

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

William Helmreich Oral History Collection

Interview with James Rapp
March 9, 1989
RG-50.165*0094

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with James Rapp, conducted by William Helmreich on March 9, 1989 as research for his book *Against all odds: Holocaust survivors and the successful lives they made in America*. The interview was given to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on Oct. 30, 1992 and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

JAMES RAPP

March 9, 1989

WH: . . . in 1951

JR: '51

JR: You were born where?

JR: Opel . . . Germany . . . my parents were in textiles . . . chased out to Radom. . .Poland. . .there I spend most of my life. I was in the ghetto over there and then I went to Auschwitz and Buchenwald. . .

WH: You have brothers and sisters?

JR: . . . three brothers – two brothers survived and my sister survived and even my father survived somehow. My mother did not survive . . . and a brother and sister did not survive.

WH: The war started, you were how old in 1939?

JR: Sixteen . . . and I worked in the underground. I created small groups . . .I was the youngest. . .and I considered myself a leader. . .

WH: In Auschwitz, what part of the camp were you in?

JR: In Birkenau. . .

WH: After the war you were liberated in –

JR: Buchenwald.

WH: What happened after the war? . . .

JR: . . .M.P.'s arrested me. . .they let me go. . .and said, "Come tomorrow to our office" . . .I was twenty-one years. . .they said, "We can use you. You speak German, and Polish and Russian and other things-. Come and work with us. . .While I was in the military government. . .Russians came in to negotiate the take over of the city, with the American government, they start talk to me, and they called me in to interpret them, called me into the sessions, and they said to me, the Russians. . . "You stay here with us," And I talk to the Americans, and they said, "Listen, you want to stay, stay. . ." the Americans moved out and I stayed there and I became a communist. But they cured me, didn't take too long. . .I was there, Chief of the whole of ?Weinmar? City, like Mayor, like everything else. Even the Russians were afraid of me. I created my our guards. . .because in Russia,

in the system, who screams louder, who's more assured of themselves, they are afraid of. They don't know who really had the real power over there. . .

WH: . . . were you like that as a child? Was this something you developed later? This ability to take charge of a situation. When you were 11 or 12 years old. . .

JR: Yeah, I was sort of a leader. Yah. I would say so.

WH: Among your siblings too . . . ?

JR: Yeah, I was the oldest one, I was rebel home already, I told my father I didn't want to be religious.

WH: . . . he was religious?

JR: Very religious. Orthodox. And he couldn't see – he said, “If the first son already rebels, what's going to happen to the rest of them? They'll be goyim.”

WH: . . . was he a leader type, your father?

JR: . . . I would say so. . . when he came to the states he was President of a shul later on. East New York, he lived . . . South Avenue.

WH: . . . in '51. . .

JR: I came to the States. . . and I lived in Philadelphia. . . my father came in 1946. . .

WH: . . . what was it like on the boat?

JR: I was the chief of the boat. They made me head of the boat, supply workers, and in the kitchen and supply things, and so on, and I don't why – because I spoke German, Russian, Polish and a little English. I don't know how I got myself that job, but I was the head man, next to the (?UN---?) officer. . .

Wh: . . . you had gotten married?

JR: I was married in Germany. . . I came over here with my wife and a daughter. . .

WH: . . . what do you remember when you came into the Harbor?

JR: I'll tell you what happens to me as soon as I came into the Harbor, they wanted me, the US Customs, since I was the leader of the ship, - they wanted me to work. . . to help them set up there. . . the Clearance. I said, “No way. I don't want to work no more. I worked

enough on the ship.” I didn’t want to work. I want to get off because I wanted to see my father . . . and they said, “You cannot go off.” I thought that if I didn’t want to work with them to process the people, that they hold me back. In the meantime, they had . . . looked at my papers, and it was marked “T.B.” and they took me to Ellis Island . . . so they didn’t let me off the boat . . . everything happens to me. Everything. But I survived it . . . then later . . . they took me to a Health Center somewhere in the city . . . they kept me in Ellis Island, it was a very nice room. A room, they put in a crib, with my daughter and so on, I played billiard over there, I played everything. It was nice food and with Jewish people talking Yiddish and so on . . . (inaudible) . . .

