

MORGENSTERN, Abraham
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One audio cassette

ABSTRACT

Abraham Morgenstern was born to Russian Jewish parents who had moved to Lublin, Poland around 1921. He was reared in a contemporary religious family, and attended Polish public school and a Jewish school. He graduated from business school at 16 just before war broke out in 1939. That year, the Russians took over his town, which protected them for a short time.

After the Germans invaded Poland, they shot about 99 percent, some 150 of Lublin's best- educated, professional Jews.

Abe asserts that no Jews in Lublin tried to escape. Lublin's two ghettos were established on April 1, 1942, and the Morgensterns were moved into one of them that month. Food became very scarce.

Abe' father and sister perished during the first of four actions. Abe says that no Jews from his area were taken to concentration camps; they were shot in the woods and put into mass graves.

Abe does not provide many details about how he and his mother survived, except to say that she bribed some people. He refers the interviewer to an unnamed book he wrote.

Abe mentions labor camps, one in Kamionka. One was burned down, killing the camp inmates. Abe reported a few times to the Judenrat, which took him to work temporarily at a factory and then at a camp. But eventually, he says, "I just stayed home."

Toward the end of the war, Abe and eight others dug a hole where they hid until Russian troops found them; about two weeks after the Russians had liberated the area.

After the war, he and his mother immigrated to Italy. They had planned to go to Palestine where they had relatives, but did not go because they did not know the relatives' names or addresses.

Abe says that of Lublin's estimated 10,000 Jews, only about 200 survived -- 50 or 60 in the city, and about 150 who had escaped to Russia.

Interview with Abraham Morgenstern Transcript

A: The minute they came to that city going to Poland already in 1921, I think that's where they smuggled the border from Russia to Poland and my father met quite a few people that he knew from before that already came ahead of him to that city,

and he found some cousins and whatever. He also, I guess, was offered a position, a good position. He managed a flourmill, and my mother got pregnant and so there was an excuse not to go. Then when I came already, my father didn't feel like leaving. He was a little established already and he felt good there. He had a lot of people that he knew and it was a nice town, a religious town and that's how we stuck there.

Q: Was your family observant, religious?

A: 99% of the Jewish people were orthodox. There was no other section that didn't, only orthodox. Some were modern, some were old-time religious but my father had no beard and he was --. In that mill, as I say, later when I was growing up, he was traveling to villages and little towns buying grains from the peasants. Then he was giving them to the casino and that's how he made his living at that time. I went to public school and in the afternoon I went to cheder which was a Jewish school. Then later on when I was like 11, 12, 13, I went to Hebrew School in the afternoon for two, three years. We learned other subjects too beside Hebrew.

Q: You went to that school solely, you didn't go to the public school any more?

A: Yes, yes. I said I went to the public school till I was 13 and finished. Up there you go seven years public school. I finished public school in 1936. There were two higher schools after that. One was the gymnasium they called it which was run by the state, and the other one was business school. It was also -- it wasn't run by the state, it was private but they were on the same level. You had to wear uniforms and you had to get exams before being admitted. I went three years there and I graduated in 1939. There, besides all the other subjects, you learned -- they also taught me German. I took German language. You could take French or German. I choose German so I'm familiar with the German language too.

Q: What did you speak in your home?

A: Polish.

Q: Polish?

A: Yes. I didn't learn Yiddish till almost the wartime. I knew it from the people speaking all around but I never spoke it and all my friends, we always spoke Polish with all my friends. In the cheder, what we went when I was small yet, I could speak to the teacher in Yiddish that time but we never spoke --. As a matter of fact my parents in the beginning, even later, they spoke Russian between themselves too because they were from Russia. But my mother wanted me to know the Polish language so she spoke Polish to me and my sister.

Q: You had just one sister?

