

Interview with Walter Lachman
July 31, 1992

Q: It's July 31, and my name is Kevin Wayne, with the United States Holocaust Museum. I am here with Walter Lachman, a Berlin survivor of the Holocaust and we are going to interview him and discuss some of his experiences during World War II. And we can start very basically with some demographic information, your name and if your name was different at the time, to mention that as well as your date of birth and place of birth

A: I was born Wolfgang, I guess after Mozart, Louis Lachman on May 26, 1928 in Berlin. My father was Max Lachman who was born in the year 1900, also in Berlin. He was the son of Louis Lachman and Anna Lachman and by profession was an engineer. He had gone to the University of Berlin and become an engineer. My mother was Frieda Schwartz whose father was Gustav Schwartz and Recha Schwartz was her mother and was also born in Berlin and they were the proprietors of a wholesale handkerchief and kerchief business. My grandfather served in the first World War as a master sergeant and served in various theaters of war -- most notably in the French campaigns in Verdun and so on and so forth. My father joined the German army in 1918 just before the war ended. While he never saw service in the first world war, he was very active in what was the campaign by the German army against the Spartacus uprising -- this was an uprising led by Karl Lebczech of basically communist agitators and it was put down in 1919, Lebczech was killed. My father fought in that ... against these Spartacus revolutionaries and received the Iron Cross, second class for his efforts. My father married in probably 19... I'm not sure, probably 1926 or 1925 uh ... for various reasons, personal and to himself, he chose not to pursue his engineering career any further and entered my grandfather's business to work along with him.

Q: What kind of engineering was he involved with before that?

A: He was a mechanical engineer. My grandfather's business was apparently a very thriving .. uh .. place. After I was born in 1928, I remember being there and seeing lots of things being shipped out. Big boxes and big storage rooms -- as it turned out, when I was first born, we lived in the same building that the business was in. The business was on the ground floor and we lived on -- it was an apartment house and we lived in an apartment. I guess on the third floor above that. Afterwards we moved to what was presumably a better building in the western section of Berlin which is now -- what was until recently, the American or the Western zone of Berlin. The business had originally been what was East Berlin. Um -- I had always led a very sheltered, quite comfortable childhood. Generally, we had the apartment in the city, we also had a fairly small, little summer house outside of Berlin in a place called Neuenhagen -- it's really like a little suburb outside of the city, and we used to go there for weekends when we weren't away. As a general rule, my parents uh .. my mother and my father and

my grandmother, went on a vacation every summer. My father stayed with us for the first week -- we would go to Italy or Switzerland or Czechoslovakia -- Marin Bada Kalspark ?? sticks in my mind or Cantina in Italy and my father stayed with us for the first week and at the end of the summer he came and picked us up, so he spent a week with us sort of at either end of the vacation. I don't know how important it is to this whole narrative, but it will tell you something about my background.

Q: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: No. I was an only child, from I was told later, I was born by Caesarean section and in those days, women chose not to have any more children if they had one by Caesarean section. I .. at least that is what I was told, I don't know how factual that is. Uh .. I like to get to my schooling now. I started going to school -- I believe in 1933 -- it was just about the time that Hitler came to power and I started going to a public school -- I remember having to sing the German anthem of course, every morning before class. And also the National Socialist anthem and soon after that, there was a time when Germany agitated for the return of the Saar provinces back to Germany and we had to sing a special song for the return of the Saar -- the coal producing -- the steel producing area that had been annexed by France -- demilitarized rather.

Q: So you sang these three songs?

A: Sang three songs, and I must say that the first two or three years of school really proceeding relatively uneventfully -- I can't recall that there was any particular prejudice or any particular hatred or any particular problems that I experienced.

Q: Did you also attend religious school?

A: Not when I was that small. Later on. As far as religion is concerned -- we were members of an orthodox congregation that at some point in time during my younger years, my father chose for whatever reason -- my father and mother -- I suppose it was a joint decision -- chose to join a reform movement and we went to a large -- very elegant reform synagogue. Maybe that had something to do with our move to the Western part, I really don't know how that came about but whatever -- that is what happened.

Q: Prior to that move, had you been living with your grandparents?

A: No. I skipped that. My grandfather had died probably six months after I was born. He died of tuberculosis and I do not remember him at all other than from pictures.

Q: This was your mother's father?

A: Yes. That was my mother's father. And neither do I remember my father's father, who had apparently had died before I was born. I do remember my father's mother and I do remember my mother's mother. My father's mother lived near us but we never spent as much time with her as we spent with my mother's mother. I don't know why that is but I suppose that is sort of par for the course, it happens everywhere. And uh .. my mother's mother really did go along on all vacations with us -- and sort of -- while she did not live with us -- she lived in her own place -- we saw her much more frequently. Every Friday night we went to her house for Friday night dinner which for some traditional reason was not chicken but rather was roast beef -- or whatever -- roast beef and roast potatoes or something like that. I am not quite sure. Oh, I would like to talk briefly about my first memories of the Hitler rise to power and socialism and what I overheard in our house. -- Um .. the first, the first real memory that I have of a discussing about Hitler was -- or about National Socialists -- was one night when we were visiting my uncle -- this was my mother's brother -- who also lived in Berlin -- who also had been born in Berlin -- but by the way, they did not live too far away from where the Reichstag was. We saw the sky turning red and over the radio we heard that there was a fire in the Reichstag and at the time, I remember a conversation that my parents had with my uncle about that particular event and about how they thought that it probably was a staged event and so on and so forth. My father was fairly conservative, fairly nationalistic German. I think now that if there is a political equivalent in this country now you would probably say that he was very much a conservative republican and he felt that this ... first of all, I think ... basically I suspect, that while he never said so, he probably felt some sympathy for some of the things that Hitler stood for. Not of course with the persecution of the Jews but with national pride which my father I believe shared and he always ... I remember one of the things that he always used to say was, "Well, this is an aberration and this man will mellow and change his mind about the Jews, particularly the Jews that had served Germany in the war and so on and so forth, or else he will be replaced with someone from his party that doesn't believe in all that nonsense and if it doesn't work out, we will leave on the "last train"." Whatever that "last train" meant, we never caught it. We didn't make that last train. I am trying to think back now, I am trying to be a little bit ... go more a little bit in time. Probably about '35 or '36, things started changing in Germany and Jewish children could no longer attend the regular public schools and I had to go to what was a Jewish school and that school was in the backyard of a synagogue in a fairly old building in the older part of town. And it was necessary for me to either take a subway ---- to take an elevator train, or walk. And, I still remember some of my teachers and uh -- that was not .. I think the school was very good. Uh .. I think I missed some of my friends from the public school but I got used to it very quickly and that's when I started, in addition to having regular schooling, I started to have religious instruction also. Peculiarly enough, even so that we belonged then to a reformed synagogue, the religious instruction that I received was Conservative Judaism -- the reform synagogue did not have any religious school. Uh .. I went to that school for a couple of years and then, you know, I was probably seven, eight years, nine years old and while one is not ...