WH: How long were you detained?

JR: . . . not long.

WH: You have any recollection of say, seeing the Statue of Liberty?

JR: Yeah. I was laying on grass looking to that Statue of Liberty every morning.

WH: From Ellis Island, wishing you could go by?

JR: Sure. It was right there.

WH: . . . what about when the boat sailed into the Harbor?

JR: When the boat sailed into the harbor, we were stopped, funny that I remember those things, the boat stopped from moving into the pier, the whole night. I remember, I saw so many cars going constantly. . . (inaudible) . . . I saw constantly, on the highway cars going, right.

WH: Right.

JR: Constantly come without stop. This was traffic. But I couldn’t realize that so much traffic, so I thought that we always saw big traffic in Europe, when the convoys of army moved, you understand? (inaudible) . . . so I said, “what do they do? The war is over. What do they do with so many trucks and all those tanks, and all those” – keep going and going all night. They didn’t stop moving. It was fascinating to see cars going, and going and going. Because we saw most probably the East River Drive or the West Side Highway . . . I didn’t know exactly what I saw, ‘til the morning, when it got daytime, they brought the boat in, so the people were ready, the immigration officers were ready to check out our papers.

WH: When you came off the boat, you went to where your father lived. Was he there to greet you?

JR: . . . maybe he was there . . . my brother took me maybe? . . . I really don't remember. But I remember I had to go to 15 Park Row. And they screen me, and they told me I should go – my sponsorship was in Philadelphia. I had to go to Philadelphia, but I said that I got a father here, and I want to stay a day or two. So they told me, "Then you have to go by yourself to Philadelphia." At the same time I had to take care of my luggage yet, too. It was at the pier. And I remember, they told me how to go, and they said, "Hey, you going to go by yourself?" I said, "You want to help me, come on help me." I had to go to check the luggage, to get the luggage, and big boxes, so I remember they gave me a dime for the bus and told me where to go. I went down to the pier and – I had to open up the luggage and boxes. They checked it out, (laughs).

WH: They checked to see what you had.

JR: Check what I have over there . . . a couple of pillows, blankets, everything I brought whatever I had, take along, that's all what I had. Ripped pillows, old blankets, (laughs) garbage. A (inaudible) radio, I brought along, dishes - .

WH: . . . so you left it there and you went to see your father?

JR: Yeah . . . and when I came back they gave me a ticket to Philadelphia. "Go to Philadelphia, on this and this station, there'll be somebody waiting for you, and that the Jewish Family Service will take care of you the following day."

WH: When you went to see your father, what was the reaction, what happened? I mean you hadn't seen him in how many years?

JR: Five years . . . one brother was already in the Army. American Army in Korea. And the other brother came with my father, they opened up a grocery store . . . in Brooklyn . . .

WH: What were your first impressions of America? What you saw, the stores, the people.

JR: Let me tell you something. I was so elated . . . I remember in Philadelphia that I went out, it was 5 cents an ice cream, I went into a restaurant and I get 5 cents a beer, I couldn't believe it. Five cents a beer in Philadelphia in the bar . . . at that time everything was so cheap, that you can't imagine.

WH: You spoke some English?

JR: Very little . . .

WH: So then you took the train, and you came to Philadelphia, where did you go? You didn't know anybody there, right?