A: Yes, one sister, two years younger, yes. As I said, you asked me about religious; my father traveled most of the week, he was in other towns but he make sure he comes back Friday afternoon to make Shabbos home and he went to the shul Saturday. He took me most of the time to shul, I remember, and holidays no question about it. On a Saturday most of the business people were Jews in the city. Very few gentiles had businesses, some had but the majority was Jewish. Come Saturday, the stores were closed up. It may be singles, Jewish stores, they were open like candy stores, or a drugstore or something like that. The rest was shut up completely. Some were open Sundays; they allowed some stores to be opened Sundays, holidays and Saturdays everybody closed. Even the people that only went to the synagogue on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, they still observed the holidays.

Q: Did you live right in the city, right in the town?

A: We lived in quite a few places. Me and my family didn't own a house so we had - - we're renters. I guess we rented wherever was convenient, wherever the job was. Then when I guess they wanted more money or whatever, the family wanted a bigger place, we had to move. I remember moving like three or four times, different places. From one end of the city to the middle city, to the outskirts, whatever.

Q: I see. Did your mother work?

A: No. Women didn't work before. My mother always stayed home.

Q: Did you ever work with your father at all? Did you ever --?

A: He used to take me sometimes on a trip. My father used to own one of these horse and carriages like you see in Central Park or something like that for pleasure. He used to keep it at somebody's stable but when he went out of town he used to go with -- he used to rent a drive of it with a horse and carriage that you could bring the grain back on that. It was like a commercial type horse and buggy, not a pleasure. As far as taking me, he'd take me -- most of the time he would take me -- he went to a place where we had some kind of relations, distant, whatever, my father knew. He would leave me there for the day, with his business and I would be there with other youngsters for me. Distant, distant relatives or acquaintances whatever. As far as working, I did not work but upon the graduation of the business school in 1939, my father took me to that flourmill where he used to manage before. Even though he was out already, maybe ten years out of that place, no not ten years, maybe seven or so, he took me to the office there. He knew the people, the accountants in the office and the managers and they interviewed me and they gave me a test and they hired me as of the first of September. I had a position in the bookkeeper's office there. I was very happy, I didn't have to -- in other words I got it through my father. I didn't get it on my own because I was green at that time, 16 years.

Q: Was this a Jewish firm?

A: Yes, yes. It was a big mill, a very large mill, exported flour all over the world. There were two mills in the city, both Jewish, different ends of the town. The mills are there today, they're there today, the mills are there.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, of course, sure. They employed a lot of people.

Q: At this point, your father was more of an independent? He was more of a merchant, a grain merchant?

A: He was self-employed. When he left -- the reason he left the mill there, it was sold. The people that they sold the mill, the owners came from Lvov, you're familiar with this city, probably you've read about it, it was a big city in the Ukraine. So the new owners came and I don't know whether they let him go or it was -- I don't know the details, I never asked. But since then he didn't work there but he was very friendly with the people, even with the new owners. The people, they sold the mill, opened up a new one at the other end of the town, somehow. They built a new one or they built and then they sold it, whatever it was, I don't know. He knew the people there and that's how he got me the job. Of course, I never got the chance to put in one day's work because the first of September I had to report, that's when it happened.

Q: Right, right. What happened on that day in your town?

A: In our town, what it happened they -- the day before they proclaimed a general mobilization. It was very touch-and-go for the last few weeks there before that date. It was the German propaganda and Hitler's speeches, you know, was broadcast all over. They demanded Danzig, it's a port city there. They gave in to this and he demanded something else after that. They knew that they cannot get out of it, he's going to attack sooner or later. The minute that they declared the mobilization, it was a Friday night or something, the next day or so they declared war. Germany declared, they attacked first and then they declared.

Q: During the mobilization, what did they expect from everybody?

