

INTERVIEW WITH IRVING BALSAM

MARCH 15, 1992

BRONX, NEW YORK

Would you just start again with what's your name and date of birth?

My name is Irving Balsam. I am 67 years old and presently reside in the Bronx. I was born in Poland. The name of the town was Praszka. A small little town on the border of Germany and Poland.

What was your birth date?

My birth date is 1924, October 17, 1924. I experienced all the strain and the horror inflicted on the Jews by the Germans. Since the day they invaded my hometown the first day of September, 1939. My survival, and I'm speaking to you today as a survivor, is simply a miracle. It came about because of the unusual coincidences beyond the grasp of human understanding. I cannot understand myself how this happened, how I survived, or was I chosen to survive by destiny in order to be able to tell the story? The story to the world that such things should never happen again to the Jewish people or to any people. My entire family, father, mother, my two older brothers their name was Moishe and Razar (18) and my younger sister, Judy, all were annihilated by the Germans. At the outbreak of the second World War, September 1, 1939, I was a boy not quite 15 years old. The severe persecution, the brutality and suffering inflicted on the Jews of our town by the Germans did not fail to reach all the inhabitants of Praszka, my home. My family, of course, was not exempted. I as a teenager suddenly encountered a completely new and aryan world, a world full of grief, cruelty and annihilation; a world bent on the destruction of our people. Why do I say the destruction of our people, the whole world. I just found out, after the liberation, that the whole world stood idly by and watched the annihilation of the Jewish people, men, women and child, concentration camps, gas chambers, wagons with gas and no one lifted a finger or a warning, even, to the Germans, to stop the killing. So in 1940, I believe it was, my entire family along with the rest of the town Jewry were corralled into a ghetto. In 1941, I believe it was in the summer, I, together with many other young Jews were taken out of the ghetto and deported to the slave labor camp near Poznan. The name of the camp was Buchvardelfost (ph)(c.56). In the interim, my entire family along with the rest of the Praszka Jewish ghetto were driven to their execution. All of them perished at the hand of the German tormentors in the death camps of Hamunull (ph)(53). After working in B____, preparing the Reichousband (c.55), we called at that time, it mean the super-highway for the Germans, working there almost two years. Then I was transferred to different labor-torture camps in Germany. Finally it was now 1943, I was brought to the frightening extermination camp of Auschwitz. There I was robbed of my name, my existence as a Jew and a human being ceased. I became number 141938 which was brutally burned into my arm and is still visible today. I became one of the damned and stampeded Jews whose only path led to the crematorium and gas chamber. I can still see and feel the many chimneys of the camp belching forth the heavy dark smoke. A stink so old and permeating that

it pursues me to this very day and is still too agonizing to recall. After a few months in confinement, in Auschwitz with the threat of death hanging over my head every day, whether it was by the cruel beatings, hard labor, I was suddenly transferred to another slave-labor in the concentration camp of Lagisza.

Where is that?

Lagisza was six kilometers before Benjun (c.82) where we built for the Germans, electricity station. As was the case with most of the Jews and under this circumstances, we experienced unbearable pain because of hunger, suffering, and degradation and hard work. Just to describe to you one day of food in a camp where we worked from six in the morning to six in the evening. When you received going out to work in the morning, a black coffee, so-called coffee and with this you had to go out to work. In the afternoon, during lunch, we supposed to have gotten a soup and it was many days where it did not reach us. Whether it was spilled during the way by other prisoners carrying it or it was available. We came home from work, we received one piece of bread. I would say in the size of the--today two slices of bread and again a soup. It was the hardest decision of my life, what to eat first.

Why is that?

It was, if you will eat up the soup with the bread, you have nothing in the morning--for the morning when you go out to work left over. So most of us, most of the concentration camp inmates, were trying to ration ourselves. We ate the little soup at night and we tried, we tried to hold on to this piece of bread until the morning to have it with the coffee. But hunger, the hunger was stronger than the resistance not to eat. So you started to nibble a piece now, put it in your pocket, didn't last, the hunger was so great. I think this is the greatest pain that a human can have, this hunger pain. So you take another out another piece and you nibble again until you nibble and you nibble till you have nothing left no more.

Were you ever able to --?

And at night, you feel guilty again that you ate it cause you're not going to have it in the morning.

Were you ever able to preserve it until the morning, yourself?

Very seldom, very seldom. It was only through certain circumstances when I got a little extra that I could preserve a piece for the morning. This is another story by itself. When, under what circumstances, sometimes a person got a little extra food, something to eat. This was, I think, looking back in retrospect, decisions what we making today in life, is nothing compared to the decision when to eat a piece of bread. It seems I left it like this in this camp till 1944. In 1945, from 1945 to January, 19--, no from 1944 also, in September till January '45, I was sent to another camp by the name of Yavozna.

Are you able to spell that?

Yeah, V_____, yeah. The name of the camp, how did they spell it? Y-a-v-o-z-h-n-a. Some of the people were working there in the coal mines. I managed to work again on the outside, again at another electrical company. Another company that _____(150) for electricity. Because I had already experience in that work, therefore they choose me to go there. My second thought was, I was afraid to go down in the coal mines where I never will come up again. This was always in my mind. If I go down there, I'll never come up again. I will starve or be buried alive. It was till 1945, January, about the 18th, 17th of January where we already knew that the Russian front is approaching closer.

You could hear bombing?

We could hear. We already found those at Cracow was already _____(c.161) and this was only sixty miles away from Cracow.

This was relatively close to Auschwitz?

Yeah, this was close to Auschwitz. Was also affiliated from Auschwitz. Auschwitz by itself had many camps which were affiliated to Auschwitz because they needed slave labor outside of Auschwitz. The day before, I would say one day before the liberation of this camp, they managed, they managed us; thousands were driven out from the camp by our so-called tormentors. I never ending that much from Poland to the vicinity of Salesea (c.171) to lower Germany, into Germany again.

Lievich? (c.171)

Lievich, that's right. On the way, many of my friends collapsed and died of hunger, illness, cold weather, simply exhaustion; they couldn't go anymore. Those who could not continue on this inhuman march, were shot dead by the Germans immediately. I still cannot understand my endurance, the strength to survive it all where my only food was snow on the ground.

Had they given you a ration before you left the camp?

Yes. They give us a ration before we left the camp but it lasted also for this one night. Then we were sleeping outside on the outer fields and our food was only snow. Someone found something beneath the snow, grass or something. One night, in the beginning of February, this was January, 1945, when we reached the area of Lievich, Germany, again we were packed into a huge barn, like cattle ready for slaughter. It seemed that time that the murderers were about to kill all of us wretched, powerless and defenseless victims. I was not mistaken in my assumption. That night, one of those night I, Irving Balsam, decided to risk an escape.

Alone?

No, I did escape with another inmate which we helped together. In camp, in concentration camp, everyone had a buddy. You could not survive alone. You had to have a buddy, a friend, a brother, we call them a brother, a buddy. I also had a buddy, a young boy who was the same age that I was. We kept to ourselves since Lagisza together. I felt that time I couldn't stand the cold weather, the beating on the way, the shooting of those who could not walk any longer. I felt I had nothing to lose. On that bitterly cold night, I and my buddy Henry, a young Jew, Henry Margolis was his name, a young Jew from Kalisz, also a little town in Poland, we fled the barn. We didn't flee the barn at first. We first hid ourselves underneath the straw. We hid ourselves in the machine which was made from the wheat corns, cleaned the wheat, the corns, from the leaves. They used to call it a thrash machine. A thrash machine, you know, you have those machine where they farm. First we hid ourselves underneath the straw. It's on? As we lay there in this machine inside, we found a lot of corn to eat, the little corn.

From the wheat?

From the wheat, that's right. This corn kept us there one day and one night. But the cold, it was in January, in February and this cold in Germany there is very--the weather is cold, probably below 20 degrees or something. We couldn't stand no more this bitter cold. We felt that our feet are freezing.

How many people were in that barn? Hundreds or--?

The people were--by hundreds of people. A lot of them were hiding but most of them were caught.

Hiding in various places in this barn?

Various places of this barn. Most of them were caught. It seems that our hiding place was the best, was the best. As we laid there in the barn, the cold permeated our very marrow of our feet. It was cold, we felt we were going to be frostbitten which is worse, the beginning already of frostbite in our legs. We--later in the morning, we heard a voice in the barn. We heard a voice speaking to the chickens. It was a farmer boy who happened to be Polish- speaking so he spoke in Polish words, we recognized him, to the chickens that they should gather together, he brought them food.

Were the other prisoners still in the barn at that time?

Was no more in the barn?

The barn had been evacuated?

The barn had been evacuated and the further marched. The further marched and we were left alone. While we met this man, we spoke to him in Polish. We told him that we are hungry. We would like also, if it is possible, to bring us some food. To which he agreed. You cannot imagine our--not satisfaction--our hope that we thought here we finally find somebody speaks Polish, we are Polish. He probably recognized that we are Jews and we told him and he agreed to bring us some food.

Was he a boy younger than you?

He was about--we the same age--about 17, 18 years old at that time. When he agreed, I hoped that time we will outlast this nightmare of the war. It seemed almost at the end. However, it seems that Jewish survival in those awful days was not easy, not even in the best of shelters. After a short wait our benefactor, instead of delivering the sorely needed substance, returned with Gestapo men who immediately arrested us and threw us back into the prison of Glewitz (c.288). While the others marched on, I'm sure to further extermination or to their deaths. When we came to jail, we found about sixty more completely miserable, ill Jews, all of them captured escaped from the death march.

It seems that a lot of them also ran away from the death march and were hiding in different places. Before long, the Germans had driven most of us captives into the prison yard, forty of them were shot to death immediately. Immediately after that, the German assassins ordered us, the remaining 20 Jews to pile the murdered victims--some dead and others still half alive, you can imagine that not everyone was shot to death, some of them were alive--into a huge wagon which they all had prepared.

This was a train car?

No, was a horse and a buggy but horse-wagon without horse. We had to harness ourselves to the wagon and drag the vehicle to an old Jewish cemetery on the outskirts of Gl _____ (c.314)

Were you amongst those having to pull?

Yes. I was amongst them having to pull.

How many of you were pulling, do you remember?

All 20 of us went with this. We were pulling and pushing this wagon with the dead bodies. The trip to this burial place accompanied by savage blows and curses from the cold-blooded henchmen, was an experience, deeply shattered experience which I--it's agonizing to this day, even to the thought. Whenever I tell this story, it is--it takes off years of my life because we thought that time will heal but--.. When we reached the cemetery, we saw two open mass graves.

Was this a real, an established cemetery?

Yes, was established, old cemetery. I found it after the war.

Was it a Jewish cemetery or--?

A Jewish cemetery in Germany. The Germans on the German territory, did not, did not vandalize the cemeteries, the old German cemeteries. Only in Poland they did it. But the Germans had Jewish cemeteries. I went to look up this cemetery in 1979. I went to Germany on a trial, testifying against the Nazis. When we came to this cemetery, we saw two mass graves. It immediately dawned on me,

after all I had four years experience with the Germany, I know already their thinking about us. They treating--the way they were treating us--as sub-humans that in one of the graves was for the other Jews which they were shot before. The other is for us.

Was your friend Henry still alive with you?

Yes, my friend Henry was alive. It was clear to us and to me and we were talking among ourselves that we would be the next. I was not at least mistaken in the assumption. As soon as we---already slowed the Jews where they were disposed into the mass grave, the German criminals resumed the shooting and immediately the dead, dying, half-alive, and heavily wounded began falling into the second grave. The full cemetery, the area there was saturated with the blood of our victims, with my friends, with my people what we were together in camps. For the time, we had piercing screams, heart-rendering moans and pained _____ (374) for help. Even my friend Henry fell into the mass grave and he was not shot. I heard him scream out, out, out. Suddenly, a dead silence enveloped the entire cemetery. I was among the unfortunate Jews in the second mass grave. As the stillness continues, the German henchmen yelled into the grave. I can tell you in German what they said. Bist du ___ (c.387), anybody alive, _____, come out. Anybody alive, come out. Anyone still alive, come right out. I and four more Jews, who escaped the assassin's bullet, crept out and were ordered to cover the horror of the gasping hole containing the dead and the near-dead Jews. How did we manage to come out without any bullet? When you dig a grave, you have sand from the grave, right? The sand creates a mound of other sand. When they aimed their machine gun and their pistols into the grave, they stood on this mound of sand. We, five boys who were laying on this side of the grave, this side the bullets did not reach us because they were going over us. So all of us who were laying on the side of the wall, on this one side of the wall, did not get any bullets.

So they had forced you into the grave first?

That's right. First they started shouting. Then they said, jump in. So we all jumped in, we had no choice. We did that under the threat of the Nazi guns pointing at us, we came out. When the gristly crime finally, was finally out of sight, the executioner shot two more of our small group and then aimed their guns at me and the remaining two Jews. Miraculously, their guns did not discharge because there were no more bullets left in them. Was everything used up, they kept on shooting into the mass grave.

They aimed the machine guns at you again?

They didn't have no more bullets in the machine guns. They only have side pistols. When we all five came out, they used the rest bullets on the other two. When they aimed the gun at me, no more bullets. A man, an older man who had on one hand, one arm, he must have been maybe from the first World War, a veteran or something, he still had his gun in his holster. When the other Gestapo men ask him, Hans Hans, give me dine browling (444). That means Hans, give my dine pistol to finish them off. This older man refused to give the pistol. He said for dezen younga (449), for these young men, I don't give a pistol. They left him alone. I could say that's why, probably I am alive today, to tell the story. After we were finished, we were commanded to harness ourselves to the wagon which transported its ill-fated load to the cemetery and the hairy guard, again with the--four of them, German, SS men and soldiers together, were driven back to this Gl___ Prison where we were locked in for three more days. It seemed that time to me, like an eternity.

How many days total were you in prison?

Maybe, two weeks. Fate, however, saved us once more from the clutch of death. After the three days confinement in the Gl___ prison, I was taken out of jail and I was certain I'm being led to the execution again. Instead we were transferred to the railroad station and transferred on the cattle wagons to another concentration camp in Austria by the name of Mauthausen. After being in Mauthausen a few days, I was again sent on a commando to Koozen (c.493). It was a camp, Koozen #2 where we worked on Messerschmitt, airplanes for the German army. I can't recall how many days, how many times. It was absolutely, completely no food at all. One soup with a little green stuff swimming around in the soup, I don't know what it was, was food for a whole day. For this we worked.

You worked in the airplane factory?

Yeah. The airplane parts factory was in the mountains, inside, in mountains. They should not--they were hidden from the attacks of the Allied airplanes.

Did you have a specific job each day?

Yeah, we would tighten the screws. We mounted screws and we put on wheels. It seems they didn't have no more motors for the airplanes. There were tens, twenties, maybe hundreds of airplanes that were ready to be shipped but they didn't get--have the motors for them.

Everything else was finished on them?

Everything was finished, just the motors they didn't have. They never arrived because I think the Allies bombarded the factories with motors.

Do you remember them ever threatening you about attempting to sabotage an airplane?

No. They didn't threaten us. It was a known fact because every where you went. There were signs, sabotage, dein tod, (517), if you sabotage, you'll be killed. Everybody was very careful to do what you could precisely. After being in V_____ (c.528) for, I would say, some days, this was the last camp, not to exterminate us but to starve us to death.

Not Goozen (c.528)?

Not Goozen, taken out from Goozen, they took us again on a march to another town in Austria what's the name, near Veldts (c.538), in the forest was a camp by the name of Gunkerin _____ (c.535) which there were only two barracks and 20,000 people. How can you fit in 20,000 people in two barracks which can only hold maybe 500?

I've read that many were crushed to death in the barracks.

That's right. The people were crushed to death. In the morning when you got up in the morning, you thought you sleeping with somebody and in the meantime the other guy was already dead. You slept among bodies, sickness, typhus, dysentery, everything was going on. And the rain did not stop. The forest was full of rain, day out and day in for the last ten days, there was nothing but rain. If we got already, one can of soup for a hundred people, there was specially a camp to starve us. The soup never reached the people because the hunger was so great--the hunger was so great from the people that they became inhuman. They attacked the can of soup and spilled it on the floor. They were eating from the floor with the mud, with every dirty thing in the rain.

Let me switch the tape. (Side B, Tape 1)

Had the war lasted, I mean had the American army not reached us on May 5, 1945, if this would have lasted another week, none of us would have been alive today from that particular camp. We were liberated May 5 by the American army.

Do you remember when the SS left?

Yes. Friday evening. I remember May was on a Saturday and Friday evening, all of a sudden we saw that the watch booth from the watchmen from the SS men from the Germans getting emptied out. They're running away. We did not know the reason because we were inside deep in the forest. However, many boys who had still the strength to go out and investigate what happening had noticed tanks with the star. We didn't know that time what tanks it was, whether it was Russian tanks, American tanks. We know only that--tanks. It seems that the same night, the American army passed--liberated us. The night of May 4 and May 5. All of a sudden, the day of May 5, we were sitting in the forest and the sun started to shine. Every one of us was full with lice, bitten, wet clothes. So we started to remove our clothing and shake it out from the lice. It seems that it didn't help much. After we found out a few days later, we were all infected t with typhus. When the American army rounded us up and put us into field hospitals--they created special hospitals for us, the ill survivors. Many hundreds died after the liberation from the sickness. Was too late for them.

Was your friend Henry still alive?

I am the lucky one who survived. My wife too in the same camp. Who is alive?

Henry.

No he was shot that time in the grave.

Oh, he was shot, I see.

I lost my friend Henry. He got down among the second batch, He was separate. After the war--from there we stood--we were liberated==--we were in the hospital for many weeks where I met my wife, at that time a young girl. weighing maybe sixty pounds, fifty pounds. We comfort each other since that day. We remained. We were in the DP camp, displaced persons camp in Austria until about 1948, until we could reach the shores of the United States.

Which DP camp were you in?

In Austria, in Links (9). Vien _____. Ever heard about that? We reached there because we had family in the United States. We reached the shores of the United States. We established our lives again here. We came to this country, we had a small child, one year old. That's the best we had. We kept on going and hoping. I think that's what sustained us. We're still hoping up till today, maybe someone is still alive, some other place which we don't know; I didn't believe that my parents are not--no more alive. I didn't believe that my brothers and sister are not alive no more. I guess the ____ of every survivor. And this is what sustained us in camp. Had I known that no one is alive from my family, I probably wouldn't have fought to live. But this was one thing we were hoping that somebody is alive and that it pays to live to tell the story. Because my father told me when I was taken to the first camp, that he blessed me. I was the first one to leave my house to be taken to camp. He says go ahead my son. When you come back, you tell me the story. He told me I should tell him the story and that was in my mind. To die now, what would I tell my father? I had nothing to tell him. Nobody would tell him the story, That's what I'm thinking. That's why I call myself a survivor. What else can I tell you?

When did you come to the U.S.?

In 1948, December, 1948.

I see. You came --.

I established myself. I came here to the Bronx. I came to the Bronx, I remained in the Bronx. a loyal citizen of the Bronx. I must say my life was not bad in the United States. I succeeded in business and have a nice family, three children, grandchildren. We are close, close-knit family. If someone is alive, I doubt it. It's too late already. It's today, 47 years after the war. I'm very involved now in the survivors' movement. I am the president of the Riverdale chapter of the Holocaust Survivors. You heard of them. We have two hundred families as members. We are having meetings practically very month with our aim is to teach, to teach the next generation, to sensitize the community, to transmit to our children and to help others. We have a very good outreach program. If a survivor is in need, we do help. Therefore, I think I have a mission in life. I am fulfilling this mission, to tell the story. Anything else you want to know?

I'd like to get a little more detail if that's possible. I like to get some information about your life before the war. About your family, where you lived, what your father did for a living?

As I mentioned before, I was not quite 15 when the war broke out. I was born in 1924. The war started in 1939. A month before my birthday, my 15th birthday. I came from a family of very--a religious family.

Hasid or--?

No, my father was not a Hasid. Observant, religious family. Wore a hat and a short, short little beard, modern. Today we would call it modern orthodox, modern orthodox. We were--we come not from a rich family. My father was a tailor. He struggled for a living most of his life.