really does not .. is not too politically cognizant of what is going on. I did hear a lot of conversation about Jewish doctors being no longer allowed to treat non-Jewish patients, Jewish attorneys no longer being allowed to practice cases, other restrictions. Also, my father complaining that some of his gentile customers no longer would buy from him or were afraid to buy from him and uh ... there was a general deterioration in the quality of life ... not the quality of life so much but the economic aspects of life. As far as I can recall, the quality of our life really continued pretty much as it had before. We continued to take our summer vacations, we continued to go to our summer house in Neunehagen, my parents continued to go to concerts and to the opera and when I reached this age, they took me once in a while and all those things were opened up to us and we continued to have a ... I believe an automobile and I believe there came a time when we could no longer drive the automobile because Jews could no longer drive pleasure vehicles, and my father had to sell it and was pretty disgruntled about that. But meanwhile, he kept saying, "Well this will go away and this will blow over and this is just temporary" and his business was still fairly good so he wasn't complaining. So things pretty much continued.

Q: Did he take over that business? Was it pretty much ...

A: Yes, he was really running the business. Since my grandfather died, he was really running the business. He was doing it. Maybe this was really ... for all I know, he might have gone in the business because my grandfather was sick or was dying or something like that ... that there would be continuity for the business -- that might have very well been the reason. Um ... when I left grammar school, which was probably around 1937 or 1938, I don't remember exactly anymore, we had to go to a different school -- what was known as an upper school -- a Gymnasium kind of thing -- but it was not called a Gymnasium because there were not supposed to be Jewish Gymnasium. It was called Jude Schule Nacht Liebplan und UberSchule -- UberSchule meaning an upper school kind of a thing. And that was in the Western part of the city. And I really believe that this is when I had my first, first personal contact with prejudice because for some reason or other, there were a lot of young kids, non-Jewish young kids who would wait for us in order to harass us and beat us up on the way to school and there was just really almost no escaping it and every day it was a challenge to try and devise a way to go to school a little different -- different street, different side of the street or get off at a different elevator stop -- to try to avoid that. And very often we were successful, very often we were not. Most of the time, I had to go alone because where I lived there was no other kid that was going to that school and it became a daily challenge and I really remember being afraid every day to go to school and crying to my mother that I don't want to go and I'm afraid and this and that and the other thing and my parents said you have to go, you have to go to school. I really don't know why my parents didn't accompany me to school but I suppose you can't do that every day anyways. But somehow, I made school every day. I mean, nobody really got hurt seriously, we would just get knocked around a little bit -- but I was afraid of it. I was never really strong or a very athletic child.

In fact my parents tried to encourage that aspect in me and had me join the Maccabean soccer league and I had boxing lessons and stuff like that which I was never really good at. I was just as bad at my piano lessons, I was never any good at that either. In any event, that became a problem. Then came the Kristallnacht on November 9, 1938, and at that time, my father's business was all smeared up on the outside with "Jewish Store" kind of a thing. Even so, it wasn't really a store -- it was a wholesale business -- people couldn't really go in and buy. It was painted with big letters and people were standing outside and discouraging customers from going in. Many of the synagogues were burned down -- in fact, most of them. And that was a turning point in the general prosecution or .. persecution of the Jews. It really, from then on, everybody's life sort of became miserable who was still left.

Q: Was your school vandalized?

A: No. The school was not vandalized -- the school was fine. There was no problem with the school. Uh ..

Q: Did your father go to work and open the store?

A: My father, yeah, my father went to work. I think he probably closed for a day or two but he still had one or two non-Jewish employees who stayed really with him until the end and in fact, I had been corresponding with one of them soon after the war and I sent him some food packages when I was in Munich after the war but ... I lost track of him and of course he has to have been dead for many years now. And uh ... my whole life started to change after November 9th. First of all, that summer -- my mother -- we had been on vacation, I believe in the Hartz Mountains which are mountains in lower Saxony and my mother became ill, while we were on vacation and she had to be brought back in an ambulance. I remember that. I guess it was some sort of bleeding if one sort or another and she died soon the after of Leukemia.

Q: The summer before Kristallnacht?

A: That was the summer of 1939, so it was really a sort of double whammy that year. First my mother dying and then Kristallnacht was that November. My father -- soon after, my father became ill or at least did not feel well. I think that a lot of it had to do with -- probably a lot of it had to do with my mother's dying -- it had to do with the deterioration of the business -- the general hopelessness if the situation and he still kept saying "This won't last -- this won't last." But then he started, I believe, trying to get us out of the country. But after 1939, it was really quite difficult -- the European countries like France and Britain would not take uh .. Jewish refugees at that time. For the United States, you had to have a relative who guaranteed your financial support. We knew nobody here so that was impossible. My father made some tentative tries to get to a South American

country and I will tell you more about that later. I think he made some contacts in Chile and I think some work was done along those lines, hoping to get to Chile.

Q: Was your father ever taken for forced labor?

A: No. He was not. He was never in any concentration camp, he was never in any forced labor -- he was never really hurt in any way. Uh ... my father, I remember living of course with my father and we still had a maid, or a servant in those days. That was a problem too, I believe that sooner or later, we weren't allowed any more to have a non-Jewish servant living in the household so I think she became a day person who would come in. My father became ill and died on December 19, 1940 of tuberculosis. Tuberculosis was then, still a very dread disease. Today of course, it has been eradicated -- or maybe it's coming to the fore again -- I don't know. But in any event, people would die of tuberculosis and people would talk of tuberculosis like we talk of cancer today.

Q: Do you recall him being ill in the house?