JR: I got to Philadelphia, and somebody from the Jewish Family Service suppose to wait for me. And there's nobody there. I walk back and forth, nobody comes over to approach me. Until I saw Traveler's Aid, and I go in to them, and I ask them does somebody speak German . . . and I told him I was suppose to meet somebody, I'm a refugee and I just got here, somebody's suppose to come from the Jewish Family Service. They said, "Yah, the woman's here. Waiting for you. She's looking for some immigrants. And she cannot find them." And I was walking around for five minutes, so – she said, "come on out. Let's help find her." She found the woman, and I said, "Are you looking for somebody?"- and I said, "I'm the one, maybe, for the Jewish Family Service?" And she said, "Yes. I saw you walking but I couldn't dare. I didn't know whether to walk over to you. I thought you were – you didn't look like immigrants. You were dressed like human beings, not with the things here over the head." We came dressed up. My kid even had a little hat on, three years old. And with the valises, and everything – she couldn't believe that we were refugees. –so she didn't dare, it was an old timer woman. She pictured refugees as coming with the basket on his hand and all those things there. She didn't know that it's 40 years later than when she came here. So she took me to a hotel somewhere in Philadelphia and she said, "You'll stay here. You got some money?" . . . (Inaudible) . . . "I'll leave you", she said, "Ten dollars. Go out and eat something," . . . this was one of those not so nice hotels, but I remember that they had a fish tank in the hallway, I watched the fish there, it was all new to me, everything was new to me. (Inaudible). Then we said, "We got to go out and eat." So, we go out, and like on Times Square . . . the luxurious hotel there . . . so next door, we walked out, it was a very sloppy restaurant, very cheap, smelled and so on, we said, "well go somewhere else to eat. Until we saw a place and we looked and it had a menu in the window, let's go in here, as soon as we walked in, we didn't look like refugees, and we said, "Can somebody speak German?" And they said, "Oh, sure!" And they brought over a German menu. And they brought over a little table for my daughter to sit down, a little high chair. I couldn't believe it, a little table for her, and a menu and napkins, and so on. I didn't see such a luxury for a long time and the only thing what I knew on the menu was chicken. – It wasn't too much, but the bill was about \$30.00 – (inaudible) it's all the money I took . . . (inaudible) Thank G-d I just had the money to pay for the bill . . . they next day I went to Jewish Family Service . . . and he said, ". . . we'll set up a budget . . . we'll get you an apartment . . ." and he came up with \$38.00 for a week to live on. I said, "What I paid!" I didn't know the value of the dollar. . . . \$38.00? I said, "I went last night for dinner! To eat something, I paid \$30.00" He said, "Where did you go?" And I explained it where I went . . . the most luxurious hotel. The hotel that had the Legionnaire's Disease later . . . so I did nicely on \$38.00 a week . . .

WH: What kind of an apartment did they give you?

JR: I rented an apartment, I went out to look for myself, they gave me addresses . . . two, three family –an apartment. I paid \$30.00 some dollars an apartment. Three, four rooms.

Very big apartment. They gave me money to buy furniture, about \$400, \$500 dollars. I filled up the room with furniture. . .

WH: What were your first impressions of Americans when you came here? How did they strike you as a people compared to Europeans?

JR: . . . I went back 10 years ago. I came down to Munich, and I lived in Munich for a while . . . and I couldn't wait to get out. I had to pay \$200 extra a ticket because . . . if you change the ticket you have to pay extra. And I couldn't stay there. . .

WH: What did you do (employment)?

JR: . . . I had some college in Germany. . . I came here, and . . . every paper was advertised, "machinist," "mechanics," wanted. Tool makers, this and that. . . my name was Israel Rappaport. And I went in from one place to another, and they didn't want to hire me. Because the industry was in the hands of the Germans. And I didn't blame them. They didn't want to take in a Jews. . . they figure they taking in an in an enemy in their midst. .

WH: . . Family Service. . . they were nice?

JR: Oh, yeah! They said, "We'll buy you tools, and whatever you want," . . I couldn't get a job. . .they said, "Change your name." I changed my name, I picked up "James" from the telephone book, and "Rapp" I shortened from "Rappaport." And the first place I walking in, they hired me. I knew every tool work, from Germany, from the Concentration camp, I worked as a mechanic . . . as soon as my name was James Rapp, and I lived on Burke Street over there was a mixed section, Polish and Jews and so on. . .

WH: Did they think you were a German Gentile?

JR: Yah! A German refugee. . .

WH: . . .who were your friends then?

JR: All the refugees, survivors like me. . .

WH: . . .did you ever feel that American Jews looked down on refugees?