A: The people had to report to their points. Whoever was 21 years old had to report, mobilize. There was a general mobilization and all doctors, dentists were mobilized and put into uniform right away and sent to different parts of Poland. They did it quick but our city was not -- was at the other end -- was at the eastern end of Poland. So it was not attacked, was not attacked by the Germans, they concentrated a little bit the other way, the western part, that's where they attacked from, the western part. It dragged on like this for about two weeks. People

started to evacuate from Warsaw and Lodz (?) and different cities. We used to see a lot of cars coming through with people in it. On _____ top of the Romanian border. We were very close to the Romanian and Russian border, was like 30 kilometers or something to the Romanian border, or 35, just nothing. They all had cars, most of them with cars, people, not only Polish people, Jewish people too, they had means and they didn't want to be caught. They figured they'll go to Romania and Romania was independent and from there they would - -. Actually, they did and people that went to Romania, they wound up in England. All the Polish escapees wound up in England.

Q: It was the way to go, even to Palestine, that route.

A: To Palestine, you couldn't go because the British wouldn't let them go.

Q: The mandate had --?

A: They wouldn't let go but the English government would let the Polish people come into England. They went -- it's a long way around but that's how they managed.

Q: Did your father ever think about leaving?

A: No, at that time, why? Where would we go? First of all, we had no means of transportation, where you going to go. It was a city of nine to ten thousand Jews and nobody tried to escape, actually nobody. Some Polish people did, officers evacuated some families and police, almost to the last day, the police, the firemen, they stayed will the last day. Almost the last day, they evacuated. What happened between those two weeks, it took about two weeks till the 17th of September; it was a Sunday morning and Germany was successful in occupying already quite a bit of -- most of -- about two-thirds of Poland. I think the only place that still was not occupied was Warsaw. They lasted almost a month. Somebody, I guess rumors started to fly or somebody knew already, they said within a few hours the Russian army is going to be here. It didn't take long, an hour or two and we heard shelling or something. They were going, the Russian army was advancing and just shooting so that the people don't attack them. They didn't know who the Polish army is still there or the police, they had no idea. They were just like shelling like over the cities to announce that they are here. Whoever didn't escape yet from the government tried to get out. But there was no fighting, there was no damage. It was very festive when they actually showed up. Their tanks and the artillery, the cavalry; actually the whole town went out to greet them in the streets, special there was a lot of -- not only Jewish people but some Poles too that they were socialists or communists or whatever. There was no communist Party, it was illegal but there were people that believe in socialism and they were the first ones to greet the soldiers and run the city right from the beginning.

Q: I'm sure your father and mother weren't among them?

A: No, no. My father never mixed in politics. That's how it started. Once the Russians went by -- they went by and the next day they send in people to run the city. The mayor became one of the -- our own people sitting in jail in the other part of Poland, in the north somewhere belonging to the communist party. They came back, they let out the prisons from there. They came back to the city, one of them became a mayor. He rode a horse and became a mayor. They figured he was a man that was way back, a card member, he sat in jail. So they gave him the honor of being a mayor but not for long, a week or two, then they appointed their own; they brought in their own people to manage the city. A little bit later, they brought their families and they took over the buildings where the Polish officers used to live with their families which was evacuated already and they settled there. Later on they even took over Jewish apartments and they settled the Russians and things like that. They nationalized the buildings and everything.

Q: What was the first effect on your family or yourself?

A: Well the effect was positive. First of all, my parents come from Russia and with the Russian army, they could communicate and then they started to organize different businesses, everything under the government control. They were looking for anybody with managerial experience and my father was pulled in right away in a good position.

Q: He had experience and he could speak Russian?

A: Experience and he went into a grain concern that the Ukrainians had established. A grain concern and they knew about him and they took him in to manage a certain thing. Then he took me into the office and that's how I got a job. I worked there almost two years in the bookkeeping department.

Q: Was that also a positive experience?

A: Yes, very positive because they treated the Jews very nicely. You know the Russian authorities at that time, most of the occupiers. The officers, the big and even the private people that were brought in, a big majority were Jewish people from Russia. It was a very positive thing for the Jewish people. It was very positive for the Ukrainian but it was not so positive for the Poles. Poles were looked a little bit down because the Russians said that they came to liberate us from the Polish yoke or whatever. So the Poles had a difficulty of getting a good position. Also then a couple of months later, they established everybody from 16 years and a half had to get a passport, the Russian passports with pictures. We had to go to register. People went to register according to their professions, whatever they did. If anybody owned a business before, they marked on the passport that this man is a businessman or if he had a son over 16, the son would be marked son of a businessman. With that passport you couldn't land a good

position already because you were considered a capitalist. That's how they marked the passports. Also you had to put your nationality, Jew, Pole or Ukrainian. They had in their passports what it was, even till today. All my friends that their parents were in business and they had problems getting jobs. Being that my father was not marked as a businessman on his passport, he was, through him I was able to get in a few of my friends to that concern too.