A: Yes, I recall him being ill and I recall him coughing and I recall him going to the hospital and I recall visiting him. Of course, you couldn't go to the regular hospital, you had to go to the Jewish hospital -- he went to the Jewish hospital in Berlin and died in that hospital. After my father had died, my grandmother liquidated their apartment and I moved in with her. That's my mother's mother. My father's mother had died in between somewhere -- somewhere along the line -- probably I would say 1935 or 1936, somewhere along that line. But as I said earlier, we weren't really that close to her. So from 1940, after December 1940, I moved in with my grandmother and moved in with her. I remember my Bar Mitzvah -- which was a very small affair -- but I did have a Bar Mitzvah -- and I guess because of my grandmother, it was in an orthodox synagogue. But it was a very small thing in our apartment afterwards with some people coming over. Nobody could have big festivities any more -- you couldn't go to restaurants any more and you couldn't go to concerts any more. My grandmother wasn't involved in that kind of thing anyhow -- all that stuff after my mother died. Uh .. I continued with my schooling while I live with my grandmother and we received a notice in January 1942 to report for resettlement on let's say on about the 20th of that month. I can't be sure of the correct date, but around the 20th or 21st of January 1942. We reported to a very large -- one of the few synagogues that had been left standing.

Q: That's where you were told to report?

A: That's where we were told to report. One of the few synagogues that had been left standing and they cleared out all the benches and chairs and everybody was on blankets -- sitting on blankets on the floor and slept there for a day or two while we were being registered. We were allowed to bring, I think one suitcase each and uh .. I remember my grandmother had me put on double clothing -- two

pairs of pants and two shirts and things like that and she took a hundred mark note and wrapped it up -- wrapped a yarn around it so it would look like some extra sewing material and gave me that to keep in my pocket which turned out to make no sense at all but you know, those are things that people do when they don't know where they are going.

Q: Did you pack something special?

A: No, my grandmother did the packing. Incidentally -- while I was living with my grandmother, she was pursuing this uh ... this Chilean trip or immigration and nothing ultimately came of it. I remember even taking lessons because uh .. to learn how to make marzipan so that she would be able to have something that you can make a living in if she came to another country and I would help her do that somehow, it never came out too well when I did it. We practiced cooking marzipan in the house so that we would have something professional or a trade if we ever got to Chile but obviously, nothing ever came of it so as we received our notice in 1942, we registered and there were probably about a thousand people and they would -- as I read now, -- they would .. each of the transports would be about a thousand people would be put .. would be sent away.

Q: How did this notification come to you?

A: It came in the mail.

Q: Just in the mail?

A: It came in the mail. My grandmother, amazingly enough, did an inventory of all our household goods that we had to leave and I still have the inventory so I am trying to collect from the German government for that but who knows? Whatever -- whether anything will come of that or not. Maybe nothing ever will. It's amazing to see all these things -- she was very meticulous, I mean even to the extent of phonograph records as to how many were left behind and so on and so forth.

Q: How much leave time did you have?

A: We had about ... I would say it was about a week, ten days. That's really all we had. And we couldn't take very much so you didn't need much lead time -- I believe the suitcase could weigh no more than 30 kgs which is about 60 pounds -- it is less than we usually take on a vacation trip now -- so you really couldn't take very much. It turns out later on that we lost everything anyway so it doesn't make a difference -- the whole thing was academic. Um ... my last memories of Berlin uh .. were that, as we were leaving the synagogue, my ... the principal of my ... of the high school that I had gone to was standing at the exit point and gave each person a hard candy and he said goodbye to me and I was surprised that he remembered me and then we were put on a truck -- an open truck and the last

sight that I remember of Berlin is that victory column that site in the middle of the Tiergarten, it's just a monument -- nothing really special -- I believe it remembers -- it commemorates a victory in the war of 1870-71 against the French. Um ... we were brought to a railroad yard and uh ... in freight cars -- you know, in regular freight cars ... and they were locked and we started our journey. Many of the people, I remember, were fairly old -- I was the only child in that particular car -- the only youngster. I must have been about fourteen -- about thirteen and a half years old. It was soon after my Bar Mitzvah. My Bar Mitzvah had been in May 1941 -- June 1941, so this must have been like since months after my Bar Mitzvah. And uh .. there were pails for toilet needs which were emptied from time to time -- the journey took, I believe, about seven or eight days. It was getting colder, the food was relatively inadequate -- this was in the middle of winter -- this was in January and we were headed East so obviously freight cars have no heating facilities -- but there were enough of us in the car so there was a certain amount of human warmth.

Q: You were with your grandmother?

A: I was still with my grandmother and incidentally, while we were at the gathering point of the synagogue, I remember seeing my first person dying -- which is really sort of indelible in my mind -- I saw many, many more after that but there was a man on one of those blankets near us and all of a sudden, he started -- well, I guess he had a heart attack and just died. I mean, nobody did anything to him -- he just died and that sort of stuck in my mind -- I had never seen that before and it was sort of a frightening thing to a thirteen and a half year old.

Q For your mother and father when they passed away, was it still possible to have a normal funeral service?

A Yes, it was. There was a normal .. you know there is a Jewish cemetery in Berlin and one of the peculiarities of the German Jewish community was there was one very large cemetery which catered to all the different religious -- religious Jewish denominations so it is a very gigantic place -- it's still in existence -- I have been back there two or three times and it is a very lovely, peaceful place. And there is a very large family plot that accommodates both my mother and my father, my grandfather, my mother's brother, who died also of asthma probably somewhere in the 30's -- that plot is still there. O.K. -- how are we doing with the tape?

Q: We're O.K.

A: O.K., we are on the cattle car -- or freight car or whatever you want to call that thing. A number of people in the car died, but after you see your first person dying, you sort of become immune to that.

Q: Did you pass those bodies out at certain points or ...

A: No. They left them. They left them until we got to where we were going. As it turned out, we arrived in Riga, which was then the capitol of Latvia and uh .. we ... as we got off the cattle cars or freight cars -- it was very cold, and there was a great deal of snow which was higher than I had ever seen it and we were told to put our luggage on sleds which were waiting nearby -- the sleds -- I think they had horses -- and we put the luggage on those sleds and I guess that was the last we saw of them. That was the end of that. Where they took it, we'll never know -- but it was gone. We were then put on other trucks and were driven to what had been the ghetto in Latvia -- I mean I know all this, but of course we didn't realize this when we went there but I knew that subsequently. Apparently, from what I know now, that had been the section of the city that had been a closed ghetto for the Latvian Jews who in December of 1941, had all been taken to the surrounding forest and killed and uh ... we went into those apartments and uh ... and were told to make yourself at home -- you decide where you want to be. Of course, there was very little room -- generally about three or four people, sometimes five people to each room -- kitchens being included as a room.

Q: The Riga 377 ? was an enclosed ghetto?

A: It was a closed ghetto, not an open ghetto. You know apparently in those days, from what I know now, there were open ghettos where people could come and go as they wished and there were closed ghettos where there were fences around them and you had to pass a gate and you could only go out in order to work and that was for a specific work purpose -- you could not go out. Riga had been -- had always been a closed ghetto from the beginning.