JR: Some. . .yes. I didn't blame them. Me, they were very friendly. The building I lived in was an apartment house in East New York. And in Philadelphia I lived, was one-family houses. So I lived also only where refugees lived. . .my daughters spoke German and Yiddish, only, . . .didn't know no English. . . When I moved to East New York, in that building, was a 30, 40 apartment house, there were Americans and American Jews. (inaudible) and my wife got friendly with another woman, neighbors, and they start to

help us out. They showed us . . . they took us out for French toast, the first time, and pizza and all those things. They showed us the tricks, they taught my wife all those things, how to be a JAP. They were very nice. No, I didn't have no problem. . .

WH: What did you mean when you said, "They weren't so nice, I didn't blame them."

JR: Because some were primitive people. Very low, primitive people. They didn't want to learn English, they were not good characters . . . didn't change their habits. . . not because they were refugees only, because they were not that- listen, friends you can pick, family you got no choice, that's true.

WH: Do you feel that the life in the camps, the experiences you went through, the things you saw, you feel that those things influenced you in terms of how you were able to deal with people in new situations here?

JR: I really don't know, but I was able to adapt myself, assimilate faster.

WH: Did you learn about people? About their character and their nature by watching them in extreme situations?

JR: Yeah, I did. I did. It helped me a lot to understand it . . . I worked in a big factory later on in New York City . . . the owner were Jewish . . . and they told me how nice the owner was to them . . .

WH: How long before you went to New York from Philadelphia.

JR: I didn't stay too long in Philadelphia. I stayed about a year, a year and a half. Because I wanted always to see my father, my family. Also Philadelphia was a very sticky city in the summer. Very, very sticky. I couldn't breathe . . . still the effects of t.b. . .

WH: When you came to New York, what did you do? What kind of work?

JR: Same work . . . machinist . . . the company . . . S.S. Corrugated . . . during a Strike, we walked on the picket lines, and they were telling me, "Oh, years ago, when the old man was still in charge, they were not exploiting the workers so much, they gave raises, they helped the children to education . . . he gave money . . ." So I said to them, "What did you do for this man so far?" "Nothing." So, when the strike settles. I was building a shul in Brooklyn, Carnasie. And I said, "You know what people? . . . he did so much for you, what did you do for him? You know what. I'm building a Hebrew School – a Jewish Center . . . we have no money. Let's call the Hebrew School, 'Issac Stern.' . . ." he was also the President, Chairman of the Board of the Temple, Lexington Avenue Temple . . . Central Synagogue . . . his son-in-law was the boss. And I went up to him and I said, "Let's have good will now." They agree with me that we should raise money

for the people to build . . .and a part of the school should be called, “Isaac Stern.” . . . and he let me send out a letter to the people and the workers send in money and we honored him . . .and I made a presentation . . .

WH: You moved to Carnasie?

JR: Yeah, I moved later from East New York to Carnasie. I promoted myself – to a new house. Yah, I bought a house . . . I build over there already, '56, '57 . . . when I say, “building,” I –two shuls. I raised the money, the funds, I got people signing up for the bank for the mortgage, I negotiate the mortgage with the bank. I bought the land and negotiated the builders and contractors.

WH: How did you know to negotiate the mortgage?

JR: You learn. You know how I got a mortgage from a bank? - a lawyer told me, “You don’t need me, go to the bank, tell them that they only giving you – your member’s money. Tell the bank that they don’t do you no favor . . .” . . . the neighborhood bank . . . I go up to the top, I’m not ashamed. And I went up to him I said, “you know what? You not doing us no favor . . .You know what? You going to get money paid on the interest, and we need a million dollars for the new building. . .” He said, “ we cannot do it by ourselves . . . then he said bring me a listing of the members.” I brought him the listing of the members who were already 4, 5 years not members . . .and after he saw the listing, I said, “All our members will pull out the money and go to another bank . . .” He said, “Come” he negotiated with me. The following day I got the mortgage . . . I had to go to another bank for a construction mortgage. I never knew all those things, but you learn, step by step. I went for the construction mortgage . . . the owner didn’t want to give me the money . . .then I had to get 50, 100 people to sign \$20,000 each . . . I went around to the members of the congregation. I was already a Vice-President, Treasurer of the Congregation and I raised the money . . .