Q: Do you remember anything about being indoctrinated about communism?

A: Oh yes, sure, of course. They had lectures, public lecture forums that you go. At that time already it was a few months after they established already their rule. As a matter of fact, they have it in the book. One of the lectures that I remember, we worked in the grain concern. Most of the grains were being shipped to Germany. At that time already, Germany took two-thirds of Poland and they took one-third. They divided between themselves. But at that time already there was a little friction between both of them somehow. There were not such good relations and yet they were shipping all the grains out to them. I remember asking that question to one of the officers that was giving the lecture. They had special propaganda men that worked in uniform and they were lecturers, special lectures. I asked him, how could we ship to them the grains that being they're already trying to tell us that they're not friends, they're like enemies. They're trying to build up their thing against us or whatever. He says, no we have to buy time and the amounts that we give them are negligible but from our concern most of them went there. He says we have to buy time to be prepared. They were preparing the building airfield outside the city.

Q: The Russians were?

A: Yeah. The Russians were. I was roped in to go to that airfield on my vacation to work there.

Q: What was the feeling in the town at that time? Was it that things are stable or --?

A: It was a stable feeling, it was stable. They opened up a Jewish gymnasium what it wasn't before. Before it was like a public; they opened up a separate Jewish gymnasium with Jewish language, Hebrew, Jewish and most of the Jewish kids that want to go to a gymnasium would go into that gymnasium. The Poles already had no gymnasium no more. The Ukrainians did have their Ukrainian gymnasium, the Poles had no gymnasium. That's how they were treated.

Q: Really lost those --?

A: Yes, they were really mad at the Poles. Didn't let us forget; they thought that because the Jews were more favored than them, they thought that they had to pay us back later. It's one of the reasons they claimed that we were patsies with the Russians and most we are communists.

Q: What about when you had to go build the airfield?

A: Well, it happened already very close to the June '41 when Russia was attacked. I had my vacation in May.

Q: You thought, you had your vacation!

A: I thought, right. I had a vacation in 1940, I had one vacation for two weeks. But in 1941, I was scheduled to go to a --. They had special places where they sent people that worked nice in the offices, they worked good and they deserved a little break, they would send them paid vacations to a place where it's like a resort area. I was scheduled to go on my two weeks to that resort area. Here like a week before it, a week before my vacation, I was called into the office of the director and he said, he says, I know that you must realize that how we are trying up an army and we have to get prepared because the Germans keep saying they're going to attack us and they built up a very big might against us. Everybody has to sacrifice and being I'm a good citizen or whatever, each office has to concentrate to the building of the airfield. Being that they cannot spare nobody from the office because it's a busy concern when my vacation comes up, that I should volunteer to go to that airfield. He says you're going to get paid for your vacation, you're going to get paid for there. But this was like six or seven kilometers out of the city with no transportation but I had no choice. You couldn't say no.

Q: No choice but to volunteer?

A: Right, no choice but to volunteer. Otherwise I'd be fired or whatever and I went there to the airfield place. They interviewed me and they said okay, whatever that day was. Next Monday you're starting, have to be there six o'clock in the morning. It was, I don't remember how I got there the first day, I really don't remember. My father had somebody drive me most of the time. I know I walked one time. I walked. They took me up there and they had mobilized all the peasants from the vicinity, all around from that area, mobilized under duress. Otherwise they didn't get even paid. Whoever had a horse and buggy was mobilized and they had to transport all kinds of materials from the warehouses and back to that place where they're building the airport. They had engineers, they had a lot of Russians and they were walking on the ground and it was just a big, big field, a tremendous field. From scratch they had to stop and build that airport. I was there two weeks and I think the second or the third day, I got acquainted with a Russian fellow that he was in the Russian army but he was in civilian clothes. He was something, a demolition expert or whatever and he was working underground something. He had a truck, he was driving a truck, they run the little trucks or something. We got acquainted and he says; I said I would like --. I walked home, that's what it was, the first day I walked home. Quite a bit to walk, an hour and a half or whatever I don't remember, an hour or more. He said -- I invited him. If you want to come to the house, you can have supper with us,