Q: So they brought you in the ghetto and they said "Find a place"?

A: They brought us to ... they would count out a hundred people and say "Here is a building, this is it -- go to it." And it was amazing, in some places, there was still food on the table, of course everything was cold -- there were no in apartment toilets -- it had been a very poor part of the city. But there were toilets on each floor but because it had been left unattended for month or six weeks, all the toilet facilities were frozen and that became a real problem I remember during the first few months. Because, as you know, nothing unfreezes, it never gets above freezing -- so it was really a ... that was one of our little problems. Uh ... we sort of ... we didn't know what to do for the first few days, nobody really paid any attention to us -- they would give us food, they brought it around in kettles -- in community kitchens and what have you, but ... I would say that probably for the beginning, the food was fairly adequate, there was enough of it.

Q: So you would go outside to ...

A: Yeah. We would go outside to get the food.

Q: Was there some type of Jewish council?

A: There was nothing at the beginning. All these things formed as we stayed there for a while. First of all, the biggest trauma that I experienced probably in my entire concentration camp life, was during the first two weeks of it and during the last three months of it. So let me go into the first two weeks of it so that I can tell you best as to what I recall best about it. As I said, I was with my grandmother who was in those days, probably in her early sixties and uh ... if I remember correctly, fairly old looking. It really fits the image -- she had gray hair and she was a little lady, maybe a little on the heavy side, not too ... but maybe a little on the heavy side. We were together in a kitchen with two other people, with a single woman and a single man. I don't remember exactly how we slept -- all I remember is that nobody really had any purpose. I mean, everything was aimless, we just would -- I would -- you know being a thirteen and a half year old kid, I was kind of curious and I would walk around and scavenge around and look for things and try to get into building that were not -- that were not occupied which of course you weren't supposed to do, but I really hadn't quite gotten used to the idea of imprisonment yet. Uh .. I would say that about the fourth or fifth day that we were there, when we went out to get our meal, they asked us for volunteers to help to sort clothes and I said to my grandmother, "I think I'd like to go" and she said, no, don't go and I said "yeah, I want to do this. I have nothing to do." So I did, and I remember that they brought us into a big hall and we had to sort. Apparently those were the clothes of the Latvian Jews which we of course didn't know. And we had to put sweaters with sweaters and pants with pants -- stuff like that. I mean, something that a thirteen and a half year old could easily do.

Q: Were there other children there, that you recall?

A: Not really. By that .. you know, the last few years, the only time I really saw children was at school. I mean, there was no way that you could play with other children, you know that ... and I really would spend more time with adults than I would spend with children anyways. So uh ...

Q: How long did the sorting go on?

A: Oh, that was just a day. It was just a day's job, it wasn't a big deal. And you know, when I made my way back, to this kitchen where we were living but my grandmother wasn't there and uh ... I asked for her but nobody knew where she was. And then it turned out that a number of the older people had been taken away. And apparently the first, I know now ... but as far as I was concerned, she had just disappeared. But we know now that the Germans in Latvia first experimented with those trucks whereby they would direct the exhaust into the truck and uh .. while they were driving the people would suffocate and then they would just unload them and ... you know, go for the next load. Of course, later on, that turned out to be a very tedious and slow process and they couldn't handle very many people. They could only take like twenty or thirty people in each truck and there wasn't really an efficient way for the Germans to do the job so they

subsequently abandoned that method and used the shower rooms and what have you. So uh .. the first few days without my grandmother were really an extremely difficult time for me because I had always been a sheltered kid, had always been with adults, had always been with my family and uh .. it was really very traumatic -- to be all of a sudden by yourself and to ... it was a mixture of feeling lonely and feeling afraid and feeling scared and uh .. I wasn't really as much worried about my life as I was just at a loss about what happens now? Where do I go? Who is going to take care of me? And the realization that I would have to take care of myself or I wouldn't exist. I continued living in that kitchen with these two single people for a ... for some time. I remember sleeping on the floor while they shared a bed. They turned out .. they became lovers later on which amazingly enough that people would think about those kind of things in the ghetto but I guess, love is a pretty powerful influence, it comes right after food.

Q: Was this kitchen heated at all?

A: Yes, there was heat. There was heat and there was, really I must say, there was heat and from what I can recollect, there was really adequate food. We were not starved. There was never really like a whole lot but there was enough.

Q: Twice a day you would get food?

A: Yeah, twice a day we would get food and I continued working sorting the clothes -- I continued doing that and uh .. we worked no more than eight hours so it was a relatively normal workday. Most of the work that I did was done in the ghetto but I know that there were other groups that assembled -- there was a large square in the ghetto -- that assembled, and they were marched out of the ghetto to do work.

Q: As a young boy, what was your impression of the S.S. or the guards?

A: Well, you know, one of the overriding and important thoughts that you have is that you worry about nothing other than keeping yourself alive and you go from day to day and that impulse intensifies, becomes more important. You hide from those that you feel can hurt you, you are anxious not to share anything that you have with those that are with you. There are stories now about many friendships having formed in the ghettos and in the concentration camps. I have never experienced that and as far as I am concerned, I was very selfish and very self-contained. I was never able to get an advantage in any way whereby I could work a little less or get a little extra food, I was very anxious to preserve that for myself and not tell anybody else about it and so, if anything, that mentality was probably one of the ugliest aspects of our imprisonment because we became totally oblivious to those around us -- sometimes to the extent that if you saw somebody who was being kicked or beaten or abused or killed or hanged -- one of the feelings that would come to your mind first was boy, am I glad it's not me. And rather than feeling sorry for the first that this was being done to, and I think this

was one of the, one of the dehumanizing and ugliest aspects of the whole ... of that whole situation. So, let me go back to the kitchen.

Q: Do you recall the couple's names?

A: I recall their last names. It happened to be Levy in both instances. He was Hermann Levy I believe but I don't know what her name was. I mean .. there were .. again, we were .. we really lived along side each other not with each other. We didn't share anything and we talked but it wasn't ... it was just like strangers talking at a bus stop, that kind of thing. We really lived, just happened to be in the same place. After ... the ghetto life sort of normalized itself if you can speak of such a thing. There was a council of elders that had been formed and there was a ghetto hospital and there was even, would you believe, a synagogue -- that was not a synagogue, per se but there were services being held in somebody's room and uh .. whenever I could, I started going to services -- which were not well attended incidentally -- uh .. from what I understand, the hospital in the ghetto performed abortions because children were not allowed to be born.

Q: Some woman : Excuse me, were there mostly Germans in the ghettos at this point?