WH: . . . when you came here, this synagogue that you founded, was it a Conservative Synagogue?

JR: Was Conservative, yah. They came to me for donation for the shul . . . there’s no shul around, they want to build a Conservative shul . . .so I got myself involved. And I became the Head of the whole thing here, the whole drive. . . .

WH: What was your reason . . .

JR: That was my mentality. Then later on when I became a stockbroker, I knew a lot of people and I was very successful.

WH: But at that time you didn’t do it knowing that. That was just a benefit later.

JR: Just, I was, figured my son is brought up, he got to go to school, and I know that I can do it, I had the persistence, the chutzpah to, you know, to go around. I made a booklet. I wrote the by-laws. . .

WH: You did it because you wanted your son to have an identity, to belong to a community?

JR: I thought that's necessary. It was needed. There was nothing there. I don't know how exactly what the motive was. You know, certain drives people have for all kinds of crazy things.

WH: When you think of our religion -.

JR: I question, "Where was G-d?"

WH: . . . so what do you say when you question G-d, where He was during the Holocaust? What's your conclusion?

JR: There's no conclusion. I read a very great theory from Nero . . . they had it in the Times . . . 20 years ago. And he . . . figured out . . . that there was no religion in the people's hearts . . . and he said . . . "The people should have a fear of somebody superior, something better, you must have the belief in G-d." And this theory stuck to me . . . you understand? I this helps a person, and if he doesn't have anything better to be human, or any religion to preach nicer . . . (inaudible) . . . looks like we need it. And let me tell you something, when they went up on moon, I don't know how it affects you, but from that so religious upbringing, - but when I realized that they are on the moon, and I always believed that the angels are on the moon, the minstrels are on the moon, everything, I said, "there's no religion no more. Take a look! Take a look! There's - we thought the sky, the heaven, we go to heaven, we go to the sky, all of a sudden, -take a look! We can't go to the - we can't go - (inaudible) there's no such thing. Very disappointing. . . (Inaudible and needs translation) . . .

WH: . . . during the war in Auschwitz . . .

JR: . . . people gave away their last piece of bread, to die for a cigarette, too. Found all crazy people. You know what it means to give away your piece of bread for a cigarette? . . . this was the going currency in concentration camp was cigarette . . . (inaudible) all for a cigarette. People had - to eat, and they wanted a cigarette, they were so addicted.

WH: Do you find that you still appreciate the average, everyday things in life today, long after the war ended?

JR: Listen, when I was (inaudible) I was able to buy myself something for the house like a radio, television and so on, I was elated for months, for weeks, now when I can do anything I want, and buy anything I want, it doesn't mean too much. But I brainwash myself to be happy with the things that I have.

WH: Your children are grown now?

JR: I have grandchildren. Children are grown.

WH: Two children.

JR: Two children.

WH: What do they do?

JR: One is a housewife, and the other one is in business textiles. . . .

WH: Did your daughter go to college?

JR: My daughter married at 17 . . . she finished 2 years community college . . .she married a little bit faster, too, because there was a war in Viet Nam and he didn't want to go to the Army . . . a neighborhood boy . . .from Carnasie . . .

WH: You moved from Carnasie to here, -in?

JR: 1971.

WH: Do you belong to a synagogue here?

JR: Yah. I belong because the social (inaudible) to belong.

WH: Do you find that you have any common bond with survivors now?

JR: I'm the Secretary of the American (inaudible) Federation of Jewish Holocaust Survivors . . . you know Benjamin Meed? . . . I'm his Secretary . . .

WH: . . . you're involved, in other words you go to the meetings. . .

JR: I'm involved in a lot of things here. I was the President of the Lodge of B'nai Brith. I'm a member of the Westchester Jewish Community Service, Westchester Jewish Conference we call ourselves. Like the ?khillim? of Westchester. All the shuls belong . .