He was an independent tailor?

Independent tailor, that's right. I mean, he worked for others. They brought him work.

Did he work out of your home?

Of the home, yeah. He worked at home. He had a machine in his house and all _____ (160) was necessary to do his job. Our life was not easy because he only had, as I remember, as far as I can remember from home--. A person can only remember the last few years, right? between 10 and 15 years. He can't remember before. He worked only six months a year. The last six months we were already bad off.

Why was that?

Because we lived in a small town. It was a lot of people, Jewish people, in the same situation. Were a lot of tailors and carpenters and all, was not steady work. When he worked six months a year, we had to--the other six months was struggling. Here and there some work.

What was the mainstay of--?

Was not easy for us to even have enough for food in the family, sometimes as I can recall. But in 1938, life started to get a little bit easier already, before the war. Because I had an older brother who was 18 years old and he was already employed as an electrician in the city of Lodz and he helped out

already with some, what do you call it, he sent some money home, helped out the rest of the family. So it was a little better. Then I joined in, as a fourteen year old boy, also left for Lodz, to study.

What did you do?

My intention was to study.

You went to a gymnasium there?

Yeah, I wanted--my intention was to study in gymnasium and to learn a profession. But it was not easy because I didn't have the means--

Financial means?

the financial means to remain in this big town.

Were you staying with your brother?

I was staying with my brother as far as he could, he helped me. We slept together, we ate together. But I still needed more financial means. I went to work also as a shipping boy. Both of us already made sure that we supplied my parents, my father and mother with the other two siblings home with money.

Were you two the oldest?

We were the oldest. We used to send them home some money that their life should be a little easier.

So you worked and you were going to school at the same time?

No. I could not. I was thinking, I was working--. No, I would intend to go to school because I registered for the next year's semester.

So you were going to work a year?

That's right. The rest of the semester and then the war broke out and it came near the border and it never happened again.

Was this a Jewish gymnasium?

No, it was not--I don't think it was. It was a Polish technological school, like you learned a trade.

What was your goal?

My goal was to learn a, how you call this in English? I had two goals. I couldn't get into one because first I wanted to be a locksmith mechanic, _____ (174) locksmith and if not, I wanted to say--my second choice would be a teeth mechanic.

A dentist or--?

Not a dentist. Just to make the teeth.

Oh, to produce false teeth or--?

Yeah, how do you call it, yeah a producer of teeth. You know, something like this. Teeth mechanic, yeah.

I guess after watching your father struggle, you weren't about to become a tailor?

No, my father would not let us become a --.

Is that right?

Yeah. When my mother used to say, you have boys going around already, let them help you something to--let them help you something. He says get away from here, from the machine. I will not permit you to be in this trade. Enough he said. He took it over from his father, his father took it over--he says enough. With your generation, this is stopping. He was right. He never permit us even--. You know children sometimes help home, put on a button, right? Oh, no!

Nothing?

Nothing. He never permit us to help him out.

Prior to going to Lodz, you were just attending public school, Polish public school?

Public school. Attend public school and I finish public school. I finish seven years in public school. This was in _____ (197) in Poland, seven year public school. We were going to school together with Polish, Polish Catholic boys and Jewish boys.

Did you also go to Cheder after school?

Yes. We were going to school till one o'clock. By the time we came home, grabbed something, two o'clock we had to go to the Jewish school. We stood there till six, seven evening. Came home with lanterns. It was already dark, there was no electricity in town. We had a lantern. Not everybody had a lantern, but some of us, and we all came home together. I was never dressed Hasidic, I was dressed more in modern clothes, a boy would dress already in that time. We were learning, we had to do homework. We had homework for Hebrew school and for the regular public school. The hardest time was, for me, I remember for us in school was, because the school was open six days a week including Saturday. We Jewish boys did not go Saturday to the school. So we weren't, we missed school every Saturday and Sunday. We had to get from the other school friends,--

The Poles?

From the Polish school friends, we had to get the lessons what we had to prepare for Monday, for school. If you didn't make your homework, you failed. You could stay in a class, it's not a kid, you could stay two, three years behind, you would fail. Luckily, I managed to pass every grade. I was

very good in history and mathematics and how you call, earth science. Earth science that time so I passed.

Do you remember any episodes of harassment, antisemitism ?

We had our share. We had to have. We were always harassed by the other schoolboys, by the Polish schoolboys during the intermission, during the intermission, we were harassed.

The intermission was--?

Between every session of school. We start at 8 o'clock. Between 8 and 9 was a lesson in Polish, right? Then you had a five-minute intermission, you went in for math. Then you have the big intermission between 10 and 11. We had 20-minute intermission. We supposed to have, eat your snack, eat your lunch. There we had the biggest skirmishes and fights with the Polish boys.

Do you remember ever getting involved?

I got very much involved. I got very much involved in --. I must say most of the time, we fought back. We fought back and we prevailed. Was a time where they were already afraid for us, to touch us because they knew that they will start with the Jewish boys and among my friends, were very strong ones. They were very strong boys and they knew that they going to get beaten up if they start with us. We always had skirmishes. We had antisemitic outbursts from teachers who made antisemitic remarks in school.

Do you remember any specific--?

Yeah, I remember one specific remark from a schoolteacher who taught us math. Was it math or history, no, a history teacher. He said we have in Poland--Poland would be a good country if we could get rid of our five million people. He didn't mention Jews. He said five million people too much in Poland. If we could get rid of them, we would--Poland would be an excellent country. Would be enough work for all the Polaks, everything was bad at the time. A Jewish boy stood up and he says to him, why don't you mention the name? you mean the three million Jews? the two million what you have there in__ (248). He didn't answer. He didn't answer but he meant the Jews. He meant the Jews because their thought was if Poland would get rid of the Jews, they would have a better life--which it proved in history was just the opposite, just the opposite. Any country that get

rid of the Jews is suffering. They need the Jewish know-how, Jewish businessmen. They need the Jewish brains, they need the Jewish profession. They know it. They thought that they can take out but they cannot. They could take our apartments, they could take our furniture, they could take our life, they could take away everything. But they couldn't take away our brain. Therefore, it was wrong and antisemitism was very great in Poland. And in the last years, which I remember the last years of my life in Poland, 1938 and '39, I must say therefore the Germans had an easier job with the Jews in Poland than in any other country.

They had natural collaborators?

Had natural collaborators. Absolutely right.

Did your family live in an apartment or a house?

No, we lived in an apartment. We lived in an apartment. Had a kitchen smaller than that, called a kitchen and one bedroom.

I see.

In one bedroom, cold flat as you call it today. Cold flat, there was no heat; there was no electricity; there was no gas.

Running water?

No running water, no toilets. We lived. We lived a happy life, a happy family home, father and children. Father went down in the coldest weather. Brought up coal and wood, made a little fire in the oven. When I grew up already, me and my brother, we went to the pump to pump water. To pump the pail water we brought it home. Mother made a meal the best she could, potatoes naturally. The main food, potatoes. Herring, bread--.

She just worked in the home?

She was in the home, yeah. There was no work for a woman. Took care on us children, sew buttons, see that the shirts are clean to go to school. Socks should be always--. It's not like here where you have everyday a pair of socks. You had a pair of socks, you wear it a week. Then you make a hole, she sewed them together, stitched them together and she washed them again and we were wearing. In winter, it was cold, I must admit. If you didn't have--you were putting on clothes on top of clothes. Kids, what did we care? We run down, played with the sled in the snow, came home wet, put on other rags. You were happy. Until this vicious storm came in and pulled us all in which we did not expect. Life was one small _____ (283). Had not the war broken, I think that probably my brother, maybe me, we would--he would emigrate to Palestine that time. Because it was the dream.

You were part of the Zionist organization?

I am part of the Zionist organization. It was the dream that for Zionists, not Zionist home, our own home. At that time we didn't know they were going to get rid of us physically, but they get rid of us tormenting, antisemitism, programs in other towns and other things.

Was your father a supporter of Zionism?

Yes, yes, he was a supporter of Zionists, yeah. He also believe in that the Jews must have their own country. He was a learned man. He learned history; he learned the Bible; he was learning the Talmud. So he knew the history of the Jewish people. He knew that there is no future for us in Europe, in Poland particularly.

Did he, himself, have the desire to go to Palestine?

No, I tell you why he didn't have the desire. In Poland a 40-year old man was old. He used to say I'm an old man already. Now I remind myself when the war broke out, he was 45 years old, forty years was old. It was a different time. A mother of 45 years, she looked like a old lady. It was an exception with my mother, she did not look an old lady but it was already. Here 50 years, was old man, a long beard, white beard. So he had no desire. But he wished for a better life for the children. Of course, the dream was there. The Zionist dream was there. It was promised through the Balfour Declaration to different politicians. He followed that, we followed that in the Zionist movement and we thought that our life will sometimes be there. It seems that this was all interrupted and it all took a different turn.

When the war broke out, were you in Lodz?

No. I was already in my hometown. Because I was in Lodz until July, I was in a camp. Then we saw--we felt the feeling--you know it was talk about the war. The feeling was that I left for home. I left for home; I left for hom. I didn't want to be in the big city.

Your brother remained?

My brother remained. He says to me, you go home. Mother and father, because I was not done there, the oldest and I had a younger brother from ten. Now he was, in 1929, he was ten, my younger sister was four years old.

What do you remember about that first day the Germans entered your town?

A very good question. I remember it a lot. The night before the Germans entered my town, we were sitting a bunch of boys in the street, on the stoop. You know, like here you go out, a bunch of boys on the stoop, was very dark. As I mentioned before, there was no electricity. We were sitting and talking and fooling around and joking like young boys and girls do. It was about eleven o'clock--the policeman in town who knew us very well came over to us and he says, go home, go home. Shut off the lights. Wherever anybody had a candle or a lamp burning, tell your parents shut off the light. Must be dark in every window.

This a Jewish policeman or just a--?

No, no. It was a Polish policeman. Go home. So we disbursed and went home. I came home and I said, you know Father. Policeman, I know his name, R ____ (357) was his name, told us to go home. The war is coming. The war is coming. My father says, nobody knows. What does he know? But he told us, the war is coming, shut off the lights and stay in your house. Sure enough, we went to sleep. Four o'clock in the morning, we heard a bang. There was a little bridge in our town between the border of Germany and Poland which was connecting both countries. The bridge was what, thirty feet wide. Yeah, that's all, maybe 30 feet wide. This bridge was dynamite by the Polish army.

That was over the Prozna (ph)(371) River?

That's right. How do you know?

I did some research.

That's right. Was the Prozna River. Was a little bridge over the Prozna River and it was dynamited by the Polish army that the Germans should not be able to come in. In the meantime, when they were dynamiting this little bridge over the Prozna, the Germans were already in town from another side. This was because there were certain places where the bridge, maybe one kilometer further was as narrow, we used to jump over. We used to make tricks, we jump to Germany. So the Polish army came over there with their tanks and with their trucks, was already in town. Immediately. So when we looked out, it got light, six o'clock in the morning, Germans are all over. Bayonets, I remember it today, the bayonets and the tanks and the trucks are coming down to put right away another bridge up. They were right away looking for Jews to go to work. So they grabbed, I went down there, a little boy in short pants, never looked Jewish. Had red hair with a lot of pimple on my face. I went down and greeted the Germans. First I went to the bakery before when the Germans were ready to come. I ran over to the bakery, me and my little brother and the baker ran away from town. He ran away from town, he was afraid when he heard shooting, he left all the bread on the floor. So we grabbed as much as I could. I hand to him and we brought it home. Fresh bread. Then other people came and they also had bread. After this, we already came home, I see already the German marching Jews. They caught some Jews to work to help them build the bridge. They marching there and the Jews were right away standing, the first day, the first few hours, up here into the water. The Prozna wasn't a big water and they were helping to rebuild the bridge what the Polish army exploded. Naturally, I ran to the house, hid my father. Took my father and my mother to the basement. I stood in front of the house. German soldiers came over with the bayonets like this, says Juda, Juda--.(397)

Jewish?

No, Juda. No Jew. Juda here, they want to know where a Jew is living there because in other places they had looked the Polish told them right away where was a Jew. They didn't know I'm a Jew. I'm not going to tell on my family. I say no Juda, no Jew, no Juda and they went further with their bayonets and they made sure that everybody opened the stores. The stores that everything should be normal. Most of the people run away from town. I witnessed the first boots, the German boots. All of a sudden, the army started marching, the German army. Army, motorcycles, trucks and tanks. Motorcycles, trucks and tanks for seven days, night and day, night and day, marching through our town to the city of Lodz. Seven days later, they were in Lodz and occupied Lodz and everything on the way. This was Friday. Sunday, they corralled all the Jews from my town into the synagogue. I showed you a picture of the synagogue. Naturally, I didn't let my father go, not my father. I went with my little brother. We all looked like little, no Jewish boys. Here they bringing Jews from all over the town into the synagogue. We thought--I didn't want to risk my parents. The idea was, we found out later, that the idea was to explode the synagogue with the people in there. This was on Sunday, three days later. Mind your this was before they had an order yet, the Von ____ (427)

Conference I think, before yet, when they had the plan to exterminate all the Jews. They were already killing Jews. This was not SS men, this was the army. I don't know where they got the orders but it was in their hand. As we stood there in the synagogue and I listened without a hat, I went in without a hat, I didn't put any. He was hollering--the general goes up on the bima, on the stage and he said, you should know, the German, you have killed many Germans in this town. Three German soldiers were killed yesterday by Jews. You entitled to die, all of you. But we giving you the last warning. If ever any German soldier will be killed in this town again, you all will be killed and he disbursed the people. He did not--we found out later from the Germans sources that they couldn't do it in our town, it was too close to Germany. It was too close, the army was marching by, you understand. Matter of fact the synagogue remained, it's still there.. This was on Sunday. Then they start marching and leaving us fairly alone, on our own till they established a headquarters and a Gestapo, They caught to work. We had to make the roads wider for the German tanks to pass.

You worked on the roads?

Yeah, we worked on the roads. Then we eliminated even some houses. There were some houses standing in the corner, little houses of wood and the German tank would pass say take it down. We had to clear it up, they should be able to cross. They took us right to work but we came home in the evening. They grabbed young people.

Your father--?

No, no. Never, we never let them. I always protected my father. I never let him go to work. He was hidden. I always went because every family had to supply people so I went, my mother went sometimes to sweep the streets. My father, no. He had very bad legs, he had broken legs before the war and he couldn't do. I protected my father. What else can I remember? Then, lasted until 1940.

Did they require armbands of you at that time?

Yeah, that's right. Two months later, a few weeks had been very quiet, we should wear all armbands and the Star of David.

Did you wear a patch or--?

Wear a patch, Star of David and a yellow armband. This way, they left us still in our homes. But we were not allowed after five o'clock out. In the morning, they let us out. But in order for us to sustain ourselves, especially my mother was the one who was the supplier of food. She ran into the village and bought some food from the peasants and brought it home dressed as a Polish woman. And I took off my band whenever--and I didn't walk in the sidewalk, I walked straight on the sidewalk. Because if I walk in the sidewalk, they knew already I am a Jew. The only thing I have to watch out for is that a Polak should not see me, he would tell him this is a Jew.

You would walk in the street?

In the street, right. You see what I mean? I walked--not in the street, I walked on the sidewalk. Took off my band, went over, brought something for somebody else, the other guy had sugar, this one had bread. You know, we did some exchanging in order to survive. This was about till 1940, till they made a ghetto. They took part of the city and they separated. We all had to leave within two hours our homes that we were living for many years and go into this ghetto. Two, three families in one room.

So your apartment wasn't within the established boundaries?

No, my apartment was not. We had to leave, we had to leave. We left and the other boundary was closer to the Jewish cemetery. Whatever we took along, we took along. Everything left. Furniture, who cares about furniture that time? We took along some schmattas, (51), to dress, that's all, to sustain yourself. There in the ghetto, we lived together. Three families into a room. Again they took us, the young people had to go to work to build the roads, to clean the snow. Winter came in and the Germans--you know they're very harsh winters.. Snow and the Germans had to travel with their trucks. We had to make the roads, we had to work for them. Till little by little, they liquidated the ghetto. They liquidated us young people, I told you, they took us to camp. Shipped off to camp, slave-labor camp.

So you were the first to go in your family?

With the first eighty boys. Looking back, retrospect, we were 80 boys with four Germans taking us on the transport. Can you imagine? No one had to--the strength or the wisdom to attack the four Germans. Eighty! Take away their ammunition and run to the forests. But nobody knew it. When I went away, I said to my father, I'm going to tell you the story. I'm going to tell you when I come back. We all thought that we going to work for three months in labor camp and we'll going to come back.. But the whole thing was to trick us in, to trick us in. So when the young people were already

tricked in, there couldn't be no more resistance , right; go in the camp. The older people with the younger people, my father with my younger two brothers, they went. The very old people, like the buby, the grandmother and-- grandfather was not alive but I had a grandmother and other people, they took them in the cemetery and shot them. They all buried in a mass grave there in Praszka. So that was the lot of my town.

What happened to your oldest brother? Did he remain in Lodz?

No, my oldest brother, I must say he died a hero,. Why did he die a hero? Because he had a good trade, he was an electrician. He came home from Lodz during the war. He run to Warsaw during the war but he came home from Warsaw. He came home from Warsaw to his parents. When I was taken out to camp, he remained home with my parents. When they had the ghetto, they clean up the ghetto, they ask all the people who had a trade, go to the right, and all the other people, my father and mother with the other children to the left. I was told, I met a boy who was in the same line, my landsman. I met him in 1944. He said your brother Moishe did not want to leave the parents.

So he went in their line?

That's right. He did not want to leave the parents. He don't know what they're going to do without him. That's why I said, he died a hero. He thought, he didn't know. He thought they're going to take him with the parents and two little children. Two younger brothers with a sister, they are going to take them. Maybe they're going to put them in the Lodz ghetto, he will work a electrician, he will have a trade. No, but it was the opposite. They took the other ones to the ghetto. If he would have gone out from the line and said I am an electrician, they would have grabbed him. He would have been.--. (End of Tape 1) I had to report to the SS man who was watching me. He say, Hefling (1), I'm under forty, _____ (1). What do you want, you dog? Bitte ___ (2) ___ means I want to go away, leave him, five minute, two minute. It was a better one he give you two minutes, it was a bastard, he said one minute back. I run to the toilet, do what you have to do, come back in a minute, if you manage. That's what they say. I always wondered, what will happen if they should give ___ (c.7). They wouldn't have to have the problems. They always could see this one, this one. So in everything in life, I think, there is some intervention. I am, most important thing of it, I remained a believer after the war, I still remained. I am a believer. I believe in divine destiny. Why me, not others? I don't know.

What about luck?

I believe. I believe that it was destiny, divine destiny that certain people should remain alive, continue their life, contribute to the society, contribute to the Jewish people and transmit the story. So today, I belong to the synagogue, I am observant and I am very dedicated, very much dedicated to the survival of the Jewish people. Not only with words, but with deeds too. I guess, it is the story of my life. There are different episodes in the middle which we could sit here for five, six hours more and I could tell you. I could tell you a story where the SS in Praszka. I was once in--thought my survival would be easier if I joined the Hitlerjugend, yeah.

This when someone believed that you were not a Jew?

That's right. I was joining them for three days I belonged to the Hitlerjugend. I thought that this would be the way. I went there and they took me in, the German youngsters, they didn't recognize me. I was in the kitchen in the beginning.

This was in your town, they had a Hitlerjugend?

Yeah, yeah. I worked there for three days till I was again given up by a Polish. The first Polish came in and he tell this is Juda. I took off my jacket and run.

Had they given you a uniform to wear?

If I would be there a few months, I would have gotten a uniform. Therefore, people saw the movie now, *Europa, Europa*, they say, I said, don't take it so easy. They said it couldn't happen. It could happen because I --and they stand up there, they don't believe it.

Somebody, one of the German soldiers or an SS man noticed you or--?

No, no. It was not a German soldier. I was again given up by a Polish.