A: Yes, at that point there were mostly Germans and a few Latvian Jews and some Czechoslovakian Jews. In fact, we lived in buildings .. the building that I lived in was a Berlin building and then there was a Hamburg building and so on and so forth and there was a group from Cologne and various parts of Germany. One of the ladies who lived in the building became the secretary to one of the elders -- the Jewish elders -- Alteste Rat as it was called. And through her, I became .. I got a job as a messenger for the Alteste Rat, of course there was no phone so when messages had to be brought from one place to another, somebody had to carry them and she arranged for me to have that job. And uh .. I did that for probably, I would say a year. Then that summer, it petered out and I went back to sorting clothes and uh .. subsequently, I had gotten a little bit stronger and quite a bit leaner -- I had been a fat kid and I lost most of that -- so one of the guards noticed me and I was sent to a ... I went on a fairly extended trip, cutting lumber in what was then Russia in a place called the Germans call it Pleskau, P-L-E-S-K-A-U, the Russian name today is Pskov P-s-k-o-v. And we were probably there for a .. oh, I would say a week or two weeks or something like that.

Q: You were transported out of the ghetto ..

A: Transported out of the ghetto to that place, cutting down trees, which I had never done before -- but that was all right. We .. we lived in abandoned farmhouse I remember. We also -- I was also put on -- they call Commando -- to a place called Rzekne and while I was there, I was ... I came in contact with Boleslav Michovsky who has become fairly well known in this country because he was the carpenter in Minneola that was accused of the war crimes -- as a war criminal and

then I guess he lost -- was stripped of his citizenship and was supposed to be deported and he is now on trial in Germany for his crimes. Probably now he is in his eighties so he will probably never ... never make it but in any event, that .. that became a fairly celebrated case.

End of Side A.

Start again at 000 on Side B.

A: O.K.

Q: What did you do on that commando?

A: I think we also did lumber, we also did wood.

Q: Did everyone survive those commandos?

A: Yeah, you know I haven't really spoken much about guards about suffering per se because, there really, in all fairness to the Germans, we didn't have much contact with the guards. There were very few S.S. men or guards in the ghetto -- I mean we were just sort of like in a steam cooker -- we were left to cook by ourselves. There were obviously people -- guards at the gates uh ... I don't remember any specific acts of cruelty or harassment in the ghetto. There were at work, if we didn't work fast enough, they would kick us or prod us with a shovel or rifle or something like that but it really wasn't the real gruesome things that you hear about --those really all came later and in the various concentration camps. Uh ... I am going to try to put this in a proper time frame now. I stayed in the ghetto probably from the beginning of February 1942 until uh ... late in 1943 or maybe even the beginning of '44 and uh .. no, no, it wasn't that long -- excuse me, I'm sorry. It was from the beginning of '42 until probably early '43. Then the Germans were beginning to liquidate the ghettos and were moving people into labor camps and concentration camps. Uh .. I would say it was somewhere in '43, early '43, maybe middle of '43. It seems to me that it was either spring or summer, that the spring and summer in Russia are very short and don't last long. Uh ... we were brought from the ghetto to a concentration camp called Kaiserwald, and from there, where we really stayed a relatively short time, and then were brought to a factory in Riga that specialized in receiving, sorting, cleaning and rehabilitating uniforms for the German army from the front -- it was called ABA 701 -- ABA standing for Armee Bekleidung Amt (Mr. Lachman spells these words out) Amt being bureau. And there we had much more contact with the guards and there was a great deal more harassment and a great deal more supervision and of course that was beginning to be real concentration camp like where instead of, this was a big old factory building -- it was a factory that had manufactured blue color, blue dye and everything in that place was still blue -- I remember that like it was yesterday -- it was called Riga Ultramarine, they had made artificial, I guess, artificial blue color.

Q: What was your job there?

A: Sorting. Just sorting and I was .. I was somehow ... I stayed with that sorting stuff, I don't know why. Maybe I became a specialist -- I don't know (laughs). But there we were constantly supervised by the S.S. people and constantly harassed and constantly kicked and constantly you know ... annoyed. And uh ... we slept in the typical concentration camp arrangement where there were like ... they weren't beds ... they were like big platforms, one on top of the other, three high or four high. Everybody would lie in the ... on the platform and it was so crowded that you know, you couldn't really turn. You had to lie on your side and of course, men were separated from women in that situation. There were communal baths and it was really like a concentration camp arrangement. Incidentally, let me go back to the ghetto for a minute. Uh .. from time to time, people would try to escape from the ghetto and as they were caught they would be brought back and hanged and everybody would have to march by in the morning and they would generally leave hanging there for, especially in the winter time when everything froze, sometimes four or six weeks just sort of as a memento so that everybody could see it every day and I guess that was supposed to discourage us from running away. I must tell you that I really never had any thoughts about running away or anything like that because I couldn't envision myself ... I had a difficult time enough getting along -- I had no contacts. I didn't speak Latvian -- I only spoke German. I mean there was just no way. Also our hair was cropped close and through the middle we had a shaven strip that was re-shaven probably every two or three weeks so ... and the women were completely shaven. Their heads were completely shaven so you would stand out from the population. I don't know how people ... I guess some people did get away -- you know, not many but I guess some people did. I mean there are many recorded instances known of people who actually ran away from .. especially from ghettos and joining partisans or undergrounds or what have you. I don't know that there was much of an underground in Latvia because the Latvians really, from everything we could see, were really very much pro German and very much anti Russian and I think the Latvians were probably rooting for the Germans to win and uh .. I would say that the Latvians were basically more -- more the Latvians than the Lithuanians-- were probably more, more antagonistic towards us than many of the Germans were so I couldn't envision escaping into that element. Uh ... let me go back to where I was -- to the living conditions in that ABA 701.

Q: A quick question?

A: Sure.

Q: -- You were obviously growing this whole time, were you able to find new clothing for yourself? Through your sorting were you able to pull through any ...

A: Well, you couldn't ... well, I'll tell you -- I did that once and it wasn't such a good thing. Uh ... it turned out to be a mistake. Uh ... well, you know, we had

uniforms. We had those blue and white striped uniforms. Incidentally, for one reason or another, amazingly enough, I still have my uniform cap. I still have that. The original uniform cap.