figured he'll give me a ride which he did. I says you come to the house and you can even stay there overnight. In the morning you'll come back.

Q: You're still living with your parents and sister?

A: Yes, yes. Unannounced he brought me home. I introduced him and he was a nice fellow. He had supper with us and he slept one night and in the morning, he went back with the truck. That's how we were going every day. So it turned out to be not bad for me; you know I had transportation. Otherwise, I probably wouldn't be coming home every day, I'd probably sleep there somewhere. The two weeks went by, two weeks went up. I went back and somebody else's vacation came up and they sent him.

Q: What did you do at the airfield? Was it labor?

A: No, no. It was office work. What I actually did, the peasants were hauling sand. From wherever they were bringing the sand here somehow and I had to give them receipts for how much sand they had to bring a full load of sand and I gave them the receipts for the loads. I had to go check if they didn't lose on the way half or whatever. I gave them receipts. They were lined up for stretches and stretches of those things from morning until the night. They were working around the clock; they had two shifts from six to six. My shift was from six in the morning until six at night.

Q: The receipts were just to show that they had done this?

A: They had done this and with those receipts they were promised they would get paid eventually. They never did.

Q> I see. Because it was too late?

A: Even so, they never had intentions of honoring them.

Q: And then what? After you went back to the __?

A: I went back to the --. Then June 21, Germany attacked. They attacked the --.

Q: Did you know, did you have the feeling that this was going to occur?

A: No way, no way. As a matter of fact I went to the beach that Sunday. The beach was empty and I couldn't understand why there was almost nobody there. Very few -- I usually meet my friends there; we play cards, whatever.

Q: This was on the lake?

- A: No, it was on a river, river. We had beaches by the river. It's a nice story; I go into detail actually.
- Q: I look forward to it. What was the first clue that there was an invasion?
- A: The first clue was that I usually meet my friends like I got up in the morning. We had no radio in the house. Very few people had radios; telephones, only doctors and professionals would have a telephone. Got up at eight o'clock, it was a nice sunny day and I went to the beach, a 15 or 20 minutes walk and I went to the beach. Close to nine o'clock usually my friends would show up already and nobody's there. Here and there, there's somebody there, you know. Go for a swim by yourself, how much can you be in the water by yourself. I go out just waiting for people to show up so we usually play cards. Then somebody around ten o'clock, somebody shows up. He says what are you people doing here? Don't you know there's a war? That's how I found out. Actually they bombed already cities at four o'clock in the morning. Four o'clock in the morning, Kiev was bombed, Lvov, other cities, Vilna, quite a few cities were bombed. Our city was bombed too but a little bit later, they bombed our city. That's how I found out.
- Q: Were you mobilized or --?
- A: Well, in 1941 people one year older than me were mobilized in 1941. Their year was called. Whoever was born in 1922, was 19 years old, they were mobilized like in March and April already, they went to be inducted. At that time when the war broke out, they didn't mobilize any more except whoever was still around who was not sent away to the points where they train you, they would send them right away. Again it was two weeks till the Germans came and they started to evacuate. The first week was normal. They attacked but they were holding their ground for the first four or five days or something. But then they broke through the lines and it was disaster. The first week we were still going into the office and then some of the Russian directors were evacuating their families already, mobilizing some cars or trucks if they had. In our concern too, the director was taking trucks and horse and buggies, putting furniture and stuff and sending family back to Russia. We were just standing there. The Jewish people started thinking about the evacuation because whoever was in the police, or whoever was communist or something, they didn't want to take chances. I think the second week already, it was like _____ they were running. Soldiers were coming back from the fronts in trucks full with soldiers. People tried to get rides with them; some did, some couldn't succeed. Again my family wouldn't think of running; not only mine, the majority didn't think of anything. Even though we knew that the Germans, they're against the Jews but nobody thought of something happening whatever happened.
- Q: Had you heard any stories about Germans?