I mean in terms of recruiting you to the--?

Recruiting you, no. I went in myself, I went in myself. I knew that--no, it was not like that. I was sent to work there. I was sent there to work. When I came in, they ask me what are you doing here? I didn't tell them I was sent by the Jewish community to work but I said I came in to work.

So the Judenrat had given out some assignments?

Yeah, Judenrat gave us some assignments. So I said I came to work in the kitchen. They young boys, 18 years old. Arbeit (49), --- here in the kitchen. Gave me an apron. Then I start to think, if I can continue staying here, I have a future. But was not easy. Was not easy because in my face you couldn't recognize me as Jewish. When people tell me the story about *Europa, Europa* when the Jewish boy was Hitlerjugend, and he did survive and certain things, I said everything is possible. It almost happened to me.

So you stayed there three days working?

Three days, I came every morning with my hand like this, Heil Hitler, you know. They believe me. The Germans was easy to get away than the Polaks. They smell you, that you're Jewish.

They could hear your accent?

Accent, accent.

Right. How long did you work in that forest? In that first labor camp?

In the forest?

Right.

I don't know. 1941--. It must have been--. When I came to camp, I came in short pants so it must have been summer. I came in short pants and a little jacket. I show it to you. My father and mother gave me something there in a little package. So I must have been there in summer, autumn, winter. Then I was sent to this German camp. There it was called Kustrin. A factory where they produced a powder for bullets.

That was before Auschwitz then too?

Yeah, this before Auschwitz, yeah.

Do you know how to spell the name of that camp?

Yeah, Kustrin. K-u-s-t-r-i-n. But on the u is two dots on top, Kustrin. Kustrin, they used to call it, Kustrin _____(75)

So after you left your town, you never went back?

No, in 1979, I was ridden down to visit my own grave. I call it to visit my own grave. To find my friend Henry Margolis. When I went to Germany, the story like this. I went to Germany to testify against two Nazis from my camp near Roznow _____(80). I went to a _____ in Germany. When I was there already, I prepared myself here home here, I got a visa for Poland. I said when I am already in Germany and I go through the agonizing, grueling of witnessing, I probably will--let's go to Poland, I said to her, my wife. She agreed with me. We never went home back. Let's go to Poland and see how it is. So this is the first time I went. After Germany, I went for five, six days to Poland in 1979. Went to visit my hometown, went to visit the cemetery. It was an agonizing experience. I lost 15 pounds at that time. Being before in Germany, take care of us two weeks. It was very tragic. I came in to my town, I was looking for the boy, I was looking for the boy who was 15. You know what I mean. I was going in the streets and my feet were sinking in like--they were so rubbery--I didn't know why your feet got so rubbery. I was looking for a young boy. I came into the home where I left. I thought I find some pictures, photographs. I was lucky, the home was there. Was occupied by a Polish drunk. He had a padlock on the door. Lucky and I didn't go in. Then I said to Helen and to the Polish guide who led me there, that I think that it was luck or Providence that the door wasn't open because I might have fainted or got a heart attack coming in the house I was glad it was closed. I went up the stair and they told me there's a Polish drunk living there. Closed and I didn't bother to go the next day. Because I came back the next day again. I didn't bother no more. I went to the cemetery, did my--did the prayers. _____(107), a Jew come to my town, nobody. I did my prayers in the cemetery. I went to the synagogue, looked just in through the window. It was also closed. They told me if you want to wait till five o'clock, we open for you. I said no, no. _____(110) I figured enough as a boy what I remember. I went on the steps from my Cheder. I said please _____. Looked around town. I saw who is living in Jewish homes, in Jewish houses and what's happening. I left, very agonizing experience. Then I went with my wife to her town. The same thing. She couldn't walk into the school, she was _____(118). She went only to the house, she will tell you where she was living. She couldn't do any more. This is the time I went over to the cemetery because was under

Poland. Y____(120) is under Poland now. So I had to go into Poland. It took me nine hours to find the cemetery. Because I asked people where is the Jewish cemetery. Nobody knew. They all were newcomers because the original populations was no more there. Until I finally got a hold of an old German woman. I gave her two dollars and she led me to the cemetery. I found the graves, I found it. Therefore when I came back, I wrote the story in the Jewish paper here. It was translated to English but this is only part of it. I came back from my own grave. Germany--I testified for three days. Was very lonely, it was not right. It's not right they sending a survivor. They are sending a survivor to testify by himself without any lawyers, without any support group without anything. Because I came in through the courtroom. They were sitting 50 people. They brought down all the secretaries and all the words in the courtroom. In the front was sitting seven judges. They told me to recognize two murderers.

This was from that sub-camp of Auschwitz?

No, from Y____(c.141).

Oh, from Y_____.

From Y_____. How can you recognize after 40 years? They old, they changed, they've no hair. You see what I mean? Instead of saying they taking four people, do you recognize two? No, they took 50 people to look at. What a _____(144). I recognized one on the picture. They show me then a picture in his uniform, then I recognize him so I said this is him. In the uniform, otherwise, I couldn't recognize him. I testified for two days, all by myself. I felt that I'm the accused. Can you imagine, seven judges! Here I have no attorney, have no defense, nobody on my side.

So they were busy asking you questions?

Yeah, they was asking me questions. You have to tell the story. How did you see? How do you know it's him? How do you it's him and how come you're--? How close were you from him? Were you two feet, three feet? I said ten feet away. They said how can you recognize it's him. I said because I saw him everyday in camp. I know it was him. If I would be closer, I wouldn't be here to testify, he would shoot me. He would kill me. The last day, I had an argument with them, not an argument, I had a statement. A very positive statement. I just spoke to their conscience. To the German judges and to them. I said one word. Through my testimony, I implicated another two SS men which were later tried. One got prison sentence. They want me to come for the other trial but I didn't want to come no more. They want me to come for the trial for the SS men from Lagisza where I was, near Benjum (162) where I told you. I didn't want to go no more. They came here. I testified

in the German consulate. I didn't want to go no more. But he got, he got through my testimony, this one guy--. As a matter of fact, i have here a paper, I had it the other day. He got sentenced one Smith. He was in the camp Lagisza--I know I just saw it. Now when I'm looking, I want to show you this piece of paper. Where do I have it? I cut it out from paper. This Smith was sentenced so many years because of--the camp from Lagisza-- because I implicated him. I wouldn't find it because I didn't prepare it. I don't know where it is.

Let me ask you one other question about when you went to Auschwitz. You were transported by train, by cattle car?

When I went to Auschwitz from K_____ (179)--. You know I don't remember, I don't remember. I'm sure it wasn't a sitting train. There was no sitting train but I actually don't remember. I remember getting off in Birkenau. You know where Mengele was there and everybody else. They took people to the right and to the left. I remember that. It was cattle cars, yes, but we were not packed like cattles from that because the Germans who put us there were a little different. I mean from this camp.

You put through the quarantine at that time?

I was put--yeah. Taken away my clothes. Taken away the clothing, taken away I had pictures from home, everything gave away. Went into shower one side, came out other side naked, give me other clothes and a different man, a different person.

Did they give you a striped uniform too or just ___?

Yeah, sure. Striped uniform, striped shirts.

Up to then you'd been in civilian clothes?

Up to then, I was in civilian clothes. My own clothes from home. We exchanged, you know, from home, this and that, civilian clothes. Then I got the striped uniform with the striped hat, with the shoes.

Wooden shoes or--?

No, I happened to grab a pair of other shoes but they were too tight. But after wearing them a few days, you don't feel no more, the tightness. No, wooden shoes, I didn't get. Some of them got wooden shoes. I happened to be lucky and got other shoes.

Did you work within Auschwitz-Birkenau?

No.

How long were you there before being--?

I volunteered on a commandant, on outside work. They came into the camp and they said we need 50 people today, 50 _____ (204). Who wants to go? One day I wanted to go, there was a camp Y _____ (205). but they--. I heard it's coal _____, it's for _____ movement, coal mines. I stepped back from the line. The next one I have we go to another camp, Lagisza-Ar _____ (207), they need _____ and I give myself another time, locksmith. I figure I'm not going _____ (209) I wanted to get away from Auschwitz as fast as possible on account of the selection.

That was Lagisza?

They were sent to Lagisza, yeah.

Okay. Let's see. Y _____ (215) was when?

1944. 1944 in the middle, there was no _____ camp at Lagisza. August. I came to Auschwitz in August, 1943. I came to Lagisza, must be in September. I was there September, October, November, December. I was there the winter. Then I went to _____ (222). When it was already, wasn't cold already. Maybe I was a year in Lagisza. I don't remember that.

So luckily your time at Auschwitz-Birkenau was relatively short?

Yeah, very short. I was just waiting there. I didn't work there, didn't go to work. Auschwitz, maybe, I don't know, a week, yeah. By the time they _____ us back and forth every day. Maybe even less than a week. They took us right out to the A _____ (232). That's all.

That's a lot.

It's enough for a book.

Yes, yes.

MENDEL ROZENBLIT

AUGUST 6, 1992

SILVER SPRING,MD

The date is August 6, 1992 and we're speaking with Dr. Marsha Rozenblit in Silver Spring, Maryland. Dr. Rosenblit is going to tell us about her father and his family, and any family members that she can recall. So please, could you tell me your father's name, his date of birth, his place of birth and then anything you can about his childhood and his family.

Okay, my father whose name was Mendel Rozenblit was born on November 13, 1907 in a town called Lukow in Poland. Anyway this town was in the area of Lublin, I don't know exactly in which direction or.....Okay, so my father was born in Lukow which was near Lublin in 1907. He was born into a pretty religious family. I think that parts of the family were associated with the Hasidim. But he did not grow up technically as a Hasidic child. He was just an ordinary traditionally religious Polish Jewish boy. His father died when he was very young, well not very young I guess. Well, let me go backwards a little bit. My father was one of about six or seven children and he was in the middle. He was not the oldest or the youngest; he was one of the middle children. His father died when he was a young boy. I think, if my memory serves me correctly, he was about twelve when his father died, which means his father died just after World War I of asthma. But I think he was sickly for most of his life. But my grandmother, that is my father's mother whose name was - well I should say that my father's father's name was Avraham Rozenblit - and his mother Masha Markusfeld Rozenblit, after

whom I'm named, Marsha - Masha, his mother managed quite well to have six children and run the family. She owned a, well my mother used to say she owned a general store, but my cousin in Israel who was seventeen when he left Poland and really knew her, said that she basically owned a shoe store. That is, she sold other things too, but it was mostly shoes and what she would do is, she would take trips to Warsaw or Lublin and see what was in the fancy shoe stores there and then copy them and arranged to have the shoes made. She didn't make them herself. She wasn't a shoemaker but she would get them made and then sell them, both in the store and also in a kind of...She would send her children out to sell them also, when they were grown, to sell them to the peasants in the villages. That I learned from my cousin in Israel. But let me just try to say something about my father's family background in general before I talk more specifically. They were a very religious family and pictures of my father show him wearing the sort of traditional cap of the Polish Jews, you know that sort of squarish cap. I can't tell from the pictures whether he has pais or not, it's hard to tell, but maybe he did. I should say before I go on that my father died, Mendel Rozenblit, the survivor that we're talking about, died in 1961 when I was ten years old so that most of my recollections come from either things I actually remember him saying, or things that my mother told me that he had said, or things that my cousin in Israel, that is his nephew, Mordecai Rozenblit, who came to Palestine in 1938 has told me. So it's a sort of conglomerate of those things. So, in any case it was a traditional religious family in the Lublin area. His mother owned this shoe store. I don't think she was rich but she was reasonably prosperous and my father had all of these brothers and sisters. His oldest, I don't even know the age order, I think Nehama the sister, he had one sister and five brothers I believe, and the sister, Nehama, was I think the oldest and then there were other brothers. There was Simcha, there was Haim Yakov, there was Meir who was the baby, there was Yehoshua and I know how most of them died actually and I'll get back to that later when we talk about it. But Haim Yakov was a very ardent Zionist and he left Poland before the war. He went to Palestine in 1937 and then his son Mordecai joined him in 1938.

Were the rest of the family involved in Zionism, do you know?

You know, I don't know. My cousin, Mutti, Mordecai, in Israel has many times told me that you know, he had said to me, [Marsha, at yahdat ha abba shelach lo haya Zioni] which means Marsha, your father wasn't a Zionist. But I think that's not true. I think that Mutti means by that, that my father didn't move to Palestine after the war. And Mutti is still mad at him forty years later for not having done that. I do have his Zionist membership card from after the war. But, of course, everybody was a Zionist after the war. So the question is was he an active Zionist before the war. Judging from the schools he sent his children to I don't think so. That is an active Zionist. I don't think he was active in the Zionist movement, no. But he was probably sympathetic to Zionism.

I was going to ask you about the town. Have you researched or found out anything about that town, was it a shtetl or...?

Well all towns are shtetls, shtetl just means little town.

What was the nature of this town?

It was a small town. I don't know how big it was. It certainly wasn't a large place. Lublin was in central Poland so it was central Poland. I think my image of it as a child was that it was like any small American town with white picket fences and neat little houses on neat little streets. And I was shocked in 1972 or '03, I was talking to Lucin Dovarshitsky[ph67] who teaches Polish-Jewish history at YIBO and who is a member of whatever the staff at the YIBO Institute and Lucin Dovarshitsky[ph69] at the time was busy collecting lots and lots and lots of pictures for the Image Before My Eyes volume and I said my father was from Lukow and he said, well I've got a picture of Lukow, come and see it. So I went upstairs to his office and I looked at this picture of Lukow and it was not my image. I mean it was a muddy little street. This was a picture taken in 1926 and it was this dreary little muddy town. So it was a tiny little nothing of a town, I think. Although my cousin Mutti in Israel who was seventeen when he left Lukow has nice memories of it so it couldn't have been that horrendous. I mean maybe this picture doesn't do it justice. He has nice memories. My father left Lukow when he married and lived near Warsaw. I'll get to that in a minute. So his adult life was not in Lukow, it was in a Warsaw suburb. The stories of his childhood that he told me when I was little were certainly not negative. If his family was prosperous, even if they weren't rich they wouldn't have suffered much.

Do you know about his education, where he went to school?

He went to Chaida. He was born in 1907. He was born when that part of Poland was part of the Russian Empire. I know he just went to traditional Chaida. He did not have a formal secular education as far as I know. I do know that he could read Polish easily and that means that he must have had some secular education. All the schooling he ever spoke of was Chaida. On the other hand since he could read Polish novels he must have also gone to something else. He didn't have a gymnasium education, that I know. He didn't go to University. But he must have gone to some Polish school as well as Chaida because you can't read Polish easily if you hadn't. Speaking it is one thing but knowing it is another. So I think that he and virtually all his siblings just went to Chaida and maybe also some kind of Polish elementary school. There is one thing that is important and that is his younger brother, Meir, wanted very much to have a real secular education and he did go to Polish school and gymnasium in their town, or maybe not in their town, it's hard to say since I was only ten when my father died, he may have just said gymnasium and maybe Meir went off to Lublin to go to gymnasium, I don't know. In any case my grandmother who was a religious woman, who wore a sheitel and so forth, nevertheless was willing to let her youngest son go to gymnasium. This must have been already, since Meir is younger than my father, this must have been after World War I. It must have been in the twenties. And the town was very mad at her for doing this. So she was something of a progressive because she was, although very religious, was willing to let her son go to gymnasium, and of course going to gymnasium meant going to school on Saturday. And theoretically Jews were exempt from writing. And in fact they were. But obviously it spoke of abandoning traditional Jewish life and

entering the larger world. She was certainly willing to do this and was willing to defy the town to let this happen. I remember my father telling a story about how there was a library in town, like a secular library. Now maybe it was a Zionist library, maybe it was Pol...I don't know what and a lot of the "frumies"[ph104], a lot of the very religious people in town marched against it and they tried to burn it down. And my grandmother, who was herself religious and not secular, nevertheless sort of defied them and insisted that her son Meir go to gymnasium. Actually Meir had a very different experience from all the rest of them. Meir not only went to Polish gymnasium but after he graduated from gymnasium, and this must have been into the '30s at some point, he went to University to study to be a doctor. He didn't go in Poland because it was very difficult for Jews to do that in Poland. He went first in Italy and then in Paris. He was presumably deported from Paris to Auschwitz because he was dead too. So his experience was different from everybody else's. One brother went to Palestine where he died a natural death in 1943 of a heart attack. Haim Yakov is the one who went to Palestine and Meir was in France.

Do you have pictures of either of them?

I have pictures of Meir as a baby. No, actually as an adult, too. Come to think of it, yes, there is a picture of Meir as an adult, two pictures of Meir as adults. One from Italy and one I'm not sure where from. He went to Pisa and studied medicine and then he was in Paris. I think he married in Paris but I don't think he had children. And I don't know what happened to his wife. I don't know if she was deported or not deported. My father never tried to look her up after the war. And my mother, after my father's death, was suspicious that perhaps Meir's wife wasn't Jewish and that's why my father hadn't bothered to look her up after the war because he was in Munich for two and a half years after the war, he could have. And he knew his brother was in Paris. And he found out that his brother had been deported so he could have presumably investigated his brother's wife but he didn't. That may mean that the family was angry that he had married a non-Jewish woman or something like that. Anyway Meir's experience as an educated Jew, as an educated person and the fact that Haim Yakov was a devout Zionist, I think indicates that this family, while very religious, clearly had its arms out to the modern world, either through Jewish nationalism or through secular education. And it's also true that my father, although raised as a very religious little boy, as an adult was not religious. As an adult in Poland, I don't mean in America after the war, that's something else. But as an adult in Poland was not as religious as he had been growing up. He had a kosher home, he sent his kids to Jewish schools, he was very Jewish, but that was normal in Poland. People did that. But he was not that observant a Jew as an adult in the thirties as he had been growing up although his mother remained religious. And I assume some of his siblings were and some weren't. I really don't know. That would be a nice question to ask. My cousin in Israel would know all these answers because he was seventeen when he left and he would have a better sense of who was religious and who was not. Anyway what else can I say about just his family background. His mother had this store. I think several of his brothers were involved in running the store or in, as I said, selling to the peasants. But some of the brothers moved. He himself moved to Warsaw. I think another brother, Simcha moved to Warsaw. I'm not sure where his sister Nehama lived when she grew up. I mean they were all adults by the '30s

and they were all married and had children and so forth. The only thing I could say I suppose - my grandmother, Masha Markusfeld Rozenblit, I mean "Markusfeld" is very important. She was a Markusfeld. Rozenblit was something that accrued to her but she was a Markusfeld. She must have been a very feisty lady, she sounds like it. She ran this store, she had her six kids which she raised by herself, or at least partly. We have a picture of her. She looks like a Jewish woman from Poland but she was kind of a neat lady, I think.

Do you know when she was born?