Q: That was once you were in this ABA --

A: In the ghetto, you wore civilian clothes and I don't know how I made out. I really don't .. you know, it was so long ago, some of that stuff just, just doesn't stick out. Um .. while I was in that ABA 701, I stole a pair of shoes because my shoes were just completely gone and uh .. I muddied them up a little bit, you know the outsides so that they would look old. But of course, you couldn't disguise that and I was found out and uh .. I was called to the commander and first got a good beating and then he said, "Well, I guess we will have to execute you." So, I went back and I said well, I guess this is it. But somewhere later on, one of the guards came back and said " Well, he's changed his mind, all you have to do ..", he gave me an iron bar to carry and I had to carry it, you know there was a four floor building, I had to carry that bar up and down the stairs for I don't know how many times .. fifty times, maybe a hundred times -- I don't know what it was, but that was my punishment and of course I got a pair of wooden shoes which was the worst punishment because I had to wear those for the next couple of years and it was really hard to walk on them. But ..

Q: Where did you find those shoes that you took?

A: I took them from the ones, all the things that came in, the things that I was sorting. Uh .. before long, there wasn't really a whole lot of sorting to do, so instead of sorting clothes they switched us to loading and unloading ships, that came into the Riga harbor and uh .. that was a lousy job because first of all, it was cold and it was wet and we then worked twelve hour shifts -- you either worked the night shift or the day shift and there was really no place to hide -- you were outside -- and the worst of it all was that the Russians used to come and bomb the harbor all the time and we had really no protection -- all you could do was try to get off the ship as quickly as you could and you know they had these flares that they would drop and the sky would be lit up and they had machine gun ships and they ... in those days, the Russians we were really beginning to make substantial progress and were moving against the Germans -- pretty well down into Russia.

Q: Were these troop ships or just cargo ships?

A: Cargo ships -- no troop ships. We were loading and unloading ammunition. We were loading and unloading supplies -- if we were loading supplies, sometimes we would try to steal some of the food if we could and again, anybody that got caught really got into serious problems. Uh .. I remember taking a package once of something and under great personal peril and when I unpacked it, I found out it was mustard -- that just goes to show you that you never know about all those things -- so instead of food, I got mustard. Um ..I was very angry at that time

because I had taken a tremendous chance to do it. It seems silly now but I didn't laugh then.

Q: Your food rations at that point had decreased?

A: The food rations at that point had deteriorated and uh .. things were really getting tougher every day. But as long as we could work and I guess we were a pretty good working group, they would keep us going. We were concerned because especially the ones that were older than I could see that the tide of the war was turning against the Germans and uh .. they were -- they would say, well, gee, what are they going to do with us if they have to get out of here. ---I would like to take a minute or two and talk about some of the older people who were in the camp because, you know, I had uh .. I was young. I was 14 or 15, 16, whatever age I was at that time, I never had the opportunity to acquire any personal dignity if you know what that means -- in other words, I never had a real position in life where I had self respect, where people looked up to me, where people felt this is a great guy or what have you. So, probably on the whole, the whole ghetto and concentration life was easier for me than for some of these people. I remember one of the people that worked with us in that ABA 701, had been the chief gynecologist in one of the leading hospitals in Berlin. Now you know, I can just imagine what scrounging for food -- the loss of dignity, being kicked around, being cursed at -- I sort of took that in stride. I had grown up with it. I had been cursed at on the way to school so you kind of become accustomed to it -- you don't like it -- but you figure out that's the way life is. But I wonder how life was for those people and it must have been much more difficult than it was for me and uh .. well, I didn't have any particular empathy for him at that time. Now I can think back, I feel that that must have been a degradation to him a great deal worse than it was for me. Uh .. O.K. -- so much about that. So, let's get back to the end of the German occupation of Riga. By that time, as I said, the Russians were raiding us almost every night -- by raiding "us" -- raiding the Germans. And of course the Russians didn't know we were there. In fact, towards the end, the Germans were parking trains -- there was a train track right through that ABA 701 -- that old factory that we were at, and the Germans were parking trains that were loaded with ammunition right along side us, so we didn't care -- it didn't make any difference but they obviously did that on purpose. Uh .. for one reason or another, the Germans decided to keep us instead of shooting us which was really, really was amazing because in retrospect, I know many people were not as fortunate. The Germans withdrew all their forces in Latvia to a uh .. to a bridgehead in Libau -- German name, the Latvian name that it goes by now is Liepaja. It is a port that is not on the Gulf of Riga but is on the Baltic Sea. It is also in Latvia. It is really not far from Riga. And they brought us there and that was a smaller group. They took some of the people that had worked on that ABA 701 and brought them back to Kaiserwald or Stuthoff near Danzig which is also a large concentration camp. And they took probably 80 of us. And again, I don't know why .. how I was selected to be part of it -- I wasn't a better worker than anybody else -- I wasn't a particularly strong or healthy individual -- I was

probably as emaciated as everybody else. I think a lot of it was God's providence and luck. So I was amongst these eighty people that were brought to that place Libau or Liepaja and we were housed in I guess it had been an old mansion -- it was near the ocean, on a beautiful street -- but there was barbed wire around it. We were loading and unloading ships -- mostly at that point, we were not unloading anything more -- we were loading. The Germans were trying to carry back everything that they could carry back. I remember, we were dismantling even the tin roofs -- putting the sheets of tin in wooden enclosures and they were being shipped back to Germany. They were just stripping the place and we were there for ... that must have been late '44, that must have been, I would say, early Fall to late Fall '44, and we were there for several months doing that particular thing. One of the unfortunate things that happened there was that one of the Russian bombs hit the building that we were in and probably fifteen or so of us were killed. Uh .. which was really too bad. Uh .. again, you don't feel -- I did not feel, particularly sorry for them, I felt particularly glad that it wasn't me. And, that is one thing that I won't forgive the Germans for -- is that dehumanization of people -- of this complete destruction of the human spirit and of the human compassion and you know, that was awful. It was hard to come back and maybe you didn't come back all the way. I don't know, I'm not sure. Maybe, I will never be as compassionate of a person as you, I have no idea. But in any event, we were there for a while and again, those of us ... the older people tend to be more concerned with the future -- the people of my age really were worried with day to day. "How am I going to have food today? How can I work the least today? How can I get the best night's sleep? How can I ...?" That was about it. "How can I keep my behind clear so that nobody kicks me around?" That kind of thing. And again, people were worried about what will they do with us when this is over with. And again, it was perhaps divine providence or perhaps luck or whatever, they decided to take us back to Germany. As they were evacuating the bridgehead in Libau, they put us on a .. a .. in the hold of a ship full of freight, by that time we were down to about fifty or sixty people, and brought us back to Germany.

Q: How long was that journey?

