, and with five other guys or six, I don't remember how many, and they gave us two pails of hot water to carry from the kitchen to the vasherei (laundry) where you clean the laundry, so my luck was, I came in, the first one to the vasherei (laundry) with the two pails of water and that was my examination as a tailor. When I came into my vasherei (laundry) I couldn't believe my eyes what I saw there. There were five Jewish guys...and I saw bread, and I saw salami, and I saw butter, it was like – I couldn't believe it! So he says to me, (the Jewish leader) 'Do you want to live?' So I said to him, 'Of course! Who doesn't want to live?' So he says, 'If you want to live, you can't touch any of those things, because once you are going to touch anything, your stomach is not used to food, whoever comes [illegible] salami or, rich soup, and he gets diarrhea and a day later he's not here anymore. So if you want to live, and if you want to listen to me,' he said 'you're going to live.' So I don't know. Today I could say I was smart – God gave me the will power. You know, I listened to him, and I listened to him, so he goes ahead and he takes a potato and he goes outside in the back of that vasherei (laundry) and makes a small fire, and he said, 'Here is four pieces.' He cut them in four pieces, burned

it, come back inside, I'll give you black coffee, and he said, 'every four hours, this is what you have to eat.' So, he said, 'I know you are going to be hungry, but your stomach has to get used to food. Otherwise you'll never survive'. So, anyhow, God was good to me. He gave me the will power and I listened to him. And then he started, he gave me a piece of bread, you know, and I toasted it, and black coffee, and after two, three days I ate that stuff he started to give me and I would say within two, three weeks, I was already a mensch... so I walked over to him and I said to all the five guys, 'I don't want you to work, I'm going to do all the cleaning, I'm going to do all the fixing, all the ironing. I don't want you to work. I'm going to do the work. I'm strong and I'm going to do the work for all five of you.'" He says, 'Why are you doing this? I said, 'The reason I'm doing this is because if you are going to send me out from here, I'm finished I'll never make it. If I was outside [illegible] better than anybody else, and young, as long the war wouldn't last forever, maybe I'll have a chance to survive. Because I didn't think that there's anything better exist than what was outside. So, he looks at me, and looks at me, and he says, 'I happen to like you.' I said, 'Well, if you happen to like me,' I said, 'when I came in you ask me I should listen to you,' so I said to him, 'how about if I would beg and plead with you, you should listen to me trying to help me out, and see that I should remain here, or whatever.'

WH: Why were you worried that they'd ask you to leave?

NK: Because every four weeks they had to change that person, just one, the other five, they were steady.

WH: This man was a wonderful man from Czechoslovakia and he went to the head of the SS who was in charge in the kitchen and he said they have a lot of work and they need a sixth man, a steady man, in the vasherei (laundry) there...and he pleaded with them, and everything, and he said, 'He is a very fine man, and he knows everything, and he has very good hands, and he's a good tailor.' And somehow he got me in there as a steady sixth man.

WH: Why do you think he liked you?

NK: I think, because he saw, whatever he told me to do, I listened to him. It wasn't, believe it or not, it wasn't easy. You know, how could I explain, when you come in hungry, I was there already over a year and a half in Auschwitz, so I don't have to tell you how hungry I was, and you coming into a place, where, like...

WH: Like a palace.

NK: Like hell and heaven. Outside was hell, and this was heaven, I just couldn't believe that something like this existed in Auschwitz. That was Buna. They that came what I was, was Buna[?].

WH: What were you doing in the camp before you wound up there?

NK: Very hard labor.

WH: What were you able to do to try to make it through that time?

NK: Well, because I'll tell you why. I made up my mind, that whatever I'm going to get, to eat. There were people when they got a piece of bread in the morning, they changed it for soup, or they changed it you know for, they should, more, let's say that small piece of bread what they give you, that was nothing. Some people tried to eat a half and put the other half away so somebody used to steal it. I made up my mind, whatever I'm going to get, I'm going to finish, and somehow, I had the will power in me to say to myself, 'You are hungry, but nothing is going to help you, that if you are going to think about food, the only thing that those people, what they were talking about the food the whole day, they didn't survive too long. Because that's all that was on their mind is food, because everybody was starving to death. So, whatever they gave me, they gave me in the morning a piece of bread with the black coffee, I finished it. I said, 'I wouldn't get anything until 12 o'clock, you know, a little bit of soup. It came, to a little soup, to some people were to be the last ones to get a little bit, take a soup – you know, I mean, they shouldn't be just water from the top, so if the Germans used to see somebody was in the front, they went to the back, they hit them, they killed people. So I said, '[illegible] never die like this [illegible] young to go [illegible] say, [illegible] wherever I was, in the middle or the front, or in the back [illegible] and, when they asked to work, I never, ever tired, you know what I mean, to – not to work and the SS should see and get hit for this I said 'As long as I'm going to have the strength, I'm going to do what I was told to do, and then whatever will be will be'. And, that was - I did it until February, and then my luck, probably, was that I was picked between the thirty people, because all the others, the 470 went to the crematorium.

WH: Was your father a tailor?

NK: No. I never knew my father. My father left Poland when I was 4 years old. So I never knew my father. He came to America. And he died here in 1927.

WH: And your mother?

NK: My mother was with us, a mother and children; he was going to send for us.

WH: Were you the oldest?

NK: I was the sixth.

WH: How many of them made it through the war?

NK: No one.

WH: You're the only one?

NK: I'm the only one.

WH: What do you think about, when you think about that? What goes through your mind?

NK: What shall I say?

WH: Do you find yourself asking, how it was that you're the only one?

NK: I always ask that question, I have a lot of questions, but I can't give myself an answer. [long pause] The best answer [illegible] I could come out with, probably, God wanted to – families should continue.

WH: After the war, you were liberated where?

NK: Czechoslovakia. I walked from January 18th until April 15th without food, without shoes, without anything - from Poland, into Germany, from Germany into Czechoslovakia - Death March.