No, but she was in her sixties when she was killed. So that would make her born in the 1880's. Right and if my father was born in 1907 that's about right. So she would have been born in the 1880's or 1870's, probably in the 1870's if he was born in 1907 and he was not her first child, he was her third or fourth child. And I think my father's father, Avraham Rozenblit, he was probably in his forties when he died, in around 1919 say, so that means he was born also in the 1870's. My father, by the way, even though he did not have formal higher education or even secondary education, knew a lot of languages like many Jews of that part of the world. Yiddish was of course his native language like it was for virtually all the Jews of Poland except a small group of hyper-assimilated Jews. But he was fluent in Polish and that was common for his generation, that is people who came of age in the twenties and thirties knew increasingly also, unless they were just Hasidim, increasingly really knew Polish. And certainly my cousin, Mutti, the one who moved to Palestine in 1937, '38, Mutti went to Polish public school in the thirties and has very fond memories of his teachers in the Polish elementary school in Lukow, that they were not anti-semitic. I don't know if he's telling the whole truth when he says that, it may be nostalgia. I mean he has unkind words about Poles in general but his teachers were very loving and very nice and he has very fond memories of going to elementary school in Polish although how deep his Polish language knowledge is, is hard to say, because at this point in the 1990's after living in Israel for fifty odd years he really can speak only Hebrew and Yiddish and English which he learned in the British army during World War II but his Polish, I think, is so rusty that he didn't use it. But anyway my father knew Yiddish of course which was his mother tongue, Polish which he spoke totally fluently. He knew Hebrew. Now that's unusual. That would indicate also a Zionist whatever. Again I don't know. My mother says he knew Hebrew. Now what does that mean. She says, she insisted that he spoke modern Israeli Hebrew, that he could easily speak Hebrew to an Israeli. I don't remember that although we did have an Israeli neighbor in the fifties and my mother says he spoke to her in Hebrew. Now maybe he said three words and my mother thought that meant he.....Certainly he had a traditional Chaida education and he was well versed. He wasn't a Talmudist but he knew Hebrew in the way a traditionally educated Jew knew Hebrew. It wasn't rote. He could look at the prayer book or at a bible and understand what it said. He knew Russian. I don't know if he could read or write Russian but he certainly could speak Russian and he knew German. So he knew his languages. Okay what else can I say about just childhood. My father was clearly a very mischievous little boy because there are several stories that I remember of him directly telling me for example about how they tormented the Malamed at Chaida, how they tormented the teacher at the traditional Jewish school in the Chaida. In fact I remember when I was in Hebrew school as a child

he would say to me, Marsha you must never do the things to your teachers that we did, that I did to our teachers. And he did all the things you read about in all the Haskala, I mean putting tacks on the chair and putting honey on the chair and they just bedeviled the life of the poor teacher, which was standard, standard childhood high-jinx. And the other thing is that his sister, Nehama, who was older than he, probably three or four years older even though she was three children older, his sister Nehama wanted a date. World War I was a kind of liberating experience, not the war itself, that was just a horrible experience. In the aftermath of the war things really opened up and social life really changed. And she wanted to go out on dates but her mother didn't want her to because her mother was still very traditional. And so my father and another one of his brothers would conspire with her to sneak her out of the house. And they did this through some kind of closet, some armoire, in Europe they have these closets and apparently they would move it against the window and open the window and open the back of the closet. I don't remember the exact details but I have vivid memories of riding in our family car in the 1950's with my father telling me stories about how they would trick his mother so that Nehama could go out on a date with probably the man she ended up marrying. But, you know, nothing serious. She didn't cover her hair, actually. Pictures we have of her or that I've seen of her as an adult, she didn't cover her hair. So clearly this was a family on its way out of religious tradition although still very deeply connected to things Jewish. So my father, I think, was a very mischievous child. He always had a twinkle in his eyes as an adult, too, so he clearly was the kind....and survivors, of course, were often the kind of people who were mischievous sorts. Okay, I think I don't know very much more about my father's real childhood, that is when he was a baby. If I think of anything I'll come back to it. My father got married pretty young. He got married when he was about twenty or twenty-one to a cousin of his whom he loved very deeply. So this was also non-traditional in a way, that is it was a love marriage, not an arranged one.

Was it a first cousin?

You know I think it was a first cousin. I think she was his first cousin. I'm not a hundred percent positive that she was his first cousin but she was definitely his cousin. Her father owned a lumber yard in the Warsaw area in a town called Wolomin, which I think is spelled W-O-L-O-M-I-N, I'm not a hundred percent sure but I think so. It's in the Warsaw area. So he moved to Warsaw, or to Wolomin, and he ran his father-in-law's business or worked with his father-in-law in running the business. His wife though, whose name was either Mira or Perella[224] I don't remember which, his wife though died about a week after their first child was born because she had a rheumatic heart and she was warned by doctors not to have any children and she then didn't listen. She wanted a child, it wasn't accidental. They weren't that religious and she died very shortly after he was born.

So you think she was probably about twenty years old?

She was probably twenty, twenty-one. I think my father was twenty-one and she was probably the same age or a year younger. She was very young. Their son's name was Avraham. He was named after my father's father. Avraham was born therefore, let's see in 1943 when he was killed, he was twelve. So he was born in 1931. So my father wasn't twenty-one he was twenty-four. Well, whatever. These stories have gotten passed from my mother who was not especially good at dates but I think Avraham was born either in 1930 or '31. And his wife died and he was very, very miserable, naturally. And the family talked him into marrying her sister whose name was either Mira or Perella[236]. In other words Mira and Perella[ph] were his wives. I just don't remember which was the first and which was the second. I think Perella[ph] was the second. I think Mira was the first. Again I'm really not a hundred percent sure. Again my cousin in Israel would know the answer. And they had another child.

The family talked him into it. Was this under duress then that he did this?

No, I think they talked him into it in the sense that this is the smartest and best thing to do. The child needs a mother, what better mother than her sister. She needs a husband, she's a nice lady, why don't you just marry her. You know, I think it was that kind of thing. And he was very depressed and he needed a mother for his child and maybe she was already taking care of the kid. I don't know exactly but he definitely married her. And it was all right. Obviously it was sad. I didn't know this when I was a child. When I was a child my father was very open and talked a huge amount about his holocaust experience and about his life before the war. But for whatever reason, maybe because it was ordinary tragedy rather than the special Jewish tragedy of the holocaust, he didn't tell me about the fact that his first wife had died. He thought that would be too sad for me. Here he was telling me about his son and daughter who had been slaughtered by the Nazis. And that he could tell me about. But the specific tragedy of his own personal life with his wife's death he didn't tell me. I found out when I was twenty or something. A cousin of his in America was visiting us and she just mentioned it casually. I said, what are you talking about? And she told me the whole story and I just bawled. It was very sad that this love of his life died in childbirth. But anyway, he did have a daughter with the second wife. Her name was Toby. That's what my mother called her. It's probably Tova, which again sounds both modern and Hebraic, Gittel is the Yiddish. Tova is already a sign of modernity in its modern Jewish form. She was four years younger than Avraham. So she would have been born in 1934 or '35, something like that, or '33 depending on exactly when Avraham was born. And my father continued to live in Wolomin with his wife and running this lumber yard. He sent his kids to - there were several Jewish school systems in Poland as you know. There was the Zionist school system and the Bundist school system and the "frumie", the religious school system and so forth. He sent his children to a school system that was very much like American Jewish Day schools, that is Jewish subjects were taught in Hebrew and secular subjects were taught in Polish which was not the case in the Zionist or Bundist schools where everything was taught either in Hebrew or Yiddish with only a minimal amount of Polish. So his children went to this kind of modern Jewish school which means, of course, that it was a little bit more religious than both the Zionist or the Bundist schools which would indicate a kind of moderate religious position. So that's the kind of school he sent his kids to.

As I said he kept a kosher home. I don't think he was Sabbath observing. So he was kind of a little traditional but not...

And they spoke Yiddish at home, I assume.

You know I don't know what language. Certainly growing up he spoke Yiddish at home, that goes without saying. What language did he speak as an adult in his family in Wolomin? I don't know. I really don't know if he spoke Yiddish or Polish or both. You know if you're utterly fluent it probably depends on your mood. Yiddish was definitely his mother tongue, what he dreamed in, what he counted in was definitely Yiddish, but I don't know. I bet they spoke Yiddish. I think most Jews spoke Yiddish.

That would be my guess.

My guess would be Yiddish although maybe sometimes Polish depending if the kids came back from school and spoke Polish, then you answered them in Polish and then all of a sudden for an hour you were talking Polish. But then if you stopped talking for a minute and then started talking again you probably would speak Yiddish because Yiddish was the natural thing to speak. After the war in America my father was utterly fluent in English. He learned English very quickly and spoke English with my mother who was American born. But with his friends from Lukow who had survived the war, and some of them had as partisans and so on, these friends who were in America, their natural language that they spoke was Yiddish although all of them were modern. None of them were Orthodox and so forth. The natural language they would speak was Yiddish. But sometimes they would just speak Polish and it would drive my mother crazy because as an American Jew she did know Yiddish but she didn't know Polish. And she would get very angry with them when they spoke Polish and the angrier she got the more they would speak Polish to make her angrier because they were very jealous of her because she had parents because she was American and they didn't. The thing they had on her was that they could speak more languages and so they would speak Polish. But my guess is that Yiddish would be the language of his home. I don't know what kind of home he lived in. He was certainly reasonably prosperous, certainly middle class and definitely in contact with his family in Lukow. He still had brothers and I think his sister was there. His mother certainly was there. Of course he had aunts and uncles and cousins and nieces and nephews. All of his brothers and sisters had married. They all had children. He was the closest with his sister. The sibling he talked the very most about was his sister. They were named for the same person. Mendel is a Yiddish nickname for Menachem and so technically his name was Menachem Mendel Tzidik[ph312]. I should tell you my father's formal name was Menachem Mendel Tzidik[ph] Rozenblit which would translate - Tzidik is Tzadok, just a Yiddish way of saying Tzadok and Nehama, his sister, who was called Nechuma[ph314], ??raised eyes that she was called Nechuma. Nechuma was obviously named for the same person. She was born first and they named her Nehama to be after whatever relative,

Menachem. When my father was born they named him after the same relative. So he was very close with his sister and he talked about Meir because Meir was unusual because he was the one who had the secular education and had gone off to study medicine. That was all he talked about with any specificity except in terms of how each of them died in the holocaust and I can tell you about that when we talk about the war years. I don't know what his wife did. I don't know if his wife worked or not. Probably not given the 1930's in Poland and middle class family. I doubt that she worked. They were definitely middle class. This is not somebody making - with nostalgia, hindsight, looking back because well maybe this isn't a good historical - forget this. I was going to say I've seen the list of property that he presented to the United Restitution Organization as part of his reparations claim. It's the kind of things middle class people have, you know silver and whatever, fur coats and so forth. But you know people could lie on those so that's not necessarily a good source. I think that despite the very terrible situation for Jews in Poland in the 1930's, you know very high anti-semitism and very terrible economy and so forth, that my father did reasonably well. He certainly didn't give any thought as far as I know to migrating although there was no place to migrate to except for Palestine. And he wasn't enough of a Zionist to want to go to Palestine although his brother Haim Yakov did. They had relatives in America like probably every Jew in Poland but America was out of the question by the twenties so I think he was perfectly content to be in Poland. In terms of his attitude to Poland as a country, actually when he was born, he was born in Russia, and of course the Polish Jews hated Russia because they were discriminated against so severely, I think he thought of himself as a Polish national. I think he was a typical Jew in Poland in the sense that his primary identity was as a Jew. If you asked him, who are you, what are you, he would say I am a Jew. But he was Polish, he spoke Polish, he identified with the Polish state. He thought of himself as a Polish subject. He used that word actually. He called himself a Polish subject which is a funny archaic word which is usually used for kingdoms. But that's how Jews were in Poland. They were members of the Polish state but they weren't Poles so he would never have said that he was a Pole because he wasn't a Pole, he was a Jew. I suppose he was hoping that the Polish Republic would get to be a nicer place than it was. As I said I was ten when he died and at ten I didn't ask him such nice interesting political questions as what you thought about Poland and how you related to Poland and so on. What else could I tell you about right before the war?

This is good. This is all good and it's what we need.

hat's what you need. So basically, before the war, on the eve of the war, in 1939, on September 1, 1939, my father had a business that was reasonably prosperous. He lived in a town near Warsaw called Wolomin. He had a wife; he had two children, a boy and a girl. He had a huge extended family. He had a very large family, he had a mother and sisters and brothers, nieces and nephews, aunts and uncles, cousins. He had a large and intact and functioning family. And then the war started.

So what happened.

What happened, okay. You know I'm used to telling the story to my six year old son and of course to my six year old son I have to include what happened during the war. I have to sketch out the war and what the Nazis did to the Jews and I don't have to do that here. In the first months of the war there was just chaos and all kinds of restrictions against the Jews. I assume that his business was Aryanized because that's what the Germans did as soon as they came in. They Aryanized businesses giving them to ethnic Germans. I assume my father was not compensated for it. He was a clever man. He probably managed to get stuff out of it before it was technically Aryanized. In all the stories he talked about the years before he was deported to Auschwitz he never mentioned that he was starving to death and he was living in the street or anything like that. Of course he was starving but he wasn't.....He must have managed to get something out of his business even though he wasn't compensated for it. You read about this in the memoirs people who with Polish friends manage to make arrangements and deals and so forth. But anyway his business was confiscated, his bank accounts frozen, all of those things taken from him. But then, of course, he was in the ghetto. Now when my father was alive and he talked about his experiences in the war he always simply said the ghetto. He didn't specify which one. When my mother, who is not a historian and who is not at all good with details and in fact was terrible with details, when my mother talked about it for him, after he died, or when I would ask her as I got a little older, well which ghetto, she said the Warsaw ghetto, that he was in the Warsaw ghetto. Some of the details of his story very much match the Warsaw ghetto in terms of...well the fact is he escaped from the ghetto when it was burning in April 1943. That's the Warsaw ghetto. What other ghetto was burning in April '43 that you could escape from in some way. But on the other hand, he didn't live in Warsaw. He lived in Wolomin which was close to Warsaw. There could have been a ghetto in Wolomin. On the other hand it was so close to Warsaw that all the people may have been moved to Warsaw. But usually people who had to move into a place did very, very badly. And my father obviously didn't fare badly. I think that he probably was in the Warsaw ghetto. He probably did just simply get moved from Wolomin into Warsaw. Let's say for the purposes of this record that he was in the Warsaw ghetto.

Have you looked up any of the records about Wolomin if they did transfer them at some point?

No, I have never done that. It's funny, I'm a historian and not a genealogist and so I'm interested in what happened to the Jews and I've never bothered to look up the specifics of my father's experience in any systematic way. A lot of his experiences that he described are very, very similar to what you read in the memoirs. So it fits in very well. But I never at all tried towhen I was reading Itzhak Arrad's[ph415] book about ???[415]Treblinka which is about the operation ???[416] death camps which basically gassed all of the Jews of Poland and certainly the region he was living in because the section of Poland that both he and his family was in was the general government. The Germans came in and annexed the Bartoland[ph420] and created the general government and the Soviets took the eastern part of Poland. So my father was in the general government. Anyway when I read that I did pay attention to see if there was any word about Wolomin. There was description of deportations from Wolomin but I don't know. There probably are no records of the Wolomin ghetto. In any case, for the sake of argument I say that my father was in the Warsaw ghetto. I think he may have worked

for the Jewish Council. He never said that. This is not a memory I have from him or from my mother or from my cousin Mutti who wouldn't have know because my cousin Mutti could only give me information about the pre-war period because he left in 1938. I have a memory from when I was a child of a friend of my father's from Wolomin, a man who had been a worker of his in his lumber yard who he was in Auschwitz with and who had also survived and who remained a friend after the war. He's still alive, a man named Shaya May[ph436]. I think he's still alive. He was alive five years ago when my mother died because I called him but I assume he's still alive. Shaya[ph] once I remember when I was a child, it was right after my father died, too, actually, he was talking to my mother about my father during the war. He mentioned something about my father working for that traitorous Council or something like that. A lot of the Jews hated the Council. He was certainly not a member of the Council, of the 24 hot shots on the Council because I certainly would have come across his name if he were. The Warsaw ghetto Judenhad had seven hundred employees so he may have known someone who knew somebody who got him a job on the Council. So he may have worked on the Council. From my memories of all the stories of the ghetto years I don't have any sense that he was in terrible shape. Obviously all the Jews had very little food and fuel and so forth. Things were very difficult in the ghettos. But his family was in tact. He had a son and his daughter. His son and daughter attended school. I think his wife taught school in the ghetto. My mother said that. Either she taught school or she taught piano. I think both stories, I remember. So she was involved in this kind of moral resistance that took place, the organization of clandestine schools, and sort of doing normal and cultural and so forth things. I don't think I know very much more about the specific ghetto experience.

So you don't know if they lived with other families or...?

That I just don't know. The only person who might know is Shaya May[ph462] but Shaya never wanted to talk about his experiences very much whereas my father talked about it all the time. I should add I have another source about my father's experiences and that is that when he went to school in America, when he came to America, the equivalent of "What I Did on My Summer Vacation," he had to write an essay about his experiences. He had to write an essay that described his experiences during the war, I guess, so he wrote. I have part of that essay, part of it is missing. But he just says I suffered terribly and goes on. He doesn't provide specific details about what it was like in the ghetto or in the camps. There was also, of course, the testimony that he provided to B. Goodmachten[ph474] for the reparations claim which my mother typed and of which there is no copy although she swears she made one. She doesn't know what happened to it and she suspects that my father actually destroyed the copy. I don't know why. But the copy just doesn't exist. Most of her memories I suppose come from that formal document that she typed for him. So I don't know if he lived with others or what the situation was. Probably he did, most Jews did, it was a very crowded situation. Most of his family, of course, was in Lukow, in the Lukow ghetto although he had a brother in Warsaw. Simcha was in Warsaw and Simcha was shot for playing cards after curfew. He was shot during the time of the ghetto. I mean not for playing cards but after playing cards going out in the street. So Simcha died before the deportations. And he had been in Warsaw because he had moved

to Warsaw already in the thirties or twenties or something and I don't know why he had moved or what he did at all. Again my cousin Mutti would probably know although he may not because since he was in Lukow he didn't really know the War.....he actually knew my father the least well because my father was already in Warsaw. He remembers my father coming home to visit twice or three times and giving him a ball or something like that. His stories are really best. From my cousin Mutti in Israel I mostly learned about my grandmother, about Masha Rozenblit, because that was his grandmother, too. Anyway so I really don't know much about the ghetto years except that things were okay. His brother was shot but things were reasonably okay. Of course then came the deportations. During the deportations from the Lukow ghetto, his mother was shot. She was in her sixties and rather than take her to Treblinka or Sobibor or wherever they were taking the Jews from Lukow, they shot her. Somebody must have witnessed that because how else would he have known, he wasn't in Lukow. She was shot. I assume the rest of his relatives in Lukow, aunts, uncles, cousins, Shia and his family were probably just deported to wherever Jews from Lukow were deported to and gassed.

Do you know what year this was, was it '43?