A: I would say three or four days. I remember that there was no food on that trip and that was kind of gruesome but at least we were getting back. I think probably they didn't want to leave us or didn't want to leave our bodies for the Russians to find. I think really that was probably the rationale because I can't think of any other reason why they would take us back, because by that time, they didn't need us anymore. By that time, they had no more use for our labor because that was early '45 and you know .. the thing had completely disintegrated. It was either December '44 or January '45, I don't know which but it was probably December '44, by that time, Germany was in such disarray that there was no work to be done anymore. As I said, the last time .. while we were in Libau towards the end, we were dismantling buildings and shipping them back which was really one of those nonsense jobs kind of a thing. There was no reason for it. What were they going

to do with sheets of metal? You know, there was no need for it any more. Uh ... I remember the ship coming in ... of course we were in the hold, we couldn't see anything and uh ... when they let us off the ship in Hamburg, I remember terrible devastation in the harbor in Hamburg. It really looked .. we were amazed, I mean we hadn't been back to Germany ... this was Germany that was so destroyed. Uh ... and, I really think they didn't know what to do with us when they got us back. It was the kind of thing where somebody says, "what did you bring us here, where did you get these guys? What am I supposed to do with them?" That kind of thing. You know. So uh .. for want of a place, they brought us to a jail -- a city jail, in Hamburg and they put all of us in two cells. Which was awful crowded and uh .. we had just nothing to do for probably .. they kept us there for I would say three or four weeks. We got very inadequate food, they did take us out a few times and the only thing we did when they took us out -- we were collecting shell fragments from the anti-aircraft guns that had fallen -- you know they were really jagged fragments. I don't know if you have ever seen an anti-aircraft shell -- they are jagged pieces of metal. You have to be careful when you pick them up because they are really sharp in some instances and we put them on, in Europe they use these trailer trucks that are open trailers in the back but we no longer had trucks because they didn't have any gasoline so we had to pull the trailers. But again .. this was a nonsense job -- it was really not a job that meant anything because nothing was going anywhere -- nothing was functioning anymore. You know .. Germany for all practical purposes, really had stopped functioning in those days. Uh .. I suppose, somewhere in the middle or towards the end of January, uh .. maybe the director of the prison wanted to get rid of us and said "look, take these guys away, I don't want them here" or somebody said, "What do we do with these people?" So, they put us in two small trucks and took us to Bergen-Belsen which is not far from Hamburg.

Q: How long were you in that jail?

A: I would say about a month. Maybe three weeks. You know, you lose track of time and uh .. even if I did remember, I don't remember anymore now. Uh ... when we went to -- they took us to Bergen-Belsen, in Bergen-Belsen, they gave us a new number. My old concentration camp number -- which incidentally I was never tattooed, I don't know why, maybe they weren't doing it that day that I got my number or something but the old number had been 12360 and I was then given the number 15713. Um .. we got a new number, we got put in barracks and uh .. we got locked in and that was the end of that. We just didn't hear or see from anybody any more. It was just like a .. you were left to your own devices. We got some food but we got very little water uh .. I remember there were these pools in the camp which were supposed to be water pools that were used .. that were supposed to be used if there was a fire uh .. they were supposed to pump water out of those pools with a fire truck and we would drink that water. Later on, we found dead bodies in those pools -- there was ... you know -- it was just a nightmare and people were sick. I contracted typhus -- I had terrible diarrhea, I mean just every day, you would drag yourself outside of the barrack and sit out

there all day long, leaning up against something and when it got dark, you drag yourself back in. There was no more roll call. You know, during the concentration camp -- every morning there was roll call and all that kind of stuff. People would come to make sure that nobody escaped. I mean order, total order had broken down, it was just a question of .. the only question that was in our minds, 'How can we survive this? How can we keep this up? How can we stay well enough until this is over?' And you know, every day, hundreds of people were dying -- dozens of people. We would try to at least, we couldn't bury them - - we weren't strong enough for that -- we would drag them towards a place where they would all be together. I mean there was no brutality by guards -- there were no guards -- there was nobody there. They just put you in a room and locked the doors and they would once in a while give us some food -- some watery soup that was sort of shoved through the gate and anybody that was strong enough to get to the gate could get some but a lot of people couldn't even get up and um .. would just die where they lay. Um ... I was in Bergen-Belsen probably for three months. On the day that I now know was April 15, 1945, we saw tanks with stars on them coming through the barbed wire and uh .. that was the British army and uh .. the German guards were either -- the ones that hadn't melted away, I imagine a lot of them had run away -- were taken prisoner and the British came in and I guess they were pretty horrified by what they saw because they just couldn't cope with it. You know, this was an advancing army, they don't -- how could they have medical facilities for uh .. I believe the records indicate that there were 13,000 unburied dead were found in the camp -- 23,000 unburied dead were found in the camp -- 13,000 were to die from the time that the British took over until they were finally able to bring sanitation and what have you into the camp. Uh .. the British couldn't really do anything for us for the first couple of weeks -- they did bring us food but it was rich food that we really couldn't eat -- but at least we got water. There was no medical attention because how could you have enough doctors to take care of all these people. And again, it was probably fate or divine providence that I got better. And a number of us got better. We were then ... the British decided to burn .. oh, the British used the German guard to bury all the unburied dead. We saw that and it was sort of satisfaction to us, I guess. Uh .. they burned down the camp because they thought that all the barracks had been so polluted and so full of excrement and blood and whatever -- there was just no way to preserve it and they moved us into a nearby um .. what had been German army camp, in fact, when I went back to Bergen-Belsen -- it is again a German army camp. You know .. they were two story buildings, it was a parade ground and typical kind of thing. And we were in there and that's when I would say -- I probably had a recuperation period of three to four months -- we got medical care. We got adequate ... we certainly got food. We were treated like human beings. And it's amazing how fast you snap back and start thinking in terms of enjoying your life. I had missed really all my childhood -- really missed all my teenage years. Those were the days when I first -- when I all of a sudden became interested in girls. You know after I got better and I guess the girls became interested in boys and we would talk and you know .. there would be the normal umm ... social ... intercourse between people where you would spend time

together and enjoy each other's company. Uh .. one of the people who worked for the British Red Cross, a lady -- I spoke some English because I had taken English in school, and probably spoke more than a passable English -- not really great but more than passable. She came into the barracks one day and said is there anyone here who speaks English and I said yeah, I speak English. So she needed, she was running a supply uh .. warehouse .. the British call it a Supply Dump but it's really not a dump, it's a warehouse for the refugees. It was organized by the British Red Cross and order of St. John and I became an interpreter for her and later became attached to the British army as an interpreter and that's why I am wearing the uniform in these pictures. And amazingly enough, I kept in touch with this lady -- Mrs. Payton for all these years. She just passed away probably a year ago or two years ago. We would exchange Christmas gifts and letters and phone calls and she came to visit us once and what have you. And uh .. I worked for this British Supply Dump as an interpreter and those were wonderful days -- it was like .. well .. like being let out of a cage. You know, it was amazing. We could get the normal haircuts and we could wear normal clothes, we could talk to other people. We felt that we were equal to -- well, you know, after things like that, you really don't feel that you are equal to anybody and you feel always in intimidation of people in uniform or the sense of awe of that and probably to some extent, I have never lost that entirely. Uh .. the respect for authority if you know what I mean. If somebody tells you that you are not supposed to do it, you just don't do it or else.