WH: How many of you made it?

NK: I think we went out by 12,000 to 13,000, maybe a hundred. Maybe.

WH: Maybe a hundred made it?

NK: Yes.

WH: Do you still have contact with any of those people who were on that march?

NK: I have. I just came back from Toronto. Which, this is another story. You see what I have here? 161341. [name/inaudible] is 161342. We were together, my name is Krieger, and his name is Kitchler. We were together from the beginning until the end of the war.

WH: And after the war?

NK: After the war...I got married in the Ghetto in 1943.

WH: Were you reunited with your wife after the war?

NK: After the war. She was in Auschwitz and all kinds of camps.

WH: I just want to understand this better. You had a factory down there (Georgia), but you lived where?

NK: I lived up here. But I start to teach people how to make money. Took over a factory – we made 800 coats. And in the same factory, I made 3,000, four dollars an hour was the top, and all of a sudden people start to make in my factory, five, six dollars an hour, everybody wanted to leave them and come to work for me. Because I am a tailor, and I had a good business in New York, and I adopted the American way very fast. You know. And I showed it. I was teaching them.

WH: In Georgia?

NK: 35 miles from Atlanta

WH: So, this letter, '*Go home Jew boy*' was something that was sent to you at the factory? Where were you when it came?

NK: When I came Monday morning, opened up the mail, and I see a letter, '*Jew boy go home.*' I went to the sheriff, I went to the Chief of Police, I went to the mayor, because we bought there eight acres of land, we wanted to build a factory, and the town put in over \$100,000 you know, developing the land, putting in sewers and they realized, you know what I mean, that if I'll build up a factory and I'll increase production, I'll take away a lot of help from them.

WH: What was the population of Buchanan?

NK: Very small.

WH: You don't know who sent the letter?

NK: No. The Ku Klux Klan came to me and they said to me that I'm going to get better protection than President Reagan gets.

WH: If what?

NK: If I stay, I shouldn't close down. So I said, 'I lived under the gun already for twenty years. They said that I was in the [illegible] and that they are going have 24 hours a guard there to watch me.' So I said, 'I'm going to be afraid to go out? You know, I used to love nature, used to go out and take the car, you know, I was finished by 4:30; 5:00 I had nothing what to do. There was no place where to go to eat, you know, and you know if I wanted to have a kosher meal, I had to take the car and go to Atlanta, which I had all the time in the world, but I didn't want to drive back at night. You know what I mean? By myself. Because those trailers, when they went there, you know, I thought that they are going to pick up my car!

WH: Did you consider staying when they offered you this protection?

NK: No, no. Because my wife has a telephone call, 'If you husband would show his face once more in Georgia, he's going to blow his head off.

WH: And you knew that these were the people who had these – [inaudible]?

NK: I assumed. What else? That is, everybody was happy.

WH: Why didn't you continue paying them the regular minimum wage?

NK: Because I needed production – and I put them, instead of time work, I put them with piece work. It was good for them, and it was good for me.

WH: So the other coat manufacturers?

NK: They don't have [inaudible] like me. Those were big times, they run the business like they used to run, you know, twenty, thirty, forty years ago because it's very hard to

get jobs there you understand? There's very little industry there. It's a different America there.

WH: They couldn't raise the wages because they couldn't raise the production?

NK: They didn't want it – in order to – I didn't raise the wages, I showed people how to make money. I have the know-how, I know every operation, I know every machine, not too many guys around in America like me, because I had my business, and I was interested, you know what I mean? I wanted to know everything. I even had foremen and managers but those foremen and managers knew what I had to do, what has to be done; otherwise, I'm no better than them. I told my managers I must have 600 coats a day, and good ones, by the end of the day, I can't ship excuses.

WH: Were you in Atlanta then?

NK: In 1981. I never lived there. I went there Monday morning by plane, and I came back Thursday afternoon.

WH: And you stayed in Buchanan in a hotel?

NK: Yes. And that's what bothered them. Because I was there only for two, three days and I set up the factory, and everything, like a clock.

WH: You have to watch over a business?

NK: You have to know how to set up a business. You have to know how to talk to people, you have to prove yourself that you are a straight man, and an honest man, that I was always. My biggest problem was, when I came to this country, and after two years, I knew a little bit of English. I became a foreman, and then I wanted to go into the business for myself. And then they scared me, they said, 'Clothing business is a whore business.' I said, 'I lived through concentration camp,' I said, 'I don't want to become a whore. (short laugh) - I wasn't there and I don't want to become a whore in America.' I'm making a good living, I was happy, you know, I made nice money. I was a very, I adopted the American system very fast. Then I had to plead with the people and they explained to me why a person has to be a whore to be in the clothing business. They tried to explain to me, there are manufacturers and contractors, they give them a dollar more, so they put away – I said 'I'm going to try to be a mensch and when I promise something, I deliver.' That was my policy all my life. And if I can't deliver, I didn't promise. And, thank God, I did well by being mensch. And that the approach I had over there, when I sat down with a person, I was talking to him; I knew what the person could do. That person didn't know. So I used to tell him, 'What do you have to lose? Why don't you do piece work? You could only make more money.' I said, 'Trust me. If you'll make more money it's yours. If you make less you'll get the same rate. What do you have to lose?' And I said, 'If you're ashamed I should show you now to do it,' I said, '4:30, when everybody will go home, I'll sit down with you and I'll show it to you.' And I had to do it with the five, six, eight people. Then, those eight people, they did the rest of the job for me already because they went around telling the people.

WH: How many people were employed in that factory?

KN: About 180.

WH: And they all lost their jobs and they had nothing?

NK: (indicates yes).

WH: So they must have been sad.