No, well all of Polish Jewry, it's '42. The operation Rhinehart which just simply went methodically and liquidated all the ghettos began something like March of '42 and was over by October '42 with some pockets left. That is there were Jews left in the Warsaw ghetto and in thewas it the Lublin? Yeah the Lublin ghetto was made into a labor camp and a couple of other places. There were pockets where they allowed Jews to still continue. Those were destroyed in '43. I assume that probably all of those relatives were killed in '42 unless by some chance Shia or another one of his brothers was in the labor camp, in the Jeneska Road[ph502] labor camp or Poniyet Tovah[ph504], I forget there were a whole bunch of labor camps in the Lublin area which maybe his brother or one of his nephews because if my father's son was already twelve by that time then his older brothers' kids could have been teenagers. So maybe they were in.....But I just don't know. I assume that everybody was just killed in '42. His sister, Nehama, though, who lived in Lukow with her family, you know I wrote down that her name was Pearlman but maybe her name was Bernstein. Yes, her name was Bernstein. Pearlman was my father's wife's maiden name. She and her husband who was much shorter than her, that was the joke of the family, that Nehama who was very tall, I presumably look like Nehama, - when I was a kid we would go to the Lukow Young Men's Benevolent Association and all the people who had come from my father's town - and people would go, Nehama, Nehama. They looked at me. I don't look like her in the pictures but they thought I looked like her. But anyway she and her family, her husband and her children (she probably had teen-age children) hid in the woods. They somehow escaped the ghetto. I don't know if they escaped in '42 or if they escaped earlier but they were hiding in the woods near there in the Lublin region. And they were only killed in '44, about three months before the end of the war in that part of Poland. They were handed over by some Poles to the Nazis at that point. So I don't know what happened to them if they were then sent to Auschwitz or if they were shot right away or whatever. But they did succeed in hiding. Nechuma, I should be fair, her name was not Nehama, her name was Nechuma. Actually she used a Polish name too, Helenie, she used the name Helenie. There are pictures on the back that say Helenie. I think she was the only one

that used a Polish name. My father didn't. He used Mendel, his Yiddish name and all the others, Shia, Meir, they all used their Hebrew names. But she used both, Nechuma and Helenie. But anyway, Nechuma and her family, that had been hiding for years, at least for two, maybe even more than two, were handed over to the Nazis by some Poles for (as my mother used to say, for a bottle of Vodka). The Poles were given booty for handing over Jews. Now I don't know if these people had just happened upon them and turned them over or if these were people who had been helping them all along and then turned them over, because often people were hiding with the assistance of Poles. Maybe it was neighbors, good Poles who were helping them who turned them over, who knows. I think that most of his family, the Lukow branch of the family, his mother and brothers and sisters, well whatever, there's not that many brothers by that time because Simcha and his family were in Warsaw and presumably they were deported in 1942. Simcha had been shot earlier for curfew violations but presumably his family was deported in '42 when most of the Jews in Warsaw were deported. In Lukow Haim, his brother Haim Yakov had already gone to Palestine although his family hadn't. My father's brother Haim Yakov had gone to Palestine in 1937 alone. His son, Mutti, followed him in 1938 leaving the wife and the other children. So they were all presumably killed also in '42. Shia was there and his family presumably were all killed and Nehama was there but she was in hiding until '44 when she was handed over to the Nazis, she and her family were handed over to the Nazis and killed and of course Meir was in Paris and he was deported, I assume, again I don't know this, but I assume he was deported in July of 1942 when the big raid in Paris took place, July 16 I believe, 1942, when most Polish Jews in Paris were deported. Now this is not necessarily true. He could have escaped to the south and have been picked up at some other time. He definitely was deported to Auschwitz because after the war my cousin Mutti in Israel, he was too upset to deal with the issue but his wife, Zeporah, spent months dealing with the Red Cross and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency to track down all the Rozenblit relatives, also her own relatives from her own family. But her own family was mostly in Palestine because they were all Zionist who'd come mostly in the '20s. So she tracked them down and she found my father and she found nobody else. So in fact the first time I saw those letters I wanted to cry because the first letter had to be in English, the Red Cross would only deal in English. So the first letter to my father that my cousin Mutti wrote to his uncle was in English so I could read it easily and my father didn't know English yet but Mutti knew English and then of course all subsequent correspondence was just real letters because my father had a real address and that was all in Yiddish which I could read too but with much more difficulty so I didn't read it quite as easily. But she found nobody else. So I assume obviously she would have found - there were all these organizations after the war, all these Jewish and non-Jewish organizations tracking down people. So he was presumably killed either in '42 or '43 or '44, everybody else. And Nehama definitely in '44. Simcha at some point before '42, everybody else in '42 except for my father and his family. In any case assuming that my father was in the Warsaw ghetto, his family was able to stay there after that initial depletion of the Warsaw ghetto in August/September of 1942. That confirms that he worked for the Jewish Council actually because the people who stayed in Warsaw, the 70,000 or so that remained after the major liquidation either worked for the Jewish Council or were involved in SS industry, or whatever industry that was working for the German war economy.

Maybe that lent itself also to them having slightly better food conditions or something like that.

That's right. Also I think the Wolomin ghetto was simply, I read that in Orad[ph33] the Wolomin was totally destroyed in 1942. So my father I know was in the ghetto until April of 1943. That's Warsaw, that April '43 date is so fundamentally Warsaw that he had to have been in the Warsaw ghetto. In fact he always lit a Yartzeit candle for his children at Pesach because that's around, I mean the Warsaw ghetto was finally liquidated on the second night of Pesach. And they didn't die that night, I'll tell that story in a minute but it was just a few weeks later. So Pesach of 1943, so Pesach is when he lit a Yartzeit candle for them. Actually he always lit a Yartzeit candle for everybody then. I don't know, maybe because he was in Warsaw and that had such an impact on his conscience. His mother was probably shot at some point in 1942 not necessarily at Pesach. My father, therefore, and his wife and his children and his wife's sister who was crippled, not totally crippled but she schlepped a leg for whatever reason, they were together in the ghetto. So he was in the ghetto after that liquidation of August/September 1942 when most of the people in the ghetto were liquidated. So he was one of the 70,000 that stayed in the ghetto until April of '43 when the Nazis decided on the final liquidation of the ghetto. Now my father in 1943, he was born in 1907, so in 1943 he was 36. Well he wasn't yet because his birthday is November, so he was 35 years old. And he had a twelve year old son and an eight year old daughter and a wife and a sister-in-law. And they decided to escape from the burning ghetto. Because of the uprising the Nazis sort of bombed the ghetto and sent in fire bombs and so forth and basically burned the ghetto down. And my father and his family decided to escape from the ghetto. I don't know if that means they went through the sewers or not. In Warsaw that's how people escaped from the ghetto. This is where he really told. My father told the stories from the escape from the Warsaw ghetto until liberation. That's what he told. The ghetto experience didn't interest him. That must mean that it was not too terrible. My image of hearing the story as a child was that they escaped into the woods. But there are no woods around the Warsaw ghetto or around Warsaw even for that matter. So I don't know how they escaped, presumably they did it through the sewers. But in any case they escaped. Oh, I do know, my mother I think told me this that he did make attempts through Polish, non-Jewish friends to get his children to be taken by non-Jews. You know pretend to be non_Jews. And nobody would do it. He was unable to get anybody to agree to do that. So anyway there he was with his twelve year old, his eight year, his wife and his sister-in-law and they escaped and somehow they made it to some woods, or maybe not to some woods, they were just out. They had a kind of pact that if one of them should get lost, they would not look for that person because that could be problematic and instead if one of them should get lost, they should go to a farm house that they knew which was some distance away, my memory is 90 kilometers but I was a little kid when I heard this so I don't know where it was. Somehow Avraham, my father's son, who by the way was not called Avraham, that's my way of Hebraizing it again, it's Avremy, the Yiddish nickname for Abraham. Avremy who was twelve somehow got lost, he wasn't there. My father's wife said that she had to go look for Avremy and my father said, no. We'll lose you if you do that. We have to stick together and go to the farm house. We'll find Avremy at the farm house. And she just was mad with concern for her son who's not even technically her son but she had raised him his whole life so he was her son. And she went to look for him and they never saw her again. I assume that means she was picked up by SS soldiers and by the SS and taken directly to Auschwitz which at that point was the only, by 1943 -- oh maybe not Auschwitz, maybe she was taken to Treblinka , I don't know where she was taken to but she was presumably killed. But my father and

his daughter and his sister-in-law did go to this farm house and they found Avremy there without his shoes, a Polish farmer had taken them, probably he needed them, probably he thought that Avremy would be killed soon anyway, what did he need shoes for. Who knows why he took them, but he took them. This is April of '43, my father, Avremy, Toby, and Tova whatever, and his sister-in-law whose name I don't know and then they were arrested, they were found. I mean it was very hard to really escape especially since the Poles were so hostile and the Nazis were so eager to find them. And he was taken to Auschwitz. They were taken to Auschwitz. Of course my father was 35, and the rest of them were not 35, they were twelve, eight, and I don't know how old his sister-in-law was, presumably in her thirties too but she was crippled. And she was as if the mother of these children. She was an adult female with two children. And so when they got to Auschwitz, he was sent to the left or the right, whichever way. He was sent to do slave labor and they were sent the other way which means that they were gassed. So in April of 1943 his son and daughter and sister-in-law were killed by the Nazis. But he was in Auschwitz and he was a slave laborer in Auschwitz for a long time. He worked in Auschwitz and he would talk about his experiences quite a lot. He talked about how awful it was although I must say that he did not dwell on how awful it was. My father talked about his experience in the camps a lot. Saturday nights when we would have company, in the 1950s if you were a Jewish family in Brooklyn you would have bagels and lox for dinner, and we would have bagels and lox and herring and so on and company and he would talk. People would say Mark what was it like. And he would talk. And I just remember Saturday nights in my childhood hearing my father talk about this. And when he talked about it he did not talk about the horrors so much. He certainly made it very clear that it was so horrific that you could not even imagine it. And in fact when people would be nasty, nasty is the wrong word, but you know how Americans could be presumptuous and they would say, how could you have done such a thing? Like my father would say we found a rat and we ate it or something. And they'd say, ooh how could you eat a rat? It's not really nasty. And he would say, you shouldn't talk, you don't know what it's like to be in a fire. I remember that expression, you don't know what it's like to be in a fire. But he wouldn't dwell on how awful it was except to indicate that it was unbearably awful and constant beatings and starvation and filth and dirt and crowded and disgusting. He indicated that but that's not what he dwelled on. What he dwelled on instead in his talking about it was the things that people did to survive and the things that people did to help each other survive. The image that I had as a child of what it was like in the camps was unbearable sadism and cruelty on the part of the Nazis but the inmates being human, working to do things that would make themselves survive and things that human beings do. I don't mean that human beings are pigs and do horrible things, but in the good sense of being human, that is of helping each other and working together to try to survive, and so forth. For example he always spoke about what the memoirs all talked about, that is the whole business of organization, the whole network through which people bargained and traded and bartered and traded their bread for other things. He talked all the time of it how it was crucial to trade your bread for soap, or to trade your bread for an onion or for garlic or something and soap so you could clean yourself. Onions or garlic so you could get vitamins. All of that which I've read in umpteen memoirs but he talked about that all the time, about the need to trade. Of course the whole network depended on pilfering from Nazi stewards and from the suitcases of people who came in to be gassed. So he talked about that a lot. He didn't use the word organization as far as I remember but maybe he did and I just don't remember. But he talked about that you really needed to do that. He also talked, in fact more importantly than this whole

organization business, he talked about holding on to the will to live. My most vivid memory I have from childhood, the most single vivid memory of my own childhood is my father talking about holding on to the will to live. And that the only way you could survive such a horrible place was to hold on to the will to live and that's how you did it, you just held on to the will to live. Like literally held on to it. And every second said, I'm going to live, I'm going to live, I'm going to live. I just remember that vividly. I don't remember what he said how you did it, how you held on to the will to live or what strategies he used to hold on to the will to live, which I read about in memoirs, thinking about the past, thinking about the future, thinking about this, whatever. There are different strategies that people used. That I don't remember, his own personal strategies. But I do remember him talking about that - holding on to the will to live. I also remember that of course it made him lose all faith in God. Actually I don't remember that, I take that back. He did lose all faith in God. But that he didn't tell me about. My mother told me about that when I was older. He didn't want me to know that because he didn't think that was fair to me. He thought that I was a child and not know that he didn't believe in God as a result of Auschwitz. And he didn't believe in God because his children had been killed and everybody's children had been killed not just his. That didn't stop him from wanting to have a kosher home or from going to shool all the time. He didn't stop being a Jew, you know what I mean? Well actually he did stop going to shool until I was born. From the time the war ended until I was born he would not go into a shool, he would not do anything religious. He would not go to a Passover seder, he would not do anything religious. No that's not true. He would go to a Passover seder. I think that was the only religious thing he would do but he would not go to shool. When I was born he didn't even think about it. He went to shool to name me. He was a Jew. That's what eastern European Jewry was like. You were a Jew. You did things because you were a Jew. Jews named their daughters in shool. The angel of death might kill your daughter if you didn't do that. You know, you had to. Just because you didn't believe in God didn't mean that you didn't name your daughter in shool. And that broke the ice and he went to shool all the time. He loved to go to shool. He absolutely loved to go to shool. He didn't go every week, he wasn't religious. But he went at least once a month. He really loved to go to shool. In fact he even wanted me to go to a Jewish day school but my mother didn't want me to go because we weren't that religious and in those days it was just orthodox schools. Getting back to his experiences, I don't remember that he talked about how he lost his faith in God but that was a central experience that he had in the camps, the loss of faith.

Do you remember any discussion of any specific episodes or incidents that he might have told you or other people?

No, I don't remember anything specific from the camps except the business of trading bread for soap which is not a specific incident; I'm sure he did it more than once and the business of holding on to the will to live and the sense of how unbearable it was. I think in his testimony for reparations he did provide some specific instances. But my mother, who unfortunately was terrible at details didn't remember them and had lost the carbon copy. I'm sure he was beaten mercilessly many times as was everybody, I mean he wasn't singled out. I'm sure there were but I really don't unfortunately know any very specific thing. In terms of what he actually did in the camp, I assume he did a variety of

labor things. He could be a carpenter so presumably when they asked him what do you do, he said I'm a carpenter and they did have him building. My mother used to say that he built crematoria. But they were already built by the time he got there so I don't - see my mother was really bad at detail. It was a shame. I'm a historian concerned with detail and she wasn't. And my father died when I was young. So I'm bringing all these memories of sitting around our table listening so I can think of something very specific.

If you don't have it that's okay too.

I remember that he would be annoyed with people who presumed - like if he would discuss - in the Warsaw ghetto for example he would say how it was wonderful when a horse would die and they would just eat the horse meat and people would say, horse, how could you eat horse, and he would say, lady, you haven't been through a fire, you don't know. People were in awe of my father. He was a very intelligent man and they would sit there sort of enthralled with his stories. I don't remember a specific incident unless as I keep on talking I'll come to something. I don't remember anything specific. I do know that he was in Auschwitz from April of '43 until January of '45 when the Russians - so in terms of your dates through 1944 he was in Auschwitz. In January of 1945 as you know the Russians came very close to Auschwitz. Knowing that the Russians were going to be there any minute the Nazis evacuated the camp and in the famous death march that Elie Wiesel and millions of other - Isabella Leitner - millions of other people described - marched off people to Germany. And my father was part of that death march. I remember him describing that a little bit in more detail than the camps. I remember him saying that it was very cold. It was January, it was winter, and they didn't have boots and they didn't have coats. Two-thirds of the people died. And I remember him saying that you couldn't fall asleep because if you let yourself fall asleep you would die. The snow was deceptive. You think that it's warm when you're in it and so you could fall asleep. And then of course you freeze to death because in fact it's not warm it's cold. So you never should go to sleep in the snow. And I remember him saying that that they would force each other to stay awake. In some of the memoirs I've read about how they were put in barns, my father never talked about that. He just talked about the snow and how people straggled, they would be shot of course and the Nazis would beat people up. The Nazis were very nervous of course at this point. He was taken to Dachau. Other people went other places. They were in Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald. They were all taken to concentration camps in Germany. He personally was taken to Dachau where he spent the next few months. I don't know how long it actually took him to get from Auschwitz to Dachau. In some of the memoirs you read how that part of the way they were on trains and trucks and so forth. My father never said that. He just said the death march. He called it the death march and he said they took us to Dachau. So he was in Dachau for a few months and he was liberated by the Americans in April of 1945. And I have a couple of little stories that I remember of the actual liberation. Not of the moment of liberation although I have a wonderful story from somebody else of the actual moment but I won't put this in my father's record. It's one of those classic stories, the other story of how this person got out of Dachau. The Nazis left the camp before the Americans got there and he was wandering around the streets and was almost shot by some American soldiers but he spoke Yiddish to them and one of them

happened to be Jewish and so forth. That's not my father's story. Right after liberation he and Shia, this person who had been his employee in Wolomin before the war and had been in Auschwitz with him, and had been in the orchestra in Auschwitz actually, my father was just a laborer in Auschwitz but Shia was in the orchestra and they were in the death march together and so forth. And after the war they were walking around and Shia picked up a rotten potato from the street that he saw and my father said what are you doing that for because now we have food. And Shia was still too scared that there would be no food. But that again is not my father's story because that's not what he did. He of course was nothing at the end of the war. He was utterly emaciated and utterly depleted. My mother used to say he weighed fifty pounds at the end of the war. I can't believe that. But he must have weighed seventy or eighty. My mother was also an exaggerator a little bit. But I bet he weighed seventy pounds at the end of the war. He was not a huge man anyway, he was probably about five nine. He was broad but thin.

He must have been strong to have survived all the labor and all.

Yeah. He was actually old to survive. Most of the survivors were teenagers, which is why they're still alive. My father if he were alive would be in his eighties. I mean he happened to die when he was young. He happened to die when he was fifty-three but even if he hadn't died and if he were still alive the man would be eighty-four years old. No, that's not right. Yes, he would be eighty-five on his next birthday. Whereas most of the survivors that you talk to I'm sure are in their seventies because they were teen-agers or in their early twenties during the war. My father was a very old survivor, very unusual, he must have been extraordinarily strong. It's funny to say that somebody in their mid-thirties would already no longer be at the height of their physical strength but it's true. So it's just amazing that he lived. But anyway he was liberated by the Americans. He did not go to a DP camp which was the standard experience but rather he went to work for the United Nations Relief and Restitution Agency and his job for them was to help people find housing. He must have learned English working for them or before but he lived in an apartment in Munich. He had a real apartment and had a real job and sort of went about his business. I assume for a few months, I mean I assume that immediately after the war he was, it took months to recuperate. In fact he said that it was months before he felt like a human being again. I do know that most of his teeth had rotted during the war and that one of the first things he did when he had some modicum of strength was he just walked around the streets of Munich and looked for a dentist. He found a dentist, walked in, asked the dentist to pull whatever was left and to give him false teeth. The dentist wanted to give him anesthesia for the pulling and he said, no need. He was so into pain that it didn't matter. And the German dentist didn't charge him because my father had a number, he had been in Auschwitz. He just showed his number. In fact in those days you just showed your number and you got anything. He didn't pay for too much after the war. The apartment I think was also free.

I was wondering about that because I talked to a number of people and they said well we just lived there. And I said how did you get food. Well, we got food.

Well if they were in a DP camp they got food from the UN.

No, I mean in cities.

But if they lived in cities - well my father worked, I mean my father had a real job, but before that he didn't have the job from the first minute, I think it was not a problem.

There was guilt.

Yeah, although the Germans didn't have any food. They must have been given food by the American army of occupation. He must have just been given it. I don't know that. I know somebody who studies the DP camps, she might know. Anyway, so he wasn't in a DP camp. I assume he stayed in Dachau because that's what they did. They set up barracks and gave people food and medicine and let them come to themselves. We have pictures of my father right after the war, not right, right after the war but in '46 where he looks fine. He had obviously regained his strength and so forth. But so he lived and worked for UNRRA and he did have housing and he had a German, non-Jewish girlfriend who he lived with which is very weird. And she knew Yiddish which is very weird.

I heard of some southern Germans who know Yiddish actually.

Well, yeah, she was a Bavarian. She was a beautiful woman. Her name was Lisa, well probably Elizabeth, but Lisa was her nickname. Just a beautiful woman. Her husband had been a soldier probably and he probably had been killed and she was probably lonely and my father had access to food and people were starving. She wanted to marry him actually and he couldn't do that. To live with her is one thing, to sleep with a shiksa is one thing; to marry a shiksa after you just....I remember him saying he used to have dreams. His mother would come and beat him up in his dreams. The very idea that he would even think of marrying a shiksa was - a German shiksa no else. Well, I mean from my grandmother's point of view a shiksa is a shiksa, it doesn't matter what kind. But the fact that she was also a German shiksa didn't really help. I'll show you her picture. She was gorgeous, just beautiful. I have this huge urge to look her up although she's probably eighty-five years old, too. I mean at the end of the war how old was my father? In 1947 he was forty right. And she may have been ten years younger so she would only be in her mid-seventies at this time. I don't know her name.

I think it would be interesting to learn something about her.