- A: Of course we heard. We heard stories from the other parts of Poland what they were two years already there. That they mobilized some people to camps, labor camps. They worked them for nothing; some guys, sometimes they cut somebody's beard off and things like that. There was no concentration camps, there was no -- at that time there was no extermination, nobody even thought about it in 1941. After they attacked Russia, they started there too, they started to do.
- Q: Were there refugees coming through your city?
- A: Oh yes. We had German refugees; they were coming in 1938 yet. Germany threw out Jewish people that their ancestry was from Poland. They brought them up to a Polish border station and left them there. Then different communities tried to absorb some of them even though it was in the west part of Poland, some wound up by us. Most of them had some family or some relations, they came here but some didn't. Some were trying to actually work their way to get into Russia. They figure they go to the eastern part of Poland, maybe they'll be able to get across the border to Russia. We had quite a few refugees here. Again, that was the worst thing that happened to them. They threw them out of Germany.
- Q: Right, right. You see trucks with Russian soldiers going through and kind of fleeing --?
- A: Civilian Russians, civilians too evacuating. It was the second week all civilians, Russians with their families were evacuating --?
- Q: Then your city was bombed, soon after that?
- A: The city was bombed right at the end of the evacuation when the German planes and the Russian planes were still fighting each other.
- Q: Do you remember seeing planes flying overhead?
- A: Well, I didn't stick my nose out. We were sitting in the basements because they were shelling. Before the Germans came there were a few nights, there was tremendous shelling. There were -- opposite sides -- shells were flying all through the night. The whole house shook every time. Nobody put their head out. As a matter of fact, wherever we lived at the time, there was a lot of gentile people lived there in that section. In that cellar, there was mostly gentile people there. But nobody would stick their head out. I had a chance to go there --= I'll just make it short. The fellow that I acquainted at the airfield, the second week of the evacuation, a tank pulls up in front of our house. Everybody got scared in the neighborhood, a tank, what's a tank doing here? A Russian tank pulled up. A guy comes out and goes up to our house. That's the fellow, he came with a tank. He came to take me with us. He says we are evacuating, the Germans are going to be here any day and come with me, I'll take you back to Russia. You might be

in trouble here, you know, the Jewish people won't have it so good. There was a discussion between my father and my mother, should they go, should they not go. I was like, I had nothing to say probably but I didn't want to go. I know I didn't want to go. I wasn't ready yet to be on my own. They decided not to let me go, my mother especially, they don't want to let me go. He left and also at the same time, maybe a day different, quite a few youngsters a little bit older than me, maybe a year or two older from the neighborhood, walked out from their homes. Said goodbyes and they all wear these knapsacks on them and they said whoever wants to join them, they're going. They're going to try to reach Russia. They went out, on the outskirts and that's all we saw of them. But about two or three days later, they came back. They came back, they couldn't get rides with nobody and they couldn't go by foot. They all came back. Then this fellow came with the tank, he didn't go to Russia either.

Q: He didn't?

A: No, I met him later, that's a story besides. They didn't -- they told him to stay back and he posed as a Ukrainian. Just met him by chance on the street. I was in a march for labor, something during the German occupation, and I met him on the street. He wouldn't look at me, we just looked at each other and then he put his head down. He didn't want to -- I was marching in a group so of course, I couldn't say nothing. Then when we were marched back, he was waiting there in a corner and he came over to me. He said something, you know I'm here and nobody knows, nobody is supposed to know who I am. He says I was on my way, they send me back.

Q: When did the first German forces enter your town?