NK: And how! That's the reason the mayor, the chief of police, the sheriff, everybody pleaded with me. You know. And I tried to tell you, I never knew who, that all the women that worked for me, their husbands were Ku Klux Klan! But they came home and they said, you know they came home with money, and they came home, 'He's a Jew from New York,' you know, because over there, a Jew from New York, if you're a New Yorker, you're no good! But if you are a Jew on top of it, you know what I mean? But they used to come with, 'He's a very nice man. He's a very nice man, he shows people, he sits down, and he knows everything. And when he says something, he keeps his word.' And I took a woman, made her a manager, I took a guy, and I used to help out the boys. The school was across the street so the parents used to work for me, 'Maybe you'll take the boy, you know, to come, he needs a few dollars to make,' so instead to take a guy to clean, a steady guy, I used to take these boys from schools. They used to clean the factory and everything. Once you make money, you could be a gentleman. You could be a hero. You throw away \$50 a week, which didn't mean anything; they didn't know what to do for you.

You know those people. And the boys used to come to clean my car to fix my car for free. And they were happy because here the work was hard. The boy came in, I opened up the soda machine, they used to take a soda, you know, or take this, and I trusted them. Once you put the trust in people, they wouldn't have the heart to steal, you know. So, if the parents worked for me, I knew I could give the boys the key. When they finished, they locked the factory, and the next morning, I came and everything was clean. Those kids were happy, you know. I had a keen understanding of human nature.

WH: What year did you come here?

NK: 1949, Marine Shark. That was the last luxury ship. My wife was pregnant.

WH: How did you get the affidavit?

NK: HIAS, from the Joint. My wife had a sister here so we landed here in New York. I came here Thursday, Monday I went to work.

WH: Do you remember what it was like?

NK: I remember Monday I bought the Forwards and I saw 'Operators Wanted' and they needed an operator on *Kosciusko* Street. I took the train, and I see a stop, *Kosciusko* Street. That's it. What I didn't know was that I had to walk about forty blocks to get to that number, but I learned. On the way back, I didn't go that way. The way back

already, I asked, and I did it right. By Friday, I brought home a check already, I think \$78.00. I was a hero. That was a lot of money.

WH: You were an operator in a regular factory?

NK: Yes, ladies clothes.

WH: Did you think of going to Israel at any time after the war?

NK: Yes I did. My brother-in-law said to me, 'If you're going to go to Israel, it's going to be very tough for you to come to America [illegible]. If you'll come to America, from here you could go any place you want.' So.....

WH: You said you worked for two years and then you wanted to go into business for yourself, right? Did you do that?

NK: I went into business, 1955. I went into business, and then what happened is, I had the nervous breakdown. So I went to my doctor and he said to me, 'You know, people get a nervous breakdown because business is bad.' I met a Russian guy, and he tested me, and I came in, and before he took me in, he's supposed to put in \$12,000, I put in five and seven thousand dollars for payroll. I was there a week, he said, 'You don't have to put in money for payroll.' And it started to improve, because I had the, what happened, the delegate from the union liked me very much, and he wanted me, to train me, because they made me for a chairman. I wasn't able to speak even English so I became a chairman, because I used to help out the people in the factory. Somebody made a mistake, and I knew how to run over, [inaudible] and all the people say that, 'This is a nice man. This is what we want. He should be a chairman.' So they used to tell me, 'Okay if I'm going to groom you, you're going to be a big union man.' So I said, 'Who wants to be a union man? I want to be in business. I don't want to be a union man.' So he put me in the business, but for happiness, I got a nervous breakdown.

WH: What do you mean, 'for happiness'?

NK: I wanted a partner, so I could be in business. It was a Russian guy, and I was there for four weeks. Whatever I promised, I did at(?) times as much. And it came Friday, he says to me, 'Well, don't bring in money for payroll, I have plenty of money.' He said, 'with the profits, you are going, we are going to make plenty of profits,' He said he's going to stay a few years because he wants to retire. And I couldn't believe it, what happened to me. You know, all of a sudden, you know, everything - I was young, strong, and everything - and all of a sudden I get up in the morning, I go to sleep, and I can't sleep. I didn't sleep a whole night, to get up in the morning, I start to cry. My wife was in the country. I called up my friend, and I ask him, 'Bring me out to the country.' I came out there, and I was sitting there for three days crying. Monday morning, we took a taxi, we came back, my wife came back with the kids, and we went to the doctor. I told the doctor the story, and he says to my wife, 'He got a nervous breakdown from happiness.' He said, 'People get a nervous breakdown from tsuris (concerns/worries.) And there are people who get a nervous breakdown from happiness.' He says, 'You want

to be happy the way you were?' I said, 'Of course I want to be!' He said, 'Get out of business.'

Tape 1, Side 2.

NK: I didn't even think twice. I called up that delegate, and I told him. He called down my partner and he says, 'What are you doing? Why don't you go and rest up? Feel better. Don't worry about it. Everything is okay. You'll get paid.' I said, 'No, no, no. I don't want to be sick.' And he said, 'I have two children, and I was happy and I live nicely, I made a nice living.' And I said, 'I don't want it.' He said, 'What do you want me to do?' I said, 'Give me back my money.' He said, 'I'll give you back the money right now, but don't do that.' He said, 'I'm happy with you.' He was pleading with me. But I didn't want to hear about it.

WH: What do you think really happened? [inaudible]

NK: That's what the doctor said.

WH: And you believed him?

NK: I believed him.

WH: Why did you believe him?

NK: Because I wanted to be what I was before. You know, I was home, I couldn't eat, I was crying. I couldn't eat. I used to eat, you know, (laughs).

WH: Maybe then all the pressure that came from the war suddenly had an opportunity to come to the surface.

NK: It came like out of nowhere. I have no idea. I want to sleep; I couldn't all night, can't eat.

WH: This doctor was not a psychiatrist, right?

NK: No, a medical doctor.

WH: Did you ever go see a psychiatrist, social worker?

NK: No.

WH: Do you believe in them?