I don't know her name. Her name is Lisa. I don't know her last name. Although actually some of my father's Lukower friends, that is the friends from the town that he met again in America, they might know her name because she lived with him. All these pictures of my father and his other survivor friends in Germany after the war. There she is, she's with them. My father did know German though, he probably did speak to her in German. Anyway, so he lived in Germany and had this job, joined the Zionist organization and stuff and then in December of 1947 he came to the United States. That was right after Congress passed that emergency legislation allowing in 100,000 victims of Nazi persecution. I guess because he worked for UNRRA he was able more easily than others to get an early seat in that. And he came to the United States in December of 1947 leaving Lisa behind in Munich. I don't think he ever had any contact with her again. Maybe initially he did but not for very long. He got himself a job very quickly. It was the only job he ever had in America. He actually lived with a Lukower. He lived with Mrs. Feldman who had moved to America God knows when. But her son, Muttel, who was my father's friend in Europe and had survived the war also, and was my father's friend in Germany, he lived with his mother, Mrs. Feldman. Muttel came later to America, too. But he lived with Mrs. Feldman. He wandered around lower Manhattan looking for a job, got a job right away for a company called Civikoppen Minor[ph304] which did store fixtures, you know the furniture that's inside stores. And he worked both as a carpenter - he knew how to work with wood, he owned a lumber yard, and he also was very handy, actually more than handy. He was talented with his hands. He could build beautiful things and so on. So he got a job there, initially I guess just as a carpenter since he didn't - I don't know, whatever - but he also worked for them supervising job installations. When they did Bambergers in New Jersey, he went out to Bambergers and made sure the job was done right. And what he wanted more than anything was to save up enough money to open some kind of business. He was an entrepreneur by nature and that's what he wanted to do. He died before he could do that. But that's what he wanted to do. So he got a job right away, I mean he probably got a job three days - oh actually I have a funny story to tell. I know you're mostly interested in the holocaust but I love this story. When he came to America he was met at the boat by his aunt, Judith Marcus, Marcusfeld shortened to Marcus. Actually she was an aunt-in-law. She was his mother's brother's wife. His mother's brother had died. They had come to America probably before World War I and had shortened the name to Marcus to make it more American. Anyway his uncle was dead but Judith Marcus met him at the boat and she said to him, today I'll speak to you in Yiddish, tomorrow only English. You're now in America, you have to speak English. Presumably he knew some English because he worked for UNRRA. Today I will call you Mendel, but from now on you have to have an American name and your name is Mark. She gave him a name that was common in America. In 1947 Mark was a common name. So in fact, when he became a citizen in 1951 he changed his name to Mark. So in America he was Mark Rozenblit, although my mother called him alternate....she called him Mark most of the time, but she called him Mendel when she was being affectionate because that was his name. Mendel was his name. He was forty-four years old when he changed his name to Mark. Although he used it, it was his American name. My cousins called him Uncle Mark and my uncle called him - I mean everybody called him Mark. Anyway, he came to America, was met by his aunt, he got a job, and he met my mother a year and a half later in June of 1949 and they got married in November of 1949 and they had me in October of 1950. The rest is history. He adjusted extremely well to America. He loved America. He felt utterly happy to

be American. He had an American wife which is unusual for survivors. He didn't feel the need to be --- of course he was friends with all the people who survived from his town. My mother hated them. They were a bunch of people who survived from this town. Actually a very large number considering how tiny the town was. Virtually all of them had been in the Partisans, except for Muttel. I think Muttel had been in the camps. Everybody else, I forget all their names now, Frimmet. God, Frimmet, Frimmet and Dave Rosen. They're so unlikely to have been in the Partisans, it's amazing. And Chayetta whose son looked like somebody else, not her husband. There's this whole sort of crew of people that I grew up with. Those people, I haven't seen them in a hundred years.

But they all ended up in New York?

They all ended up in New York, all the survivors. There were probably eight of them; it's not like there were hundreds of them. But there were some of them. Some of them actually subsequently moved to Israel. In the 50's and 60's they lived in America and 70's and some of them retired to Israel. Well Frimmet and her husband and the Feldmans, Muttel and Fanny moved to Israel. But I think Lola and her husband, I forget his name, they still live in America, in New York. I mean, unless they're dead, I haven't spoken to these people in a hundred years, a hundred years, but a long time. So my father adjusted very, very well to life in America. He really did. He didn't want to have children because he lost two. He had one because he thought it wasn't fair to my mother to impose that on her but he wouldn't have any others because it was too much of a risk that you could lose your children. In a way I replaced his daughter; his son he mourned for continuously. He had nightmares all the time, all the time my mother said. I don't remember that. That was from my mother. He was in his daily life in America, fine. He joked and laughed and was successful. I mean not successful in the huge sense but he had a job and worked and made a living and he was saving money for a business and he had an American family. I remember my father being loving and warm and it was fine in his waking consciousness but of course he was racked by nightmares. He missed his son profoundly. He was in excruciating pain at a bar mitzvah. He had a very hard time at bar mitzvahs because his son died just before his own. The loss of his children was really unbearable to him. The loss of everyone else he could handle but the loss of his children was unbearable to him.

That must have been a big responsibility for you really to have that position.

I felt it an honor. I felt very privileged. I felt very special as a child. I felt that I was privy, very close to this horrible thing that had happened to the Jewish people and therefore that I understood it better than others. I felt honored. I felt terrible for my father and the family and so forth. But I felt very special. I felt responsible, yes, but not in the negative sense of wishing that I didn't have a burden but in the positive sense of feeling that I had a special responsibility to bear the information and the pain of it. I knew lots of other people in the same situation though because although my mother was American and therefore all the family that I had was American, that is her family, we knew a lot of

survivors. Both because of the Lukower, all of these people who had survived, but also because in Brooklyn in the fifties when I was growing up there were survivors. There were lots of survivors. I had friends whose parents were survivors. Not all my friends, certainly. In fact probably most of my friends didn't have survivor parents but Elaine and Esther

Rosenberg's parents were survivors and whatever, I don't have to name all the names. But there were plenty of other survivors around so it was not an unusual or weird thing at all. But yes I did feel a responsibility, a very great responsibility, probably

magnified by the fact that he died when I was ten years old. I remember, my father always talked about it, I do not remember a time in my life when I did not know about the holocaust. We didn't call it the holocaust, of course, we called it the war, or the camps, or the Nazis, whatever. So I don't remember not knowing about it. I always knew about it. But I do remember the first time I saw pictures. There was a series of pictures prepared by the American army for Germans so they would know how horrible the camps were. And my father had a set. In the back it said "Zo vais in Dachau"[ph418]. So it was in Dachau. It was horrific pictures. You know those really gross concentration camp pictures from the end of the war when things were even worse, because there were bodies lying all over the place and so forth. And I remember I was eleven years old when I came across those pictures and I vomited. I remember that very vividly. I mean this wasn't a picture of my father, of course, my father was alive. Not then, he was already dead. Yeah, I felt this great responsibility because of it, absolutely. Anyway what else would you like to know about the whole thing.

I think that should probably cover it.

As much as you guys need, right.

Yeah. If there's anything else that you feel you want to include for the sake of this interview and have it in the museum we can turn off the tape and if you think about it, you can tell me.

Yeah, I'm just trying to think. You know of course I'm not the survivor so I can't give you the details that your survivors are giving you. My father also did die when I was ten which means that I didn't get a chance to question him and whatever. My cousin in Israel could only provide information about Poland before the war. My mother was bad at detail. So it's a hard thing. Let me just think of a few other things randomly. My father taught me not to hate all Germans because of the Nazis. He thought the Nazis were evil but he didn't hate all Germans. I mean I think the fact that he had a non_Jewish German girlfriend is a sign of that. He taught me that. He taught me that I had to distinguish between people. Nazis were evil but not all Germans were evil. I probably did get the sense that all Poles were anti-semitic in my childhood. That is, I think Polish Jewry in general thought that although no, no although. That was the sense I probably got. I got the sense that obviously most people were

killed but that those who survived did so not because they were awful people. I mean there was this notion in certain circles especially in the fifties that the people who survived had been vicious and horrible and mean and had killed each other and been dog eat dog. From my father I learned that you survived because you were clever. You held on to the will to live so you were strong psychologically. You were clever. You figured things out. You were lucky, gutsy. That's what made you live, not being underhanded and mean but being tough and strong. In fact I had a wonderful experience. I went to the first international gathering of holocaust survivors in Israel in 1981 and I in fact gave a paper on it. I gave a paper on teaching the holocaust at the university level. But I went to not all the sessions but many of the sessions. I went to the final session which was held at the kotel, at the wall, when there were speeches. Menachem Begin spoke and Teddy Kollack spoke, everybody spoke, millions of speakers, all in English, really weird. But anyway English was the common language because there were French survivors and whatever. Anyway so I went to it and it got real cold. It was at night in Jerusalem in the summer and I was wearing a jacket and I was feeling very cold. Begin, maybe he wasn't the very last speaker, but he was one of the last speakers and he was going on and on endlessly. Everybody else had spoken for two minutes because there were hundreds of speakers. He was going on. He was already prime minister. He was going on and on and he was really being nasty. He was exhorting the crowd that if they didn't live in Israel they were traitors to the Jewish people. It was a really not nice, disgusting speech. Half the crowd started to leave. They just started to leave. They picked themselves up and they walked. My American side, that is my Protestant side, I mean I'm not a Protestant but you know what I mean, the American side that you just stand on line whatever, was appalled that they would do that. Because, after all, even you hate him, even if you think he's saying awful things, and I certainly don't agree with Menachem Begin politically and I thought what he was saying was awful. But still he's the Prime Minister of a country. You don't get up and leave in the middle of his speech. It's just not nice even if you're cold and even if you're unhappy you don't do it. And so I was really annoyed. My sort of American side that hates when people cheat on line was getting very angry. And then all of a sudden like I had this revelation, wait a second, that's why they survived. They just do what seems to them the right thing to do. And then I loved them because I remembered all these survivors from my childhood. My father's dead for a long time and I've moved away from that world and I just loved them and I wanted to kiss all of them. I didn't leave because I'm not them. But they left because that's why they not only survived but they also succeeded after the war in returning to normal life. The vast majority of the survivors are normal, functioning human beings. Even if they're a bit neurotic, even if they scream a little too much, even if they have more fears than your average person, even if they are way more over-protective of their children than your average person, even all of those things and even if their children say oh my parents were such crazy people, they are functioning human beings, they are not lunatics. And the ones who are were lunatics anyway. The ones who are were lunatics before the war. This had a searing and traumatic and devastating effect on them but they function as human beings, successful ones for the most part. There are lots of successful business people, successful professionals. All the survivors I know as children all of them made it. Even if they were just laborers, they still went to work in the morning and they still provided for their families. They were fine, they were really fine; crazy but crazy in a way that's understandable. But anyway so I love them all because they are what they are. They survived because they have the courage to do what feels right at the moment instinctively. I don't know if there's anything else I can say at all. This is not about my

father's American experience and that's of course what I'm most familiar with. He had a good one. He spoke English all the time to my mother. They spoke Yiddish when they didn't want me to understand which was enough so that I did understand Yiddish. He was fiercely proud of being Jewish even if he wouldn't fast on Yom Kippur because he didn't believe in God anymore and he'd gone hungry long enough. But I didn't know he didn't fast on Yom Kippur. He didn't want me to know that because....I mean I'm sure he would have told me if I was older, but I was little. I think that's all I have to say, at least now. If I think of something in the next ten minutes we can always add it.

Okay. I want to thank you very much for your time and for this interesting story.

You're welcome, you're welcome. Let me add just one last thing. I know this is not going to go into the cards that you're doing but somehow the transcripts of these will be saved.

Yes they will.

So I'll just say it. My son is named for my father. I'm named for my father's mother and he's named for my father. And so therefore we have Masha and a Mark and a Marsha and a Mark and it's very nice. And he really feels connected to my father and to the holocaust. He has also always known about it and you asked me if I feel a sense of responsibility and I do. I feel it both in my professional life and in my personal life. And I'm very pleased that I was able to tell my son about the holocaust in a way like I learned about it, in a very personal way, in a way that emphasizes the goodness in all human beings but it also emphasizes that we should be careful about the evil that human beings are capable of and I feel that as a child of a holocaust survivor that I have a moral obligation to purvey they meaning of the holocaust to the next generation and I'm glad I was able to do it with my own son. A lot of children of holocaust survivors are worried how they will do it and I think it can be done easily, so thank you for interviewing me.

Thank you.

I have one more thing to add, I just remembered. When the Nazis occupied Poland in 1939, my father's wife said to him, escape to the Russian zone, you can do that for a couple of months in September, October, November of 1939; you go escape. After all the Germans won't hurt women and children but they might hurt men. And my father said well it's true the Germans certainly won't hurt women and children because after all his memories, like most Polish Jews, his memories of World War I, were that the Russians were the horrible creeps but when the German army came and occupied Poland the situation of the Jews improved. The Germans were civilized and nice and so

forth. So he had a sense that the Germans wouldn't be so bad but he didn't want to go to the east because he thought that the Russians would be very barbaric and he didn't want to go to the east. He said the Germans are more civilized than the Russians. I will take my chances with the Germans and I don't want to leave my family alone and so forth. So the image of the German was this positive one which of course worked to the detriment of lots of Polish Jews. That's all I wanted to add..

Thanks.

You're welcome.

My father understood that Hitler was a maniac and that the Nazis were evil and that they were doing terrible things to the Jews. He understood that. He just thought that ultimately German decency would prevail whereas the Russians were absolutely repulsive and that it was at best to stay at home with family and take one's chances with these Germans than go off to Russia. Okay.

whole world. I just found out, after the liberation, that the whole world stood idly by and watched the annihilation of the Jewish people, men, women and child, concentration camps, gas chambers, wagons with gas and no one lifted a finger or a warning, even, to the Germans, to stop the killing. So in 1940, I believe it was, my entire family along with the rest of the town Jewry were corralled into a ghetto. In 1941, I believe it was in the summer, I, together with many other young Jews were taken out of the ghetto and deported to the slave labor camp near Poznan. The name of the camp was Buchvardelfost (ph)(c.56). In the interim, my entire family along with the rest of the Praszka Jewish ghetto were driven to their execution. All of them perished at the hand of the German tormentors in the death camps of Hamunull (ph)(53). After working in B _____, preparing the Reichousband (c.55), we called at that time, it mean the super-highway for the Germans, working there almost two years. Then I was transferred to different labor-torture camps in Germany. Finally it was now 1943, I was brought to the frightening extermination camp of Auschwitz. There I was robbed of my name, my existence as a Jew and a human being ceased. I became number 141938 which was brutally burned into my arm and is still visible today. I became one of the damned and stampeded Jews whose only path led to the crematorium and gas chamber. I can still see and feel the many chimneys of the camp belching forth the heavy dark smoke. A stink so old and permeating that it pursues me to this very day and is still too agonizing to recall. After a few months in confinement, in Auschwitz with the threat of death hanging over my head every day, whether it was by the cruel beatings, hard labor, I was suddenly transferred to another slave-labor in the concentration camp of Lagisza.

Where is that?

Lagisza was six kilometers before Benjun (c.82) where we built for the Germans, electricity station. As was the case with most of the Jews and under this circumstances, we experienced unbearable pain because of hunger, suffering, and degradation and hard work. Just to describe to you one day of food in a camp where we worked from six in the morning to six in the evening. When you received going out to work in the morning, a black coffee, so-called coffee and with this you had to go out to work. In the afternoon, during lunch, we supposed to have gotten a soup and it was many days where it did not reach us. Whether it was spilled during the way by other prisoners carrying it or it was available. We came home from work, we received one piece of bread. I would say in the size of the--today two slices of bread and again a soup. It was the hardest decision of my life, what to eat first.

Why is that?

It was, if you will eat up the soup with the bread, you have nothing in the morning--for the morning when you go out to work left over. So most of us, most of the concentration camp inmates, were trying to ration ourselves. We ate the little soup at night and we tried, we tried to hold on to this piece of bread until the morning to have it with the coffee. But hunger, the hunger was stronger than the resistance not to eat. So you started to nibble a piece now, put it in your pocket, didn't last, the hunger was so great. I think this is the greatest pain that a human can have, this hunger pain. So you take another out another piece and you nibble again until you nibble and you nibble till you have nothing left no more.

Were you ever able to --?

And at night, you feel guilty again that you ate it cause you're not going to have it in the morning.

Were you ever able to preserve it until the morning, yourself?

Very seldom, very seldom. It was only through certain circumstances when I got a little extra that I could preserve a piece for the morning. This is another story by itself. When, under what circumstances, sometimes a person got a little extra food, something to eat. This was, I think, looking back in retrospect, decisions what we making today in life, is nothing compared to the decision when to eat a piece of bread. It seems I left it like this in this camp till 1944. In 1945, from 1945 to January, 19--, no from 1944 also, in September till January '45, I was sent to another camp by the name of Yavozna.

Are you able to spell that?

Yeah, V_____, yeah. The name of the camp, how did they spell it? Y-a-v-o-z-h-n-a. Some of the people were working there in the coal mines. I managed to work again on the outside, again at another electrical company. Another company that _____(150) for electricity. Because I had already experience in that work, therefore they choose me to go there. My second thought was, I was afraid to go down in the coal mines where I never will come up again. This was always in my mind. If I go down there, I'll never come up again. I will starve or be buried alive. It was till 1945, January, about the 18th, 17th of January where we already knew that the Russian front is approaching closer.

You could hear bombing?

We could hear. We already found those at Cracow was already _____(c.161) and this was only sixty miles away from Cracow.

This was relatively close to Auschwitz?

Yeah, this was close to Auschwitz. Was also affiliated from Auschwitz. Auschwitz by itself had many camps which were affiliated to Auschwitz because they needed slave labor outside of Auschwitz. The day before, I would say one day before the liberation of this camp, they managed, they managed us; thousands were driven out from the camp by our so-called tormentors. I never ending that much from Poland to the vicinity of Salesea (c.171) to lower Germany, into Germany again.

Lievich? (c.171)

Lievich, that's right. On the way, many of my friends collapsed and died of hunger, illness, cold weather, simply exhaustion; they couldn't go anymore. Those who could not continue on this inhuman march, were shot dead by the Germans immediately. I still cannot understand my endurance, the strength to survive it all where my only food was snow on the ground.

Had they given you a ration before you left the camp?

Yes. They give us a ration before we left the camp but it lasted also for this one night. Then we were sleeping outside on the outer fields and our food was only snow. Someone found something beneath the snow, grass or something. One night, in the beginning of February, this was January, 1945, when

we reached the area of Lievich, Germany, again we were packed into a huge barn, like cattle ready for slaughter. It seemed that time that the murderers were about to kill all of us wretched, powerless and defenseless victims. I was not mistaken in my assumption. That night, one of those night I, Irving Balsam, decided to risk an escape.

Alone?

No, I did escape with another inmate which we helped together. In camp, in concentration camp, everyone had a buddy. You could not survive alone. You had to have a buddy, a friend, a brother, we call them a brother, a buddy. I also had a buddy, a young boy who was the same age that I was. We kept to ourselves since Lagisza together. I felt that time I couldn't stand the cold weather, the beating on the way, the shooting of those who could not walk any longer. I felt I had nothing to lose. On that bitterly cold night, I and my buddy Henry, a young Jew, Henry Margolis was his name, a young Jew from Kalisz, also a little town in Poland, we fled the barn. We didn't flee the barn at first. We first hid ourselves underneath the straw. We hid ourselves in the machine which was made from the wheat corns, cleaned the wheat, the corns, from the leaves. They used to call it a thrash machine. A thrash machine, you know, you have those machine where they farm. First we hid ourselves underneath the straw. It's on? As we lay there in this machine inside, we found a lot of corn to eat, the little corn.

From the wheat?

From the wheat, that's right. This corn kept us there one day and one night. But the cold, it was in January, in February and this cold in Germany there is very--the weather is cold, probably below 20 degrees or something. We couldn't stand no more this bitter cold. We felt that our feet are freezing.

How many people were in that barn? Hundreds or--?

The people were--by hundreds of people. A lot of them were hiding but most of them were caught.

Hiding in various places in this barn?

Various places of this barn. Most of them were caught. It seems that our hiding place was the best, was the best. As we laid there in the barn, the cold permeated our very marrow of our feet. It was cold, we felt we were going to be frostbitten which is worse, the beginning already of frostbite in our

legs. We--later in the morning, we heard a voice in the barn. We heard a voice speaking to the chickens. It was a farmer boy who happened to be Polish- speaking so he spoke in Polish words, we recognized him, to the chickens that they should gather together, he brought them food.

Were the other prisoners still in the barn at that time?

Was no more in the barn?

The barn had been evacuated?

The barn had been evacuated and the further marched. The further marched and we were left alone. While we met this man, we spoke to him in Polish. We told him that we are hungry. We would like also, if it is possible, to bring us some food. To which he agreed. You cannot imagine our--not satisfaction--our hope that we thought here we finally find somebody speaks Polish, we are Polish. He probably recognized that we are Jews and we told him and he agreed to bring us some food.