A: I think it was like July 7 or 6. I have the date in the book exactly. From the 21st of June till July 6 or 7.

Q: What was the first appearance of the German occupation?

A: Well, first of all, again, it was a Sunday, the Germans came in. We were not in the street; we were in the basement all night. In the morning we went back to the rooms and then one of the neighbors came in. She says the Germans are in town already and you better don't dare to go out on the street. They're catching Jews or whatever. Of course we didn't. A little bit later, there was a knock on the door, the same day, and it was in the afternoon, early in the afternoon. Two Ukrainian policemen were there; there were no Ukrainian police before, all of a sudden, there's Ukrainian police, uniforms and rifles. We didn't know at the time but that day also they proclaimed independent Ukraine with the capitol in Lvov. The Germans let them have an independent Ukraine. They had prepared already, evidently they were prepared for that. They had uniforms already. So they came and they came into the house and they took my father out.

Q: Did they give a reason?

A: Yes, they need him for work. My mother was pleading and crying and pleading. We didn't live in the city, we lived outside. It wasn't a Jewish section at all. They had plenty, there were sections where there were a lot of Jews and why they came here, they had to cross a bridge --. The minute they knocked on the door, me and my sister, we were hiding under the bed or somewhere in the bedroom and they took my father. My mother was crying and of course we thought he'll never come back. He didn't show up till late in the evening, he came back which it was like a miracle too. He says they did take him to work something by the river, whatever he had to do. Him and whoever else they caught. He says they didn't beat him and when they finished whatever they were doing; they let him go. It was the first experience. Second experience with the Germans, the next day already.. We didn't go any more in the basement because there was no more shelling already so we stayed in the room. We still didn't dare to go in the street. Now I don't remember if it was the second day or the third day, a lot of German cars, motorcycles pulled up in our street. They stopped on the street and some of them came into the -- we had like a yard in the front and they put in their motorcycles in the yard. They were knocking on the doors; evidently they were shown where Jews lived. They were not youngsters, they were officers, elderly guys and they were from the army. Evidently they were asking where Jews are living not because -- we didn't know, the minute we saw these things we tried to run down the basement over there by that time. But my mother stayed out and what they were looking for, they were looking for Jewish people in order to communicate. Because they couldn't communicate with the other people and most of the Jews knew German somehow because the Yiddish and German is very similar. They stopped for a rest and they had all kinds of provisions with them and they want us to cook. They want the women to cook for them the stuff and they should have their break and eat and then they go further. That's what happened.

Q: Who cooked for them?

A: My mother and then there was another family there, you know. So that's what they came for.

Q: They didn't ask any questions of you?

A: No, no. They just ate. She cooked the meal; they gave some to us. I think they gave my mother some stuff what they had and then they went on their way.

Q: Let's flip the tape over.

END OF SIDE A (ONLY ONE TAPE)

A: It was the first time we saw the German soldiers. Otherwise, we didn't stick our head out.

- Q: Again your father hadn't been harassed again, just that once?
- A: No. Well, then the holidays came in and we -- of course we couldn't go anywhere to pray. We started from the neighborhood. We gathered some people and we made like a little gathering in our house.
- Q: This was like Rosh Hashanah?
- A: This was already Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashanah we didn't pray because it was that time when it happened that they --. We prayed there, people prayed there. All of a sudden somebody came in the neighborhood and said that Ukrainian police is coming. They see Ukrainian police coming up the street. Everybody ran, you know, they took off the prayer shawl and went to their homes. Some from a little further away, they had to stay, disperse a little bit. That's what they were coming, to check if Jewish people praying.
- Q: Had there been some decree that Jews weren't allowed to pray?
- A: There were a lot of decrees but this was right -- was only a day or two away or three from where they -- we didn't even go out nothing. Then there were decrees, a lot of decrees. I think within the first week they started decrees. First the Jews had to register. They imposed the Jewish community leadership. Otherwise they came to the -- there was a Jewish vice-mayor. The vice-mayor was Jewish, he was a lawyer. They came to him and they said you better organize a Jewish community.
- Q: The Ukrainian police?
- A: No, no, the Germans, already the Germans came. There was a building from the Jewish community and they found out who was the vice-mayor. They came to the leader's house and they says we want in 24 hours we want a Jewish community leadership so we can communicate and give directions, whatever. They had a problem to organize it because people didn't want to serve on it voluntarily. They don't want to be involved with the Germans at all. Because you expose yourself once you did. This vice-mayor tried to get some of his friends and acquaintances and little by little they organized a community leadership. Then the Germans had proclaimed announcements all over the town that --.
- Q: Posters?
- A: Posters, yes, that we had no announcing on the radio. There was no such thing. They had special places with their posters and that's how you announced everything. Every street had different places where they announced what's going on and that the Jewish people have to register at the community center in order to