NK: No. To me they all look like they need psychiatrist (short laugh). And I'll tell you one thing. Once, I'm the type of a guy, if I make a decision, I live with my decision. Good or bad. I make the decision, and I'm not going to go ahead and cry over spilled water. But I felt better, it was only a week or two and then my old boss heard that what happened to me, he calls me up and he says, 'You want to come back to work?' And I was the happiest one. And I said to him, 'You know, I'm not feeling so well, I can't produce as much as before.' He said, 'But I want piece work [inaudible].' Came in, I

worked a few weeks, I was a new person. But I couldn't sit any more. Once I felt better, I said to myself, there is a better life out there. There's more money to be made there. But this time, maybe, I'm going to do it a different way. I'm going to ask doctors, I'm going to ask how to, you know, conduct myself, not to get, you know, so overwhelmed with it, you know what I mean, so I said after a while, I want to go into business. So he said, 'If you'll take my son-in-law in, we'll find another business.' So I took his son-in-law, for a partner, and a few months later I was back in business.

WH: Weren't you afraid that the same thing would happen again?

NK: I was afraid, very much. But I also had my mind made up, that I'll never be happy for the rest of my life if I'm going to remain a worker, because I have the knowledge, I have the know-how. You know, I had a way of dealing with people. I was say, a straight person, an honest person, with whom I dealt, and whatever.

WH: Do you see that you learned anything [illegible] with people as a result of the experiences in the camp?

NK: [illegible] don't what to answer [illegible] would say, I came out I was a different, I mean, I was young when I went in you know, but I would say one thing, that's more in my nature or the more the way I was brought up, you know, the way you know, I actually, you know I [inaudible]...as a kid, I was twelve years old I went to work. My mother gave me away for four years as a tailor. And I really didn't have anybody to tell me what to do, you know what I mean? Parents to overlook, you know, or whatever, because one child raised the other.

WH: You didn't have your mother, or father, so what do you think it is?

NK: You were brought up to listen to your mother, you know what I mean. Whatever mother said, that went. You know, and I actually, I developed my life on my own.

WH: When you make a decision, do you make it quickly or do you like to think it over?

NK: I like to think it over, or ask somebody, or consult with somebody, which I feel knows more than I do, he's more experienced in the field.'

WH: Are you an optimist?

NK: Yes.

WH: So now, even after you lost your wife, do you feel that things will get back to normal eventually?

NK: I don't think so.

WH: That's too much.

NK: I hope, you know that things are going to get better.

WH: Do you think that today the generation has a different attitude toward Jews than before?

NK: I think that they have better than the parents, the grandparents, you know, because that was poured into the, you know, anti-Semitism, you know, this and that. To me, I'm hoping that it is because I would like to see a better world for my children, for my grandchildren, you know, so I always like to look at the bright side. If I'm not sure with something, I say, 'Let me think that they are better'.

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

NK: Yes.

WH: Why?

NK: Because if things are going to get bad here, economically, there go the shvartzes (blacks). Give them a little bit of freedom, take all the gentiles, which they look at the Jews, the way they live, and it bothers me a lot about our Jews. The way they conduct themselves, you know. I'm sitting in a shul (synagogue), and listening you know, to those [inaudible]. Young Israel, those landlords, the way they talk, and the way everything, it's terrible.

WH: What do you mean?

NK: No steam. No hot water. Who gives a damn about them [inaudible]? I believe one thing, if you buy a house, and if you're a landlord, and if you're smart enough to buy a house, people should get service. And if not, don't get into it.

WH: You think that they are just creating anti-Semitism?

NK: Yes. Absolutely and it really bothers me, because you know, there has to be a reason why people hate us so much. I understand people hate us because we are [inaudible] a little bit above them; we are a little bit smarter. We are a little bit – I lived through that when I came here with our own Jews. But they came, you know, before me, and here's the 'greeners' (immigrants)...look at him!' And I go to the shop, and I have the American boys working for me, they always look at the way he's doing, what he's doing, and I overheard once, and I walked over to him and I said, 'Let me ask you a question. You were here on that shop before me. Why didn't you buy [inaudible]? You didn't want to have the headache, correct? If you don't want to have the headache, you're happy the way you're sitting, and you're working and this way you get a good dollar and this one get, so I says, 'Why do you angry at me? You were here before me.' 'Yah, but I don't know what you know!' So I say, 'So, what do you want? I envy you too.' I said, 'I wish I would know the language the way you know it.' I said, 'If I would know the language then before, I wouldn't sit the way I'm sitting here. I go still a step higher and a step higher but because of the language', I said, 'I have to hold myself down to the level where I feel I could do the best to my ability.' And this is the reason that scares me and worries me. You know, reading the papers and what's going on with the

whiteheads, with the Ku Klux Klan, and with this one, and with the other one. Germany was a wonderful country. I remember growing up, that everybody from Poland went to Germany to make money, you know the story, we have Palestine in Deutschland. The German Jews, they lived like kings there and everything. They were good citizens and they were nice people, you know. They were more educated than the Polish Jews, or the Hungarian Jews, or the Czechoslovakian Jews. Really, they were on a higher level and they were, as people, they were nicer people. And there wasn't any reason; you know what I mean, the way they conduct themselves, you know, that something like this should happen. Do you understand the comparison I'm trying to make? I'm trying to make?

WH: That it could happen here.

NK: That the German Jewish people, were much, I wouldn't say much nicer, they were the, beautiful, I mean, I can't say a bad word, because American Jewry, they come, they help me, you know, I mean, whenever, if not the Joint, and not the HIAS, I wouldn't be here and wouldn't be able to live and bring up children, they should live the way they live, and everything, I don't mean to criticize, you know what I mean? The American Jews, or America, when I daven (pray) every morning, I say every morning, 'God Bless America'.

WH: Yes, but?

NK: But you ask me a question, and I see the way some of the American Jews, the way they conduct themselves, comparing to the German Jews, the way they were for Germany, you know what I mean? Before Hitler came up. They were much nicer you know what I mean, for Germany, than our Jews are for America. And that could bring another Holocaust or disaster, or whatever.