Was he a boy younger than you?

He was about--we the same age--about 17, 18 years old at that time. When he agreed, I hoped that time we will outlast this nightmare of the war. It seemed almost at the end. However, it seems that Jewish survival in those awful days was not easy, not even in the best of shelters. After a short wait our benefactor, instead of delivering the sorely needed substance, returned with Gestapo men who immediately arrested us and threw us back into the prison of Glewitz (c.288). While the others marched on, I'm sure to further extermination or to their deaths. When we came to jail, we found about sixty more completely miserable, ill Jews, all of them captured escaped from the death march. It seems that a lot of them also ran away from the death march and were hiding in different places. Before long, the Germans had driven most of us captives into the prison yard, forty of them were shot to death immediately. Immediately after that, the German assassins ordered us, the remaining 20 Jews to pile the murdered victims--some dead and others still half alive, you can imagine that not everyone was shot to death, some of them were alive--into a huge wagon which they all had prepared.

This was a train car?

No, was a horse and a buggy but horse-wagon without horse. We had to harness ourselves to the wagon and drag the vehicle to an old Jewish cemetery on the outskirts of Gl _____ (c.314)

Were you amongst those having to pull?

Yes. I was amongst them having to pull.

How many of you were pulling, do you remember?

All 20 of us went with this. We were pulling and pushing this wagon with the dead bodies. The trip to this burial place accompanied by savage blows and curses from the cold-blooded henchmen, was an experience, deeply shattered experience which I--it's agonizing to this day, even to the thought. Whenever I tell this story, it is--it takes off years of my life because we thought that time will heal but--.. When we reached the cemetery, we saw two open mass graves.

Was this a real, an established cemetery?

Yes, was established, old cemetery. I found it after the war.

Was it a Jewish cemetery or--?

A Jewish cemetery in Germany. The Germans on the German territory, did not, did not vandalize the cemeteries, the old German cemeteries. Only in Poland they did it. But the Germans had Jewish cemeteries. I went to look up this cemetery in 1979. I went to Germany on a trial, testifying against the Nazis. When we came to this cemetery, we saw two mass graves. It immediately dawned on me, after all I had four years experience with the Germany, I know already their thinking about us. They treating--the way they were treating us--as sub-humans that in one of the graves was for the other Jews which they were shot before. The other is for us.

Was your friend Henry still alive with you?

Yes, my friend Henry was alive. It was clear to us and to me and we were talking among ourselves that we would be the next. I was not at least mistaken in the assumption. As soon as we---already slowed the Jews where they were disposed into the mass grave, the German criminals resumed the shooting and immediately the dead, dying, half-alive, and heavily wounded began falling into the second grave. The full cemetery, the area there was saturated with the blood of our victims, with my

friends, with my people what we were together in camps. For the time, we had piercing screams, heart-rendering moans and pained _____ (374) for help. Even my friend Henry fell into the mass grave and he was not shot. I heard him scream out, out, out. Suddenly, a dead silence enveloped the entire cemetery. I was among the unfortunate Jews in the second mass grave. As the stillness continues, the German henchmen yelled into the grave. I can tell you in German what they said. Bist du ___ (c.387), anybody alive, _____, come out. Anybody alive, come out. Anyone still alive, come right out. I and four more Jews, who escaped the assassin's bullet, crept out and were ordered to cover the horror of the gasping hole containing the dead and the near-dead Jews. How did we manage to come out without any bullet? When you dig a grave, you have sand from the grave, right? The sand creates a mound of other sand. When they aimed their machine gun and their pistols into the grave, they stood on this mound of sand. We, five boys who were laying on this side of the grave, this side the bullets did not reach us because they were going over us. So all of us who were laying on the side of the wall, on this one side of the wall, did not get any bullets.

So they had forced you into the grave first?

That's right. First they started shouting. Then they said, jump in. So we all jumped in, we had no choice. We did that under the threat of the Nazi guns pointing at us, we came out. When the gristly crime finally, was finally out of sight, the executioner shot two more of our small group and then aimed their guns at me and the remaining two Jews. Miraculously, their guns did not discharge because there were no more bullets left in them. Was everything used up, they kept on shooting into the mass grave.

They aimed the machine guns at you again?

They didn't have no more bullets in the machine guns. They only have side pistols. When we all five came out, they used the rest bullets on the other two. When they aimed the gun at me, no more bullets. A man, an older man who had on one hand, one arm, he must have been maybe from the first World War, a veteran or something, he still had his gun in his holster. When the other Gestapo men ask him, Hans Hans, give me dine browling (444). That means Hans, give my dine pistol to finish them off. This older man refused to give the pistol. He said for dezen younga (449), for these young men, I don't give a pistol. They left him alone. I could say that's why, probably I am alive today, to tell the story. After we were finished, we were commanded to harness ourselves to the wagon which transported its ill-fated load to the cemetery and the hairy guard, again with the--four of them, German, SS men and soldiers together, were driven back to this Gl ___ Prison where we were locked in for three more days. It seemed that time to me, like an eternity.

How many days total were you in prison?

Maybe, two weeks. Fate, however, saved us once more from the clutch of death. After the three days confinement in the GI ___ prison, I was taken out of jail and I was certain I'm being led to the execution again. Instead we were transferred to the railroad station and transferred on the cattle wagons to another concentration camp in Austria by the name of Mauthausen. After being in Mauthausen a few days, I was again sent on a commando to Koozen (c.493). It was a camp, Koozen #2 where we worked on Messerschmitt, airplanes for the German army. I can't recall how many days, how many times. It was absolutely, completely no food at all. One soup with a little green stuff swimming around in the soup, I don't know what it was, was food for a whole day. For this we worked.

You worked in the airplane factory?

Yeah. The airplane parts factory was in the mountains, inside, in mountains. They should not--they were hidden from the attacks of the Allied airplanes.

Did you have a specific job each day?

Yeah, we would tighten the screws. We mounted screws and we put on wheels. It seems they didn't have no more motors for the airplanes. There were tens, twenties, maybe hundreds of airplanes that were ready to be shipped but they didn't get--have the motors for them.

Everything else was finished on them?

Everything was finished, just the motors they didn't have. They never arrived because I think the Allies bombarded the factories with motors.

Do you remember them ever threatening you about attempting to sabotage an airplane?

No. They didn't threaten us. It was a known fact because every where you went. There were signs, sabotage, dein tod, (517), if you sabotage, you'll be killed. Everybody was very careful to do what you could precisely. After being in V _____ (c.528) for, I would say, some days, this was the last camp, not to exterminate us but to starve us to death.

Not Goozen (c.528)?

Not Goozen, taken out from Goozen, they took us again on a march to another town in Austria what's the name, near Veldts (c.538), in the forest was a camp by the name of Gunkerin _____ (c.535) which there were only two barracks and 20,000 people. How can you fit in 20,000 people in two barracks which can only hold maybe 500?

I've read that many were crushed to death in the barracks.

That's right. The people were crushed to death. In the morning when you got up in the morning, you thought you sleeping with somebody and in the meantime the other guy was already dead. You slept among bodies, sickness, typhus, dysentery, everything was going on. And the rain did not stop. The forest was full of rain, day out and day in for the last ten days, there was nothing but rain. If we got already, one can of soup for a hundred people, there was specially a camp to starve us. The soup never reached the people because the hunger was so great--the hunger was so great from the people that they became inhuman. They attacked the can of soup and spilled it on the floor. They were eating from the floor with the mud, with every dirty thing in the rain.

Let me switch the tape. (Side B, Tape 1)

Had the war lasted, I mean had the American army not reached us on May 5, 1945, if this would have lasted another week, none of us would have been alive today from that particular camp. We were liberated May 5 by the American army.

Do you remember when the SS left?

Yes. Friday evening. I remember May was on a Saturday and Friday evening, all of a sudden we saw that the watch booth from the watchmen from the SS men from the Germans getting emptied out. They're running away. We did not know the reason because we were inside deep in the forest. However, many boys who had still the strength to go out and investigate what happening had noticed tanks with the star. We didn't know that time what tanks it was, whether it was Russian tanks, American tanks. We know only that--tanks. It seems that the same night, the American army passed--liberated us. The night of May 4 and May 5. All of a sudden, the day of May 5, we were sitting in the forest and the sun started to shine. Every one of us was full with lice, bitten, wet clothes. So we started to remove our clothing and shake it out from the lice. It seems that it didn't help much. After we found out a few days later, we were all infected t with typhus. When the American army rounded us up and put us into field hospitals--they created special hospitals for us, the ill survivors. Many hundreds died after the liberation from the sickness. Was too late for them.

Was your friend Henry still alive?

I am the lucky one who survived. My wife too in the same camp. Who is alive?

Henry.

No he was shot that time in the grave.

Oh, he was shot, I see.

I lost my friend Henry. He got down among the second batch, He was separate. After the war--from there we stood--we were liberated--we were in the hospital for many weeks where I met my wife, at that time a young girl. weighing maybe sixty pounds, fifty pounds. We comfort each other since that day. We remained. We were in the DP camp, displaced persons camp in Austria until about 1948, until we could reach the shores of the United States.

Which DP camp were you in?

In Austria, in Links (9). Vien_____. Ever heard about that? We reached there because we had family in the United States. We reached the shores of the United States. We established our lives again here. We came to this country, we had a small child, one year old. That's the best we had. We kept on going and hoping. I think that's what sustained us. We're still hoping up till today, maybe someone is still alive, some other place which we don't know; I didn't believe that my parents are not--no more alive. I didn't believe that my brothers and sister are not alive no more. I guess the ___ of every survivor. And this is what sustained us in camp. Had I known that no one is alive from my family, I probably wouldn't have fought to live. But this was one thing we were hoping that somebody is alive and that it pays to live to tell the story. Because my father told me when I was taken to the first camp, that he blessed me. I was the first one to leave my house to be taken to camp. He says go ahead my son. When you come back, you tell me the story. He told me I should tell him the story and that was in my mind. To die now, what would I tell my father? I had nothing to tell him. Nobody would tell him the story, That's what I'm thinking. That's why I call myself a survivor. What else can I tell you?

When did you come to the U.S.?

In 1948, December, 1948.

I see. You came --.

I established myself. I came here to the Bronx. I came to the Bronx, I remained in the Bronx. a loyal citizen of the Bronx. I must say my life was not bad in the United States. I succeeded in business and have a nice family, three children, grandchildren. We are close, close-knit family. If someone is alive, I doubt it. It's too late already. It's today, 47 years after the war. I'm very involved now in the survivors' movement. I am the president of the Riverdale chapter of the Holocaust Survivors. You heard of them. We have two hundred families as members. We are having meetings practically very month with our aim is to teach, to teach the next generation, to sensitize the community, to transmit to our children and to help others. We have a very good outreach program. If a survivor is in need, we do help. Therefore, I think I have a mission in life. I am fulfilling this mission, to tell the story. Anything else you want to know?

I'd like to get a little more detail if that's possible. I like to get some information about your life before the war. About your family, where you lived, what your father did for a living?

As I mentioned before, I was not quite 15 when the war broke out. I was born in 1924. The war started in 1939. A month before my birthday, my 15th birthday. I came from a family of very--a religious family.

Hasid or--?

No, my father was not a Hasid. Observant, religious family. Wore a hat and a short, short little beard, modern. Today we would call it modern orthodox, modern orthodox. We were--we come not from a rich family. My father was a tailor. He struggled for a living most of his life.

He was an independent tailor?

Independent tailor, that's right. I mean, he worked for others. They brought him work.

Did he work out of your home?

Of the home, yeah. He worked at home. He had a machine in his house and all _____160) was necessary to do his job. Our life was not easy because he only had, as I remember, as far as I can remember from home--. A person can only remember the last few years, right? between 10 and 15 years. He can't remember before. He worked only six months a year. The last six months we were already bad off.

Why was that?

Because we lived in a small town. It was a lot of people, Jewish people, in the same situation. Were a lot of tailors and carpenters and all, was not steady work. When he worked six months a year, we had to--the other six months was struggling. Here and there some work.

What was the mainstay of--?

Was not easy for us to even have enough for food in the family, sometimes as I can recall. But in 1938, life started to get a little bit easier already, before the war. Because I had an older brother who was 18 years old and he was already employed as an electrician in the city of Lodz and he helped out already with some, what do you call it, he sent some money home, helped out the rest of the family. So it was a little better. Then I joined in, as a fourteen year old boy, also left for Lodz, to study.

What did you do?

My intention was to study.

You went to a gymnasium there?

Yeah, I wanted--my intention was to study in gymnasium and to learn a profession. But it was not easy because I didn't have the means--

Financial means?

the financial means to remain in this big town.

Were you staying with your brother?

I was staying with my brother as far as he could, he helped me. We slept together, we ate together. But I still needed more financial means. I went to work also as a shipping boy. Both of us already made sure that we supplied my parents, my father and mother with the other two siblings home with money.

Were you two the oldest?

We were the oldest. We used to send them home some money that their life should be a little easier.

So you worked and you were going to school at the same time?

No. I could not. I was thinking, I was working--. No, I would intend to go to school because I registered for the next year's semester.

So you were going to work a year?

That's right. The rest of the semester and then the war broke out and it came near the border and it never happened again.

Was this a Jewish gymnasium?

No, it was not--I don't think it was. It was a Polish technological school, like you learned a trade.

What was your goal?

My goal was to learn a, how you call this in English? I had two goals. I couldn't get into one because first I wanted to be a locksmith mechanic, _____ (174) locksmith and if not, I wanted to say--my second choice would be a teeth mechanic.

A dentist or--?

Not a dentist. Just to make the teeth.

Oh, to produce false teeth or--?

Yeah, how do you call it, yeah a producer of teeth. You know, something like this. Teeth mechanic, yeah.

I guess after watching your father struggle, you weren't about to become a tailor?

No, my father would not let us become a --.

Is that right?

Yeah. When my mother used to say, you have boys going around already, let them help you something to--let them help you something. He says get away from here, from the machine. I will not permit you to be in this trade. Enough he said. He took it over from his father, his father took it over--he says enough. With your generation, this is stopping. He was right. He never permit us even--. You know children sometimes help home, put on a button, right? Oh, no!

Nothing?

Nothing. He never permit us to help him out.

Prior to going to Lodz, you were just attending public school, Polish public school?

Public school. Attend public school and I finish public school. I finish seven years in public school. This was in _____ (197) in Poland, seven year public school. We were going to school together with Polish, Polish Catholic boys and Jewish boys.

Did you also go to Cheder after school?

Yes. We were going to school till one o'clock. By the time we came home, grabbed something, two o'clock we had to go to the Jewish school. We stood there till six, seven evening. Came home with lanterns. It was already dark, there was no electricity in town. We had a lantern. Not everybody had a lantern, but some of us, and we all came home together. I was never dressed Hasidic, I was dressed more in modern clothes, a boy would dress already in that time. We were learning, we had to do homework. We had homework for Hebrew school and for the regular public school. The hardest time was, for me, I remember for us in school was, because the school was open six days a week including Saturday. We Jewish boys did not go Saturday to the school. So we weren't, we missed school every Saturday and Sunday. We had to get from the other school friends,--

The Poles?

From the Polish school friends, we had to get the lessons what we had to prepare for Monday, for school. If you didn't make your homework, you failed. You could stay in a class, it's not a kid, you could stay two, three years behind, you would fail. Luckily, I managed to pass every grade. I was very good in history and mathematics and how you call, earth science. Earth science that time so I passed.

Do you remember any episodes of harassment, antisemitism ?

We had our share. We had to have. We were always harassed by the other schoolboys, by the Polish schoolboys during the intermission, during the intermission, we were harassed.

The intermission was--?

Between every session of school. We start at 8 o'clock. Between 8 and 9 was a lesson in Polish, right? Then you had a five-minute intermission, you went in for math. Then you have the big intermission between 10 and 11. We had 20-minute intermission. We supposed to have, eat your snack, eat your lunch. There we had the biggest skirmishes and fights with the Polish boys.

Do you remember ever getting involved?

I got very much involved. I got very much involved in --. I must say most of the time, we fought back. We fought back and we prevailed. Was a time where they were already afraid for us, to touch us because they knew that they will start with the Jewish boys and among my friends, were very strong ones. They were very strong boys and they knew that they going to get beaten up if they start with us. We always had skirmishes. We had antisemitic outbursts from teachers who made antisemitic remarks in school.

Do you remember any specific--?

Yeah, I remember one specific remark from a schoolteacher who taught us math. Was it math or history, no, a history teacher. He said we have in Poland--Poland would be a good country if we could get rid of our five million people. He didn't mention Jews. He said five million people too much in Poland. If we could get rid of them, we would--Poland would be an excellent country. Would be enough work for all the Polaks, everything was bad at the time. A Jewish boy stood up and he says to him, why don't you mention the name? you mean the three million Jews? the two million what you have there in ___ (248). He didn't answer. He didn't answer but he meant the Jews. He meant the Jews because their thought was if Poland would get rid of the Jews, they would have a better life--which it proved in history was just the opposite, just the opposite. Any country that get rid of the Jews is suffering. They need the Jewish know-how, Jewish businessmen. They need the Jewish brains, they need the Jewish profession. They know it. They thought that they can take out but they cannot. They could take our apartments, they could take our furniture, they could take our life, they could take away everything. But they couldn't take away our brain. Therefore, it was wrong and antisemitism was very great in Poland. And in the last years, which I remember the last years of my life in Poland, 1938 and '39, I must say therefore the Germans had an easier job with the Jews in Poland than in any other country.

They had natural collaborators?

Had natural collaborators. Absolutely right.

Did your family live in an apartment or a house?

No, we lived in an apartment. We lived in an apartment. Had a kitchen smaller than that, called a kitchen and one bedroom.

I see.

In one bedroom, cold flat as you call it today. Cold flat, there was no heat; there was no electricity; there was no gas.

Running water?

No running water, no toilets. We lived. We lived a happy life, a happy family home, father and children. Father went down in the coldest weather. Brought up coal and wood, made a little fire in the oven. When I grew up already, me and my brother, we went to the pump to pump water. To pump the pail water we brought it home. Mother made a meal the best she could, potatoes naturally. The main food, potatoes. Herring, bread--.

She just worked in the home?

She was in the home, yeah. There was no work for a woman. Took care on us children, sew buttons, see that the shirts are clean to go to school. Socks should be always--. It's not like here where you have everyday a pair of socks. You had a pair of socks, you wear it a week. Then you make a hole, she sewed them together, stitched them together and she washed them again and we were wearing. In winter, it was cold, I must admit. If you didn't have--you were putting on clothes on top of clothes. Kids, what did we care? We run down, played with the sled in the snow, came home wet, put on other rags. You were happy. Until this vicious storm came in and pulled us all in which we did not expect. Life was one small _____ (283). Had not the war broken, I think that probably my brother, maybe me, we would--he would emigrate to Palestine that time. Because it was the dream.

You were part of the Zionist organization?

I am part of the Zionist organization. It was the dream that for Zionists, not Zionist home, our own home. At that time we didn't know they were going to get rid of us physically, but they get rid of us tormenting, antisemitism, progroms in other towns and other things.

Was your father a supporter of Zionism?

Yes, yes, he was a supporter of Zionists, yeah. He also believe in that the Jews must have their own country. He was a learned man. He learned history; he learned the Bible; he was learning the Talmud. So he knew the history of the Jewish people. He knew that there is no future for us in Europe, in Poland particularly.

Did he, himself, have the desire to go to Palestine?

No, I tell you why he didn't have the desire. In Poland a 40-year old man was old. He used to say I'm an old man already. Now I remind myself when the war broke out, he was 45 years old, forty years was old. It was a different time. A mother of 45 years, she looked like a old lady. It was an exception with my mother, she did not look an old lady but it was already. Here 50 years, was old man, a long beard, white beard. So he had no desire. But he wished for a better life for the children. Of course, the dream was there. The Zionist dream was there. It was promised through the Balfour Declaration to different politicians. He followed that, we followed that in the Zionist movement and we thought that our life will sometimes he there. It seems that this was all interrupted and it all took a different turn.