Q: How long did you work with the British?

A: I worked for the British probably until late '42. Late .. excuse me. I've got my dates all wrong. Late '45, I'm sorry, late '45, maybe early '46. Uh .. then, I started really thinking seriously about what are you going to do with yourself. Where do you go from here? Uh .. most of the people that were with me at the time, the young people -- almost everybody who survived was young. There were no old people. I would say everybody was between 15 and 30. There was nobody older that made it. Most of the young people wanted to go to Israel which was then Palestine. Uh .. I felt that Israel was an agriculture society which was what it was and that was not what I wanted to do. Uh .. I wanted to go somewhere else -- I wasn't sure. For some crazy reason, I ... my father's sister and her husband had gone to the United States before the war and for some crazy reason I remember their address. I don't know how I ever possibly did that but I did do it, O.K. And I wrote them a letter and made contact with them. So, I had an opportunity to go to the United States -- some other people who did not want to go to Israel wanted to go to Australia and you know, and we pretty much, except for Israel, could decide where we wanted to go. We could stay in Germany, some of the people who had been from Eastern Europe had wanted to go back. Not many of them, but some did. So ...

Q: Did you think of returning to Berlin?

A: No. No. I wanted to have no part of Germany, wanted to have no part of Europe. I wanted to go somewhere else.

Q: Some woman: Your uncle was in Germany.

A: My uncle was in Israel.

Q: woman: He went back to Germany.

A: That was later. I knew I had an uncle in Israel but I just did not want to go ... I just didn't want to go to Israel. I don't know why .. yes, I do know why. I didn't want to work on a farm. I didn't want to do that. I wanted to work in some kind of a trade or business enterprise or that kind of thing. Uh ... so .. uh, I decided that if I wanted to go .. I finally decided that I wanted to go to America, to the United States, and in order to do that, I had to really get into what was then the American Zone of occupation. It was very difficult to get from the British zone of occupation to the United States. So, this Mrs. Payton wrote a recommendation for me to the United Nations Headquarters in Munich and also a friend of mine who was a Canadian captain who I also met after the war in Germany did the same thing. And uh .. I had to get permission to take a train -- you know, everything was still in disarray. So I went to Munich and started working for the United Nations --, the United Nations Legal and Rehabilitation Administration doing the same thing again in a warehouse for relief supplies and I applied for going to the United States and came here in September 1946. I had the relatives -- my father's sister lived in Springfield, Massachusetts. I had some other relatives who lived in Springfield Illinois and we were given, before we left Germany, we were given ten dollars as money for -- we came on one of the tube ships the "S.S. Marlin" -- I remember that. I remember having our first oranges aboard ship and orange juice. I never had orange juice before in my life and you know, just to see oranges in bins -- you know ... I hadn't seen those in ten years. I hadn't seen eggs in ten years -- well, not ten years but five anyway. So, you know, this was an amazing sight. It is hard for anyone to imagine that kind of stuff. And uh .. since I had seven dollars left out of the ten dollars, when I came here, and that was not enough to go to Springfield, Illinois, so I chose to go to Springfield, Massachusetts. Which was that train fare here and that's basically.

Q: You landed in New York?

A: I came to New York City first. I did not like New York City, inside or outside. I had some relatives in New York. I guess it was the sister of my grandmother or something like that and I stayed with her for a couple of weeks. First of all, it was very difficult to find a job in New York because that was the time when all the GI's were being demobilized and of course, they had first right -- as well they should -- for all the jobs. And uh .. I went to Springfield and I guess I hung around for about two or three weeks doing nothing and just enjoying this wonderful country and all the opportunities and I decided that I wanted to work in

either a wholesale or a retail business. Springfield had kind of a small main street and I went from one end to the other trying to find a job in one of the stores and I did not find one. Later that night, somebody called my aunt who I stayed with in Springfield and said, "well, there's a person who has a store in an outlying section of Springfield who is looking for a stock boy". I found a job there as a stock boy -- then you know, my problem was schooling. I never had more than eight years of schooling, so uh, what I need to do was first to get my school equivalency certificate. Which, I don't know if you have that here but in Massachusetts, you go to the department of education. They devise a plan for you -- evening courses that you have to take, correspondence courses that the State Department of Education gives and I, they devised a plan for me whereby I would get the high school equivalency certificate which I did. Meanwhile I continued working during the day, in that store. I then ended up at Northeastern University at night, there was a Springfield division of Northeastern University -- it was a high school equivalency certificate and I went to Northeastern for six years -- always continuing to work at my job -- gradually advancing from stock boy to sales person. Then I started going for my Masters to American International College -- another local college in Springfield. I never got my Masters -- I hope to take some courses now and maybe get it. I ultimately advanced to buyer and then general manager and then subsequently the business was sold to a large corporation and I became president then became president for some other department stores -- so, I at the height of my career, I ran eleven small New England Department stores for the Van Heusen shirt corporation and in 1982, I had an opportunity to buy the original store that I had started working at as a stock boy, which I did and I just sold it in March of 1992 and I am retired. That's basically it. I talked for a long time. If you still have ...

Q: Sure -- there's plenty of tape.

A: Not about Belsen per se. I had wanted to go back to Belsen to see what it was like and I was really ... I didn't do it with an easy heart. I wasn't sure really what I would find, but I thought it would be a very lonesome place with maybe just a few old guys like myself standing there and saying Kaddish -- that's a Jewish prayer for the dead. I don't know if you're Jewish -- if you know. So, uh ... instead we got there on a Sunday morning -- it had been turned into a memorial park and I was really amazed to see probably two hundred young Germans -- some with children going there and just looking around. Visiting this memorial park, you have all the mass graves that are still there which say "Here lie five thousand", "Here lie five hundred". "Here lie a thousand". And so on and so forth. But these people had taken their Sundays to go and look at this and it made me feel that was kind of a nice thing. That at least these people wanted to know about this period of history.