WH: You mean, when they don't supply the steam or heat to the shvartzes, what they're really saying is, 'They're not Jewish, so who cares about them?' It's not that they're shvartzes, but that they're not Jewish.

NK: [illegible] you know, their policy is, with the [illegible] could do anything you want, [illegible].

WH: [illegible] you [inaudible] you warn [illegible] some [illegible] [inaudible], and you wanted to stop this threat of anti-Semitism in America. What would you do? What do you think we have to do as Jews?

NK: To conduct themselves like human beings, like people. Know to respect the next person, whoever that person is.

WH: You were in shul (synagogue) yesterday, and I thought about the Rabbi's speech, about stealing exams, also creates anti-Semitism.

NK: I was. Shall I tell you something? I was heartbroken to listen to that. You know? It's really a horrible thing. And the yeshivas, you know, we should be – teaching other values and everything. And that, that what bothers me. Because, I hate to use the word,

that the Hassidim, they worse than this and that, but mostly, of those very orthodox, very extreme people, that they're policy is, 'It's me', and everything else, the hell with it. You know, and the clique, what [inaudible] one will do for the other one. But they will find a way of, I would say, allow them to steal from a poor tenant, or from a businessman, or from a next, you know, they are going go into a deal right away to get your money. Not to go into a deal to create a business, and to make money but how to get out the money from the next guy without thinking, [inaudible] whatever they sit and pray every day, you know, doesn't mean anything, because somehow, they'll find a loophole, you know what I mean, that you are allowed.

WH: What about the way they act with each other? Do you think they act nice to each other?

NK: I don't think so.

WH: So you see that when they find the excuse to deal this way with the goyim (non-Jews), they eventually extend it to themselves?

NK: Themselves too, the problem with them is, that their upbringing, that derekh erez (respect), that they didn't grow up, that you had to fight for a piece of bread, that you went to bed hungry, you know what I mean? I'm not talking concentration camps. I'm talking before the war. I think a person becomes a better person if he grows up, you know, if he has to earn every little thing what he has instead of it to be handed to him.

WH: And you did, I mean, to work for yourself.

NK: I started up all my life from scratch every place I went. And, I started up many times in life.

WH: At your stage in life, you said it was 1982, right, you went in again (in business)?"

NK: I was in business for 22 years manufacture men's clothing.

WH: Did you find that the survivors in the business helped each other out?

NK: I did, not friends necessarily, whoever - somebody else, or somebody friend told me he has an uncle or this or family needs a job, I said, 'Send him over!' And I used to teach him, and give him a break. Why not? I felt God was good to me you know, I accomplished something and if I could help somebody, it was my biggest pleasure.

WH: When you think of how you survived the war, what do you think it was due to? What do you think was responsible for you being able to make it through?

NK: I would say luck.

WH: Would you say only luck?

NK: No, I didn't do anything different than I was asked to do. And when I was asked to go to work, I went. I didn't want to hide and then get hit, you know, get killed because they called me - whatever food they gave me, I finished, I ate, and in my mind I think I

was lucky that I could make up my mind, seven o'clock in the morning, whenever I got a piece of bread, that until twelve o'clock, no matter how much I'm going to think about it, it's not going to help me. I'm not going to get it. So, by twelve o'clock I'll have a little bit of soup, and then I knew, we'll come home by six o'clock, we'll have another soup. And I tried.

WH: Did you find that people helped each other in the camps, did better than people who didn't?

NK: I don't think so, everybody was looking to survive. You have to understand that.

WH: In business, you were in what part of the clothing business?

NK: I was a contractor. I set up my factory in East New York.

WH: You were in it for 22 years, and then what happened?

NK: The neighborhood started to get bad. They killed the grocery next to my factory. My son read it in the paper and he called me up, and he says, 'Daddy, I want you out of there! I don't want to get a phone call. Come pick up your father.' Which I said, I have nothing to worry about, because they all were watching me, when I went down, it was dark, and they wouldn't let me go down by myself. I always had people who would work for me, to go, they went down until I went into the car and drove away on Atlantic Avenue and Jerome.

WH: That was what year you closed the business?

NK: 1980.

WH: Did you find that in business, here in America, that you had to be tough to survive?

NK: I knew my business. I never had a problem with people, because people used to come into work, they used to come in for a job. I said, 'If you want to work, this is the place for you. You want to come in two, three days and the next time call up I'm sick, and get the check Thursday, and don't show up on Friday.' I said to one guy once, I said 'four days I'm working for you. Even I'm the boss'. But the fifth day, I said, 'It's mine. And if you take the check on Thursday, and you don't show up on Friday', I said, 'If you're not interested in me, I'm not interested in you. It's piece work and everybody needs the next guy.'

WH: When you came here, did you establish, did you have connections right away with people from the war? In the first years when you came to this country, did you get together with people who were also what they call 'greener'?

NK: Yes. We used to go out on Eastern Parkway. That was the gathering on Pitkin Avenue in those days. We used to live in East New York. And all the refugees used to meet. Marching with the carriages, with the kids, because the shopping center was Pitkin Avenue, that time there were very good stores and movie theatres, and everything. Then

we used to go Eastern Parkway, which was already the better part, we used to sit on the benches, the parks there and everything, Crown Heights part.

WH: What was life like then?

NK: Well, I've always had a group, we were together, and those days when was a good movie, you know, we [illegible], our son was born we would never leave our son with a babysitter.

WH: Why not?

NK: First of all, who could spend the money? So either my wife used to go with her friends, or I used to go with, you know, with the men to movies or whatever, because everybody was the same way. You know, there was one child, and then came another child, and those days we didn't have babysitters. First of all, the money part, second of all, nobody was even thinking to leave the kids. You left there, you had a bar mitzvah, or you had something. A friend came over and watched your children. And when they had, we went to them, to watch their children.

WH: That's lost today.

NK: That's history. It's a different world now.

WH: But didn't that world mean that you were closer because then you knew about each other's children more?

NK: Of course.

WH: It meant that it kept you closer.