WH: . . . the work you do now, you're Vice-President, and you work with ?Gruen-Tell (inaudible)?, right?

JR: Next week I'll be working with Shearson . . . I worked downtown 20 years, long enough, I like it here . . . (Westchester) . . .

WH: . . . what do you do to relax? – Go on vacation?

JR: Not too much. . . I go on vacation, I try to relax, I try to retire, I try everything! But thank G-d, that I keep going . . .

WH: . . . when you think of how you survived during the war –

JR: Miracle!

WH: Was it a miracle?

JR: Why did I survive? I always ask me, “Why, what for?” At certain points in my life. I felt guilty. That I survived and better people than me did not survive. –Just a coincidence. –

WH: Was it just luck?

JR: Sheer luck, coincidence, I don't want to tell – you. Otherwise I wouldn't be able to talk to you?

WH: Don't you think though, that you're a person who takes advantage of opportunities? As you did in all the things you described to me.

JR: I had, in certain points in my life, took daring steps to survive. Like one of the German Commissars, he wanted to kill me by himself. He went up to his gun to shot me. And he pushed me in the (needs translations- German –washtebin) guard house.

WH: Where was this?

JR: In a camp . . . pushed me there and he walks up, he said, he wants to have the satisfaction he's going to shoot me. (Inaudible) . . . you know why? He caught me on the outside. . . of the factory, outside the ghetto without an armband and from millions of people on the street, he had to recognize me . . . he takes me back, and you know, I was so cool, calm and collected, that he went up for his gun, and they didn't know, he didn't exactly turn me over to anybody individually, he just put me in the guard house. And in the guard house, one guard goes out to the back, I follow him like I belong here. Like I'm a worker, belong here. I go out, I go through the wire (inaudible) go out to the guard, the

guard is standing there, with the gun, I got so sure of myself, he says "Where you going?" I said, "I work here." I knew some people work out the fence. Outside the camp. And I run away. You know, they couldn't believe it that I run away. They put the lights on, the firemen, the police, the camp police, EVERYBODY was looking for me. . . .

WH: Do you think that even though there are people from all different minority groups here, that it wouldn't change anything?

JR: The Jews are always outstanding for – they're – the Black Sheep in the whole group because of the successes, and all other things here, and the jealousy and- .

WH: But we have Blacks here.

JR: -you don't hear about them. To appeal to the masses here, and so on, the Jews will always be the scapegoat. And it can happen again, and again and WILL happen again and again.

WH: You think it will happen?

JR: Yah. Even this country can change so fast you can't even imagine. When the Congress (inaudible) impeach Nixon, who did so many things for this country, only because of political- because they didn't like him, political clout, or whatever you want to call it, because he stepped on too many toes, what did he do, I can't still understand it, and I read a lot, I read every day the Times, and the Wall Street Journal, and other papers and so on, if this could happen overnight . . . (inaudible) . . . and I consider Kissinger the biggest anti-Semite.

WH: Why do you say that?

JR: Och! Read the history behind the scenes what he did to Israel. To Golda Meir. Reach her memoirs. Israel had a victory on their hands . . . (inaudible) . . .

WH: Been to Israel many times?

JR: Yah. I'm also the leader here of the (inaudible – Share rut?) organization. I'm the Vice-President.

WH: . . . you're involved in a lot of organizations. . .

JR: . . . lately, the last couple of years, the last years, (inaudible) . . . I raise a lot of money for the Russian Jews, and I write journals, dinners, I raise funds. I do a lot of things. I have a dinner almost every year. This year I had it in the Plaza Hotel. I had, Vice-President Bush was my Honorary Chairman . . .

WH: For which organization?

JR: International League for Repatriation of Russian Jews. I write very good ads, and journals, and articles, ect. . .ect. The only thing I didn't write is a book. No patience.

WH: You should work on one.

JR: I have a lot to write. A lot.

WH: . . . Watergate, what were your feelings about all that?