When the war broke out, were you in Lodz?

No. I was already in my hometown. Because I was in Lodz until July, I was in a camp. Then we saw--we felt the feeling--you know it was talk about the war. The feeling was that I left for home. I left for home; I left for hom. I didn't want to be in the big city.

Your brother remained?

My brother remained. He says to me, you go home. Mother and father, because I was not done there, the oldest and I had a younger brother from ten. Now he was, in 1929, he was ten, my younger sister was four years old.

What do you remember about that first day the Germans entered your town?

A very good question. I remember it a lot. The night before the Germans entered my town, we were sitting a bunch of boys in the street, on the stoop. You know, like here you go out, a bunch of boys on the stoop, was very dark. As I mentioned before, there was no electricity. We were sitting and talking and fooling around and joking like young boys and girls do. It was about eleven o'clock--the

policeman in town who knew us very well came over to us and he says, go home, go home. Shut off the lights. Wherever anybody had a candle or a lamp burning, tell your parents shut off the light. Must be dark in every window.

This a Jewish policeman or just a--?

No, no. It was a Polish policeman. Go home. So we disbursed and went home. I came home and I said, you know Father. Policeman, I know his name, R____ (357) was his name, told us to go home. The war is coming. The war is coming. My father says, nobody knows. What does he know? But he told us, the war is coming, shut off the lights and stay in your house. Sure enough, we went to sleep. Four o'clock in the morning, we heard a bang. There was a little bridge in our town between the border of Germany and Poland which was connecting both countries. The bridge was what, thirty feet wide. Yeah, that's all, maybe 30 feet wide. This bridge was dynamite by the Polish army.

That was over the Prozna (ph)(371) River?

That's right. How do you know?

I did some research.

That's right. Was the Prozna River. Was a little bridge over the Prozna River and it was dynamited by the Polish army that the Germans should not be able to come in. In the meantime, when they were dynamiting this little bridge over the Prozna, the Germans were already in town from another side. This was because there were certain places where the bridge, maybe one kilometer further was as narrow, we used to jump over. We used to make tricks, we jump to Germany. So the Polish army came over there with their tanks and with their trucks, was already in town. Immediately. So when we looked out, it got light, six o'clock in the morning, Germans are all over. Bayonets, I remember it today, the bayonets and the tanks and the trucks are coming down to put right away another bridge up. They were right away looking for Jews to go to work. So they grabbed, I went down there, a little boy in short pants, never looked Jewish. Had red hair with a lot of pimple on my face. I went down and greeted the Germans. First I went to the bakery before when the Germans were ready to come. I ran over to the bakery, me and my little brother and the baker ran away from town. He ran away from town, he was afraid when he heard shooting, he left all the bread on the floor. So we grabbed as much as I could. I hand to him and we brought it home. Fresh bread. Then other people came and they also had bread. After this, we already came home, I see already the German marching Jews. They caught some Jews to work to help them build the bridge. They marching there and the Jews were right away standing, the first day, the first few hours, up here into the water. The Prozna

wasn't a big water and they were helping to rebuild the bridge what the Polish army exploded. Naturally, I ran to the house, hid my father. Took my father and my mother to the basement. I stood in front of the house. German soldiers came over with the bayonets like this, says Juda, Juda--.(397)

Jewish?

No, Juda. No Jew. Juda here, they want to know where a Jew is living there because in other places they had looked the Polish told them right away where was a Jew. They didn't know I'm a Jew. I'm not going to tell on my family. I say no Juda, no Jew, no Juda and they went further with their bayonets and they made sure that everybody opened the stores. The stores that everything should be normal. Most of the people run away from town. I witnessed the first boots, the German boots. All of a sudden, the army started marching, the German army. Army, motorcycles, trucks and tanks. Motorcycles, trucks and tanks for seven days, night and day, night and day, marching through our town to the city of Lodz. Seven days later, they were in Lodz and occupied Lodz and everything on the way. This was Friday. Sunday, they corralled all the Jews from my town into the synagogue. I showed you a picture of the synagogue. Naturally, I didn't let my father go, not my father. I went with my little brother. We all looked like little, no Jewish boys. Here they bringing Jews from all over the town into the synagogue. We thought--I didn't want to risk my parents. The idea was, we found out later, that the idea was to explode the synagogue with the people in there. This was on Sunday, three days later. Mind your this was before they had an order yet, the Von ____ (427) Conference I think, before yet, when they had the plan to exterminate all the Jews. They were already killing Jews. This was not SS men, this was the army. I don't know where they got the orders but it was in their hand. As we stood there in the synagogue and I listened without a hat, I went in without a hat, I didn't put any. He was hollering--the general goes up on the bima, on the stage and he said, you should know, the German, you have killed many Germans in this town. Three German soldiers were killed yesterday by Jews. You entitled to die, all of you. But we giving you the last warning. If ever any German soldier will be killed in this town again, you all will be killed and he disbursed the people. He did not--we found out later from the Germans sources that they couldn't do it in our town, it was too close to Germany. It was too close, the army was marching by, you understand. Matter of fact the synagogue remained, it's still there.. This was on Sunday. Then they start marching and leaving us fairly alone, on our own till they established a headquarters and a Gestapo, They caught to work. We had to make the roads wider for the German tanks to pass.

You worked on the roads?

Yeah, we worked on the roads. Then we eliminated even some houses. There were some houses standing in the corner, little houses of wood and the German tank would pass say take it down. We had to clear it up, they should be able to cross. They took us right to work but we came home in the evening. They grabbed young people.

Your father--?

No, no. Never, we never let them. I always protected my father. I never let him go to work. He was hidden. I always went because every family had to supply people so I went, my mother went sometimes to sweep the streets. My father, no. He had very bad legs, he had broken legs before the war and he couldn't do. I protected my father. What else can I remember? Then, lasted until 1940.

Did they require armbands of you at that time?

Yeah, that's right. Two months later, a few weeks had been very quiet, we should wear all armbands and the Star of David.

Did you wear a patch or--?

Wear a patch, Star of David and a yellow armband. This way, they left us still in our homes. But we were not allowed after five o'clock out. In the morning, they let us out. But in order for us to sustain ourselves, especially my mother was the one who was the supplier of food. She ran into the village and bought some food from the peasants and brought it home dressed as a Polish woman. And I took off my band whenever--and I didn't walk in the sidewalk, I walked straight on the sidewalk. Because if I walk in the sidewalk, they knew already I am a Jew. The only thing I have to watch out for is that a Polak should not see me, he would tell him this is a Jew.

You would walk in the street?

In the street, right. You see what I mean? I walked--not in the street, I walked on the sidewalk. Took off my band, went over, brought something for somebody else, the other guy had sugar, this one had bread. You know, we did some exchanging in order to survive. This was about till 1940, till they made a ghetto. They took part of the city and they separated. We all had to leave within two hours our homes that we were living for many years and go into this ghetto. Two, three families in one room.

So your apartment wasn't within the established boundaries?

No, my apartment was not. We had to leave, we had to leave. We left and the other boundary was closer to the Jewish cemetery. Whatever we took along, we took along. Everything left. Furniture, who cares about furniture that time? We took along some schmattas, (51), to dress, that's all, to sustain yourself. There in the ghetto, we lived together. Three families into a room. Again they took us, the young people had to go to work to build the roads, to clean the snow. Winter came in and the Germans--you know they're very harsh winters.. Snow and the Germans had to travel with their trucks. We had to make the roads, we had to work for them. Till little by little, they liquidated the ghetto. They liquidated us young people, I told you, they took us to camp. Shipped off to camp, slave-labor camp.

So you were the first to go in your family?

With the first eighty boys. Looking back, retrospect, we were 80 boys with four Germans taking us on the transport. Can you imagine? No one had to--the strength or the wisdom to attack the four Germans. Eighty! Take away their ammunition and run to the forests. But nobody knew it. When I went away, I said to my father, I'm going to tell you the story. I'm going to tell you when I come back. We all thought that we going to work for three months in labor camp and we'll going to come back.. But the whole thing was to trick us in, to trick us in. So when the young people were already tricked in, there couldn't be no more resistance , right; go in the camp. The older people with the younger people, my father with my younger two brothers, they went. The very old people, like the buby, the grandmother and-- grandfather was not alive but I had a grandmother and other people, they took them in the cemetery and shot them. They all buried in a mass grave there in Praszka. So that was the lot of my town.

What happened to your oldest brother? Did he remain in Lodz?

No, my oldest brother, I must say he died a hero,. Why did he die a hero? Because he had a good trade, he was an electrician. He came home from Lodz during the war. He run to Warsaw during the war but he came home from Warsaw. He came home from Warsaw to his parents. When I was taken out to camp, he remained home with my parents. When they had the ghetto, they clean up the ghetto, they ask all the people who had a trade, go to the right, and all the other people, my father and mother with the other children to the left. I was told, I met a boy who was in the same line, my landsman. I met him in 1944. He said your brother Moishe did not want to leave the parents.

So he went in their line?

That's right. He did not want to leave the parents. He don't know what they're going to do without him. That's why I said, he died a hero. He thought, he didn't know. He thought they're going to take him with the parents and two little children. Two younger brothers with a sister, they are going to take them. Maybe they're going to put them in the Lodz ghetto, he will work a electrician, he will have a trade. No, but it was the opposite. They took the other ones to the ghetto. If he would have gone out from the line and said I am an electrician, they would have grabbed him. He would have been.--

(End of Tape 1) I had to report to the SS man who was watching me. He say, Hefling (1), I'm under forty, _____(1). What do you want, you dog? Bitte ___(2) ___ means I want to go away, leave him, five minute, two minute. It was a better one he give you two minutes, it was a bastard, he said one minute back. I run to the toilet, do what you have to do, come back in a minute, if you manage. That's what they say. I always wondered, what will happen if they should give ___(c.7). They wouldn't have to have the problems. They always could see this one, this one. So in everything in life, I think, there is some intervention. I am, most important thing of it, I remained a believer after the war, I still remained. I am a believer. I believe in divine destiny. Why me, not others? I don't know.

What about luck?

I believe. I believe that it was destiny, divine destiny that certain people should remain alive, continue their life, contribute to the society, contribute to the Jewish people and transmit the story. So today, I belong to the synagogue, I am observant and I am very dedicated, very much dedicated to the survival of the Jewish people. Not only with words, but with deeds too. I guess, it is the story of my life. There are different episodes in the middle which we could sit here for five, six hours more and I could tell you. I could tell you a story where the SS in Praszka. I was once in--thought my survival would be easier if I joined the Hitlerjugend, yeah.

This when someone believed that you were not a Jew?

That's right. I was joining them for three days I belonged to the Hitlerjugend. I thought that this would be the way. I went there and they took me in, the German youngsters, they didn't recognize me. I was in the kitchen in the beginning.

This was in your town, they had a Hitlerjugend?

Yeah, yeah. I worked there for three days till I was again given up by a Polish. The first Polish came in and he tell this is Juda. I took off my jacket and run.

Had they given you a uniform to wear?

If I would be there a few months, I would have gotten a uniform. Therefore, people saw the movie now, *Europa, Europa*, they say, I said, don't take it so easy. They said it couldn't happen. It could happen because I --and they stand up there, they don't believe it.

Somebody, one of the German soldiers or an SS man noticed you or--?

No, no. It was not a German soldier. I was again given up by a Polish.

I mean in terms of recruiting you to the--?

Recruiting you, no. I went in myself, I went in myself. I knew that--no, it was not like that. I was sent to work there. I was sent there to work. When I came in, they ask me what are you doing here? I didn't tell them I was sent by the Jewish community to work but I said I came in to work.

So the Judenrat had given out some assignments?

Yeah, Judenrat gave us some assignments. So I said I came to work in the kitchen. They young boys, 18 years old. Arbeit (49), --- here in the kitchen. Gave me an apron. Then I start to think, if I can continue staying here, I have a future. But was not easy. Was not easy because in my face you couldn't recognize me as Jewish. When people tell me the story about *Europa, Europa* when the Jewish boy was Hitlerjugend, and he did survive and certain things, I said everything is possible. It almost happened to me.

So you stayed there three days working?

Three days, I came every morning with my hand like this, Heil Hitler, you know. They believe me. The Germans was easy to get away than the Polaks. They smell you, that you're Jewish.

They could hear your accent?

Accent, accent.

Right. How long did you work in that forest? In that first labor camp?

In the forest?

Right.

I don't know. 1941--. It must have been--. When I came to camp, I came in short pants so it must have been summer. I came in short camps and a little jacket. I show it to you. My father and mother gave me something there in a little package. So I must have been there in summer, autumn, winter. Then I was sent to this German camp. There it was called Kustrin. A factory where they produced a powder for bullets.

That was before Auschwitz then too?

Yeah, this before Auschwitz, yeah.

Do you know how to spell the name of that camp?

Yeah, Kustrin. K-u-s-t-r-i-n. But on the u is two dots on top, Kustrin. Kustrin, they used to call it, Kustrin _____ (75)

So after you left your town, you never went back?

No, in 1979, I was ridden down to visit my own grave. I call it to visit my own grave. To find my friend Henry Margolis. When I went to Germany, the story like this. I went to Germany to testify against two Nazis from my camp near Roznow _____ (80). I went to a _____ in Germany. When I was there already, I prepared myself here home here, I got a visa for Poland. I said when I am already in Germany and I go through the agonizing, grueling of witnessing, I probably will--let's go to Poland, I said to her, my wife. She agreed with me. We never went home back. Let's go to Poland and see how it is. So this is the first time I went. After Germany, I went for five, six days to Poland in 1979. Went to visit my hometown, went to visit the cemetery. It was an agonizing experience. I lost 15

pounds at that time. Being before in Germany, take care of us two weeks. It was very tragic. I came in to my town, I was looking for the boy, I was looking for the boy who was 15. You know what I mean. I was going in the streets and my feet were sinking in like--they were so rubbery--I didn't know why your feet got so rubbery. I was looking for a young boy. I came into the home where I left. I thought I find some pictures, photographs. I was lucky, the home was there. Was occupied by a Polish drunk. He had a padlock on the door. Lucky and I didn't go in. Then I said to Helen and to the Polish guide who led me there, that I think that it was luck or Providence that the door wasn't open because I might have fainted or got a heart attack coming in the house I was glad it was closed. I went up the stair and they told me there's a Polish drunk living there. Closed and I didn't bother to go the next day. Because I came back the next day again. I didn't bother no more. I went to the cemetery, did my--did the prayers. ____ (107), a Jew come to my town, nobody. I did my prayers in the cemetery. I went to the synagogue, looked just in through the window. It was also closed. They told me if you want to wait till five o'clock, we open for you. I said no, no. ____ (110) I figured enough as a boy what I remember. I went on the steps from my Cheder. I said please _____. Looked around town. I saw who is living in Jewish homes, in Jewish houses and what's happening. I left, very agonizing experience. Then I went with my wife to her town. The same thing. She couldn't walk into the school, she was ____ (118). She went only to the house, she will tell you where she was living. She couldn't do any more. This is the time I went over to the cemetery because was under Poland. Y ____ (120) is under Poland now. So I had to go into Poland. It took me nine hours to find the cemetery. Because I asked people where is the Jewish cemetery. Nobody knew. They all were newcomers because the original populations was no more there. Until I finally got a hold of an old German woman. I gave her two dollars and she led me to the cemetery. I found the graves, I found it. Therefore when I came back, I wrote the story in the Jewish paper here. It was translated to English but this is only part of it. I came back from my own grave. Germany--I testified for three days. Was very lonely, it was not right. It's not right they sending a survivor. They are sending a survivor to testify by himself without any lawyers, without any support group without anything. Because I came in through the courtroom. They were sitting 50 people. They brought down all the secretaries and all the words in the courtroom. In the front was sitting seven judges. They told me to recognize two murderers.

This was from that sub-camp of Auschwitz?

No, from Y ____ (c.141).

Oh, from Y _____.

From Y _____. How can you recognize after 40 years? They old, they changed, they've no hair. You see what I mean? Instead of saying they taking four people, do you recognize two? No, they took 50 people to look at. What a ____ (144). I recognized one on the picture. They show me then

a picture in his uniform, then I recognize him so I said this is him. In the uniform, otherwise, I couldn't recognize him. I testified for two days, all by myself. I felt that I'm the accused. Can you imagine, seven judges! Here I have no attorney, have no defense, nobody on my side.

So they were busy asking you questions?

Yeah, they was asking me questions. You have to tell the story. How did you see? How do you know it's him? How do you it's him and how come you're--? How close were you from him? Were you two feet, three feet? I said ten feet away. They said how can you recognize it's him. I said because I saw him everyday in camp. I know it was him. If I would be closer, I wouldn't be here to testify, he would shoot me. He would kill me. The last day, I had an argument with them, not an argument, I had a statement. A very positive statement. I just spoke to their conscience. To the German judges and to them. I said one word. Through my testimony, I implicated another two SS men which were later tried. One got prison sentence. They want me to come for the other trial but I didn't want to come no more. They want me to come for the trial for the SS men from Lagisza where I was, near Benjum (162) where I told you. I didn't want to go no more. They came here. I testified in the German consulate. I didn't want to go no more. But he got, he got through my testimony, this one guy--. As a matter of fact, i have here a paper, I had it the other day. He got sentenced one Smith. He was in the camp Lagisza--I know I just saw it. Now when I'm looking, I want to show you this piece of paper. Where do I have it? I cut it out from paper. This Smith was sentenced so many years because of--the camp from Lagisza-- because I implicated him. I wouldn't find it because I didn't prepare it. I don't know where it is.

Let me ask you one other question about when you went to Auschwitz. You were transported by train, by cattle car?

When I went to Auschwitz from K____ (179)--. You know I don't remember, I don't remember. I'm sure it wasn't a sitting train. There was no sitting train but I actually don't remember. I remember getting off in Birkenau. You know where Mengele was there and everybody else. They took people to the right and to the left. I remember that. It was cattle cars, yes, but we were not packed like cattles from that because the Germans who put us there were a little different. I mean from this camp.

You put through the quarantine at that time?

I was put--yeah. Taken away my clothes. Taken away the clothing, taken away I had pictures from home, everything gave away. Went into shower one side, came out other side naked, give me other clothes and a different man, a different person.

Did they give you a striped uniform too or just ___?

Yeah, sure. Striped uniform, striped shirts.

Up to then you'd been in civilian clothes?

Up to then, I was in civilian clothes. My own clothes from home. We exchanged, you know, from home, this and that, civilian clothes. Then I got the striped uniform with the striped hat, with the shoes.

Wooden shoes or--?

No, I happened to grab a pair of other shoes but they were too tight. But after wearing them a few days, you don't feel no more, the tightness. No, wooden shoes, I didn't get. Some of them got wooden shoes. I happened to be lucky and got other shoes.

Did you work within Auschwitz-Birkenau?

No.

How long were you there before being--?

I volunteered on a commandant, on outside work. They came into the camp and they said we need 50 people today, 50 _____ (204). Who wants to go? One day I wanted to go, there was a camp Y _____ (205). but they--. I heard it's coal _____, it's for _____ movement, coal mines. I stepped back from the line. The next one I have we go to another camp, Lagisza-Ar _____ (207), they need _____ and I give myself another time, locksmith. I figure I'm not going _____ (209) I wanted to get away from Auschwitz as fast as possible on account of the selection.

That was Lagisza?

They were sent to Lagisza, yeah.

Okay. Let's see. Y____(215) was when?

1944. 1944 in the middle, there was no _____ camp at Lagisza. August. I came to Auschwitz in August, 1943. I came to Lagisza, must be in September. I was there September, October, November, December. I was there the winter. Then I went to _____(222). When it was already, wasn't cold already. Maybe I was a year in Lagisza. I don't remember that.

So luckily your time at Auschwitz-Birkenau was relatively short?

Yeah, very short. I was just waiting there. I didn't work there, didn't go to work. Auschwitz, maybe, I don't know, a week, yeah. By the time they ___ us back and forth every day. Maybe even less than a week. They took us right out to the A_____.(232). That's all.

That's a lot.

It's enough for a book.

Yes, yes.