NK: We kept together, because somehow it was like a family because, you know, and we were very close. We used to go there for suppers to them, they used to come for suppers to us, and we got together to play cards, we were young, we always had, first we had the meal and then we sat down and we talked for an hour, or whatever, and then we sat down and we played cards, and – or went to a show. You know, used to go to the Jewish theatre. We loved it. We enjoyed it very much.

You see you have to understand one thing. We enjoyed it I think more than anybody else, because coming out from the camps, you know, I thought what's going to happen with the Jewish nations. There were no children. Where we talked, they lost the whole family, when we got together in the DP camps, so, when a child was born it was like a [illegible] for the whole camp. You know what I mean? It was - there were no children. And so, we developed a friendship there, and the people what went to Israel, we still the best friends. I still call all my friends that I'm going here, and I'm going there, don't call because I'm not going to be here, and if I call one, this one has the telephone numbers from the other one, calls them, you know, whatever, and the friends what came here, we still friends from – since 1945, 1946, most of them we know each other from home or from during the war.

WH: What DP camp were you in?

NK: Landsberg.

WH: One of the things that I've been coming across has been that there's a sort of dislike in many cases between the Hungarian and the Polish Jews.

NK: Let me explain you one thing. It comes from it, because after the war, everybody was looking, you know what I mean, you had more – you were looking for connections. You were looking to have somebody. And it's only human nature, you know what I mean?

WH: That you go to the ones that you have in common?

NK: That you know that you speak Polish, you speak Yiddish, there was a language barrier.

WH: Well, among the people who have something in common, does it matter – let's say you have something more in common with Polish Jews, does it matter if the Polish Jew is from Galicia or from [inaudible]?

NK: It doesn't, you know, it goes around a joke. You're a Galicianer, you a Litvak, you know what I mean? The Litvaks think that they are on a higher level than the Galicianer, the Galicianer feel they more educated people who came out, big scholars, from Galicia then, well, (needs translation – I would not? Litvak yidded) They are, really, I personally like the Litvak Jews better than the Jews what I was brought up.

WH: From the Jews who were in regular Poland like (?), Galicia, there's no big difference?

NK: Well, let me explain to you one thing. To me when I came even before the war, during the war, after the war, to me, a person is a human being. You know, I don't care, you know, even as a Jew I always respected the Gentile. If he's a person, if he's a human being, I would go out of my way to give him more respect, you know what I mean? That I would give a fellow Jew, because this you take for granted. And this, you feel the guy's a person, he's entitled, you know what I mean, [inaudible] that's the way I am.

WH: (talking about nursing home in Long Beach) Do you have nightmares?

NK: It's a miracle that I could think normal, that I could function like a human being.

WH: What do think accounts for this miracle?

NK: I think that life to life. You see, we wanted to raise a family; we wanted the best for the children. We wanted to accomplish something. We came into this country, and I said, it's a wonderful country, and the opportunity is there, and I had the drive in me, you know what I mean? Not to, some people decided that making \$200, \$250 a week, they were happy, they didn't want to have any responsibilities and headaches, and they lived their life. And plenty of times, I was wondering, who's better off? You know? Because

business is a lot of aggravation, you know? I had a big responsibility. But everything, I complained once to my manufacturer, so he gave me a good lesson. He said, 'Come over here, boychik (little boy), stop complaining so much,' he said. 'If business would be easy, we wouldn't need you. Everybody would be in business.' You know, and that gave me something to think about it. You know, and so I learned, the aggravation comes, don't take it in, you know, too much too heart, try as much as you can, you know, to live through the day.

WH: You have two children, right?

NK: Yes.

WH: Did you tell them about the war? Did you discuss it with them when they were growing up?

NK: More to my son than to my daughter, because it was very hard for me to talk to my children, because once I started to talk, my family comes up, and then I get very depressed, and then I can't talk about it, because sometimes I sit and wonder, 'Did I abandon them, or did they abandon me? We were nine kids.

WH: Did you ever deal with the larger question of how G-d could have allowed something like this to happen?

NK: I used to go into that, because [illegible] to me. I came out of the camp. I became more religious than I was before.

WH: Why?

NK: Because I said, G-d helped me. I lived through the war, [illegible] I never, you know, people ask me, 'How did you survive?' I could tell them [illegible]. I was smart, I was shrewd, I was you know, I outsmart the Germans, my fellow inmates, or whatever. I said, 'G-d helped me'.

WH: Do you think if G-d was watching that He wouldn't have done something about it?

NK: I'll tell you, If I would go in deep into that, I had to change my life, and I didn't want to change my life because I believed in G-d, and it was easy for me to live, because every time when I had a problem, or whatever, it's – my saying was – 'G-d will help and I [illegible].

WH: (needs translation)

NK: And I'll creep out of it. So somehow, you know what I mean?

WH: It's easier, and it works.

NK: And it works. And if I should start the question out, there are a lot of questions, but who's going to give me an answer? I have to come up with an answer myself. Because you will ask a thousand people and everybody has a different answer.

WH: So you believe in G-d.

NK: Right.

WH: Didn't your children ask where G-d was during the war?

NK: I know one thing. There was a G-d. And I know one thing, I always believed in G-d, and I said, if G-d wants me to live, I'll live. G-d wants me to die, I'll die. But I'm not going to go die because I'm hungry, go out steal a piece of bread from him, or take my bread and change for a soup, or do other things. I said, 'I'm here, I'm not alone, that what happen to Jewish people and I'm not better than anybody else,' and...

WH: Do you think that your children were affected?

NK: I think so. I really don't know how to answer that question. But I think that children of survivors are different than children when they are born, you know, to – I don't want to use the word, 'normal parents.'

WH: Americans.

NK: Americans, or Israelis, or whatever. You have to understand one thing. We were very protective of our children, I feel they wanted to have more freedom, you know, as kids to grow up, and if I would understand then, what I understand now, maybe I would tell them to do things different. Maybe I wouldn't tell them so much to do. Maybe I would let them a little bit more, freedom, or how you say in America, I would give them more 'room to breathe.' I don't remember having too many arguments with my son. Really, we had a very good relationship.