JR: They all connivers. All the politicians. I don't know why they picked Nixon, He didn't do nothing else, nothing worse for that matter, than Johnson did, or any other president. . .inaudible . . .

WH: Do you consider yourself a Moderate person politically, or Liberal, or Conservative?

JR: I don't know. Between a Democrat and a Conservative Republican. Same thing with Towers . . .G-d, they all bums! All are drinking. Anytime you invite one of those politicians, to a dinner and so on, they half-drunk . . . (inaudible) .

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

JR: oh yeah! I saw McCarthy style. I saw what happened in McCarthy time and I realized that it's – you cannot even understand the human cycle. How human can be, how they can be-

WH: After everything you saw from the camps, you were able to rebuild your life here, how did you do it? TO what do you attribute it to? Was it something in your attitude? Something in your view on life?

JR: After all those things (inaudible) –it's hard to understand to your in psychology. Freud, I don't think understood it too. We had to start all over and you felt by the fact that your survived, and you saw the down fall of your enemies, and all other things and so on, you kept your goal. I think so. I don't know, it's so hard to describe why, what and when. You had to start . . .

WH: Maybe it's because you didn't go in so deep to everything.

JR: No! This was a very important factor. That people that thought they won't survive, they didn't survive. I didn't even think it. I WILL survive. I didn't even give a damn. Mentally, I saw psychologically, people who gave in right when they came in the camp,

only a couple of days, they died. They passed away. They knew they won't survive, they gave in. Passed away. First of all, they might have been a little older, might have thinking more seriously, might think a little differently. First thing what I said, "I won't survive. Hitler will kill every Jew there is. I shouldn't even try. But as long as I can. I should do everything I want."

WH: So you took it one day at a time.

JR: I took it one day at a time.

WH: . . . did you impart this to your children . . . ?

JR: In the beginning, I was telling them, they didn't want to hear –

WH: And now?

JR: Now? No, we don't talk about it. They hear it so much - . Now, do you know in the beginning, -I have a number here, a tattooed number from (inaudible). And in the summer I was going without a –with a short sleeve shir, right, and people came over to me. At the beginning, people looked at you like you're an outcast. Even Jewish people. Even Coney Island people. What I did? I put a tattoo over it. So I got a number and a tattoo. Then, I suppose to cover out the number with stars. I said, last minute, "Leave it on. Leave it on." I was so ashamed I didn't want it back . . . (inaudible) . . .the last couple of years, the last ten years . . .we start to open up and talk about it more . . . (inaudible) – more sure of yourself, prior to this, I was ashamed of my past. A reporter came to interview . . . (JR gives WH a copy of the article) . . .me . . . in 1985 . . .

WH: And you said you didn't want to talk about it then?

JR: Yah, I didn't talk about it. But the children, I told them, but they didn't want to hear it. It was too gruesome. And you know why, not that I want to talk, I had to. You know, when you get a loss in a family, and so on, the first couple of months, you don't talk about that person no matter what. My wife passed away, and I went on dates, and I was talking about her . . . (inaudible).

WH: What was it that made you reluctant to talk about it? You said you were ashamed of talking about it, why?

JR: It was a stigma. It was nothing to be proud, in those years.

WH: In the early years?

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0094

15

JR: Yah . . . because they consider you like a jailbird, you know, if you want, you don't want, they couldn't understand it.

WH: You mean you think that they almost looked at you as though you had done something wrong, that you deserved to be in this situation?

JR: Sort of . . . I didn't get a good reaction . . . (inaudible) . . . the first time when I started, and I cannot give lectures, talk about it, you are lucky enough that I can talk to you . . . (inaudible) . . . when the United Jewish Appeal came out with the slogan, about 10 years ago, "What happened before, can happen again," and they start to bring out those stories to the people and they ask me, I should be one of the speakers . . . I was on the radio station once, twice. . . then all the stations heard about me, and they all wanted me to be interviewed, and I said, "No more. This was enough for me, and I didn't do it." I cannot, I cannot, I can't go through the same thing again.

Conclusion of Interview