WH: Do you think that he's more protective of his own children? Do you see that he gives his children more independence or less?

NK: Ah, yes, well you have to understand one thing. You know he was my first son, I lost my whole family, he was my – my whole life! He was my whole life. And I had to make another decision, he came home once, and he says, that was 1967, he wants to go as a volunteer to Israel. And I had to sign papers for him, because he was 17 years old. And it was like (needs translation) here I was a Zionist, and here, all my friends heard that the American children that are coming in as volunteers so they all made bet between themselves, 'I'll bet you that Nathan's son is going to be the first one there because he was...' I signed the papers, I let him go, it was a tough decision..."

Tape 2, Side 1.

WH: What did you think of his involvement with the [inaudible] with the whole business? I mean, what's your opinion of these organizations?

NK: Oy. I don't want to answer that.

WH: Really? I didn't know that I've touched on something?

NK: No, no. I tell you the truth. To me, everybody's looking for kovod (honor/respect). You know, too much involved there with them. I think if people doing those things, should be done for history reasons, you know, everything should be recorded, but not that I'm on top, and not that I'm sitting here now at the dais, not that a president has to be for life because you know, I feel that there are more people capable of doing it, you know, don't argue, don't fight, you know, it comes to a commemoration, it comes to – I never missed the one in Madison Square Garden, you know what I mean?

WH: Yes.

NK: But I saw all the fights that went in with that and everything, and the selfishness, you losing a little.

WH: Do you feel that it's right that, I mean, the survivors make the money, right, and they did well, but is it right to have a fancy dinner at the Waldorf Astoria, to commemorate something like this?

NK: That to me, it's a disgrace.

WH: You're not the only one to say that.

NK: I'm saying my opinion. I say we should get together and have coffee and cake, and take the money and donate it to the poor children or to Israel, or whatever. Not to come and show-off the tuxedos, with the dresses, pay so much money – I never went to fancy stuff. I never go for those.

WH: Why do you think they do it?

NK: To show off. To knock the other guy down or somebody should tell his friends, which he wasn't as fortunate as he was [illegible] made as much money as he was, that I'm on the top and you're on the bottom.

WH: There's a lot of resentment out there by the little guy, the average Schneider living in Canarsie.

NK: There are a lot of guys there which are more a mensch. I'm talking about the human being. More dedicated person to the cause than the other guys with the money, well, it was always like that, you know, somehow, one reason or other, they say every person is a selfish person, you know, if you come to commemorate your parents and your uncles, and your sisters, and your brothers, it has to be a different way, than to make a party out of it. Or to have a million fights over it, that to me, it's like they're trying to make a business out of the Holocaust. You know, for their selfish way.

WH: They claim that if they didn't have these fancy dinners, they wouldn't be able to raise fifty million dollars for Israel.

NK: It's possible, I agree with that.

WH: And then they said, if you want to get a guy to give a million dollars to Israel, you got to honor him at a dinner, you got to have the dinner. So in that sense, is it wrong to do it?

NK: If this is the only reason, there's nothing wrong with it, because, I'm involved in a Yeshiva [inaudible] in San Rockaway. I'm one of the founders there, get 600 to 700 people for \$300 a couple to the Sands, we spend a lot of money, but it brings in a lot of money.

WH: So it sounds like in a way, it's really an evil, but a necessary evil.

NK: I think that's the way of life in America, maybe.

WH: What you're really saying is that you personally are turned off by all this [inaudible], but you know that if they didn't have it, they probably wouldn't get half as much as they're getting – but it's still not pleasant to watch it. What you're condemning really, is that the system makes it necessary for this kind of narrishkeit (foolishness) to go on.

NK: Yes, you have to understand one thing. When I go to those dinners, 80% of the food is being thrown out. That's what hurts me more than everything else, throwing out food, which to me, I can't take a piece of bread and throw it out – I eat the toast, if not I'm going here to feed the ducks.

WH: So many people who are survivors mention bread to me, does it seem, because bread was so important in the camps that it's more of a shame to waste a piece of bread than say a half a piece of corn or peas or cherries?

NK: Who dreamed about peas or cherries, you know, in the camps – there was a potato or bread - most of the survivors said, 'Before I die, I would like to have enough potatoes to eat', and I should say, now I could be happy, because I'm not hungry anymore, so bread and potatoes, that's the two things what you were dreaming, I can't throw out any food. It doesn't matter what.

WH: Israel. How do you feel about the 'Who is a Jew?' problem?

NK: I would say that they should leave that for the rabbinate. To me, it is, not the government's business. You know, we survived, because we lived by the Torah. Otherwise we would not have survived. If we wouldn't have Jews, what believed, you know what I mean? How long would the Jewish nation exist with the Reform Jews? They would be assimilated. You wouldn't exist 4,000 years, but at the same time, I don't agree with those extremists you know what I mean? To go ahead and don't do this, or don't do that.

WH: Of your four closest friends are they all survivors?

NK: Yes.

WH: What do you think is more important, a job that provides security, or a job that is challenging?

NK: I like challenge. I have to tell you a story. My son had finished law school, Hofstra. He comes over and says, 'Daddy, I'm opening up an office.' I said to him, 'What are you talking about? You just finished law school.' 'I know, my friends, they go to work to get experience, this and that,' so he lets me talk and talk and talk. And then he says, 'Dad, could I tell you something?' I said, 'Yes. What do you want to tell me?' He said, 'Anything wrong to go in a father's footsteps?' I said, 'What are you talking about?' I said, 'I'm a tailor, you're a lawyer.' He said, 'Daddy, let me finish. All my life I was brought up, you were sitting by the table, or you with your friends, you always, everybody asked you, how did you accomplish, what did you do, what do you have to say, and I always heard by the table, you said, you came with a little bit of knowledge and a little bit of ambition, and you applied that with your work. And thank G-d you did well. So is there anything wrong with a son to go in a father's footsteps? Daddy, I have a little bit of knowledge, I have a little bit of ambition, I live at home, I don't have any expenses, I have money in the bank.' Because he used to teach Hebrew, bar mitzvah classes, and he said, 'Why are you against it? Let me go and open up an office. A year later, if I fail, if I don't do well, I'm going to go and get a job. Didn't you say, you quit one job and you went to another job? And I heard you always said, 'A job I could always get.' So you took the chance to better yourself.' I couldn't say anything to him. I had to agree with him.

WH: And it worked out.

NK: It worked out.

WH: Do you think that people who say that they're lucky, that they make their own luck?

NK: You have to do something. I believe in one thing. First you have to do. And then, you can't sit and wait until lucky will strike you.

WH: (needs translation) You are an optimistic person, why?

NK: Because I always look at things the good way. I always look at the other person with good eyes. I try to get out, I don't know if it's a nature or I developed it, I always said, I'm bad enough. What I want now from you, is the good parts, what I don't have. The bad parts, I don't want to hear them, because I'm bad enough. You know, I see that every person has in him all kinds of [illegible]. So, when I talk to people, when I deal with people, or whatever, [illegible] to get, to get out the better part of the person, not to learn from him, you know, the things what I don't want to do. Do you understand what I'm saying?

WH: In the war, you seem to come to the conclusion that then, it wasn't a good time to take risks. That the most, that if you followed the rules?

NK: I followed the rules as long as I was in Auschwitz, there's no other way out.

WH: So really you would say that you're a person who adapts, you adjust?

NK: Yes.

WH: You know when to fight and when not to fight. You know when to run and when to sit still, and that's not something you learn, is it?

NK: I grew up; I had nobody to learn from, which, whatever I am, I had to do it on my own because my father died when I was nine, ten years old. We were nine children with a mother. And, I don't remember anybody telling me do this, or do that, you know. I mean, you have to understand that life with nine children at home, one child raises the other, you have to listen to your mother, you have to listen to your older brother; you have to listen to your older sister. That was the life in Europe. Here, that would be a total disaster.

WH: Is that part of the reason why you had more in common with the people who came from Europe when you got together with them?

NK: It's the same culture. You have to understand one thing, you now. You were brought up together. Everybody was brought up in the same way. You know, almost the same way.

WH: Did you belong to any survivor groups?

NK: No, when I came here they told me I have to belong to a society, I said, 'What they want from my life? I came here to live; I didn't come here to die.'

WH: You mean you thought of it only as a chevra kadisha (burial society)?

NK: (laughs) I belonged to the Zionist Organization. When I came here I belonged to the (inaudible name) society.

WH: Did it mean going to meetings?

NK: Yes, once a month, I enjoyed the meetings until there was a fight for three hours that the chazzan's (cantor's) son became bar mitzvah and the treasury gave a \$25 present and didn't have a committee. I said, 'You guys expect me I should spend a half day here, going to fight.' That was the time already, I was already a little bit on the upper level, which \$25 you know, didn't mean so much.

WH: What year?

NK: '54, '53, '55, something.

WH: So what happened after that? You lost interest?

NK: I said, 'I'm not going to come here, spend you know four hours, you guys should sit and fight. Don't you have anything better to do?'

WH: What did they say?

NK: They were on a different category, you know. We were more updated, you know what I mean? We went with the times, you know.

WH: The ones that were fighting, were they the people that were here before the war?

NK: Yes.

WH: How did they get along, the ones that came before the war?

NK: That was two different people.

WH: In what way? You both came from Europe.

NK: They both came from Europe, we were more educated, sophisticated, whatever you want to call it, you know what I mean, more up-to-date, or whatever. You know? We lived a different way. I could see it, you know?

WH: How were you more educated?

NK: Self-education. As a result, your mind was sharpened more, you know, you learned, first of all, you had to learn how to survive. You know what I mean? That was a lot, after the war, you still had to learn how to survive. Let's say I was in Germany, I didn't want to take anything from (UNRRA), a package or this or that I found out that there's a black market where you could do some business, and what happened, I joined the club. Why? Because I wanted to have a car, I wanted to have a motorcycle; I wanted to have nice clothing.

WH: People here who said to you, 'Well you had it tough but we had a depression here.' What do you say?

NK: What would I say (needs translation)?

WH: So in reality, the survivors on the whole, do you think that they did better than those people?

NK: Oh, 100 – I would say, 1,000%. You take the majority of survivors, you know, they grabbed the opportunity, you know what I mean?

WH: (the American) why is he such a shvitzer (show off)?"

NK: I don't know. Because that's the way they live, you know. They have everything, but [inaudible] on credit cards. They pay all the payments; I used to tell, 'What are you buying all that stuff?' I said 'How could you afford it?' He said, 'I have credit and I pay every month \$130 or \$140, I know, so whatever I buy, they still can't take off more than \$140 or \$150, my credit is good, because I pay. So, I want to have everything. I said, 'I'm different.' I said, 'If I have money, I buy it. If I don't have money, I could live without it.' I never bought anything on payments, or this or that. In

the beginning, whatever, we wanted to buy something we were waiting until we saved up enough money, and then we bought whatever it was.

WH: What did you do when people told you that it's economically better to buy on credit?

NK: I never believed him. I didn't want to have payments. My mind was made up. If I have money, I'll buy. If I don't have money, I could live without it.

WH: Would you say that your health is good, though, in general?

NK: Well, I'm not a young man.

WH: Do your feet get swollen still from the camps?

NK: I walked for 3 and a half months without shoes in the snow, at 30 below zero – you ask me a question, I said, I think I am the healthiest person in this world, because what I went through, I still could get up in the morning, and take a shower and take a shave, and go into a car and drive and this and that. That means, thank G-d, my general health is good. I'm lucky.

End Tape 2, Side 1.