receive food stamps, rations, food rations; otherwise you have to be registered. There was no kind of register, you would not receive rations. They didn't say you would be punished or something just have to register. The same thing, the gentile population had an announcement. They have to register in their places wherever so most of the people went to register. When you registered, I didn't go, my father went and he registered. They asked him his profession from before and address and everything and he registered. Then I think a week or two later you had to go and pick up the rations. It was very small rations that they gave you. Whatever they gave, the Jews got half of it. Then every day different posters. If anyone has a radio, he has to turn it in. Anybody has a telephone, he has to turn it in. You cannot walk on the sidewalk, any Jew cannot walk on the sidewalk. Every Jew must have an armband with the Star of David, a white armband with a blue Star of David. It has to be so many centimeters, ten or whatever and it has to be worn on the left arm. Again, different -- no Jew can have a business. If he has a business, he has to take in a gentile partner but at that time already the Russians took the businesses away and there wasn't that many. They still had businesses, there were some their stores were nationalized so they were talking about these stores; where the people worked for the Russians but it was their own from before. They had to take in a partner, an Ukrainian partner -- was only the beginning. Then the Ukrainian took it right over.

Q: Over how many weeks did these decrees pass?

A: It was maybe the second week the Germans were already here. Right after the second week or so or the end of the first week, something like that. It was very fast, very fast. You could not own a bicycle. Jews cannot own a bicycle. Then again you could not be found in a gentile's house. You cannot marry a gentile. All kinds of laws; every day a few different things like that. It was very restricted.

Q: Do you remember your family turning in anything in particular?

A: Oh, yeah, sure. It was later, we had to turn in fur. That was November, December, they announce on posters that every Jewish family has to turn in all their fur. They have to bring it into the Jewish community so they can collect it for the German army. They were fighting already in Russia, they got stuck for the winter. They needed that and of course, in those days you could see a lot of smoke going through the chimneys. We were burning fur but everybody had to turn something in because they knew every family has fur. We buried some in the yard.

Q: Some furs?

A: My father buried some fur, yes. Because he didn't want to give it away -- probably still there today. Whatever we turned in, my mother had a nice fur coat, I think it's in that book, in the picture but she had given it away already a little bit

before that to one of the Ukrainians that worked with my father before. He took me in for like two or three nights to stay over his house because I had to report to go to a camp for labor already. My mother wouldn't let me go and my father took me there. They kept me like two, three days and she promised them a fur coat so my father brought her fur coat there. That was before we knew that we had to give away fur coats.

Q: Was there a marked change in the Ukrainians themselves? Before when the Russians were occupying the area, the Jews and the Ukrainians were getting along?

A: Right, right.

Q: But at another part, the police, the collaborators --?

A: At that time, even the Poles which were also not favorites by the Germans, the Ukrainians were. The Poles were not favored. Not only the Ukrainians didn't want to look at us, or anything to do with us, but even the Poles didn't want anything to do with us. They wouldn't help us, just the opposite. They were glad that you're getting paid back what the Russians did to us. I had friends from school, that we were very friendly used to go to each other's house, saw him on the street, he looked the other way.

Q: Did you get your armband from the Jewish community center?

A: No, no. Everybody made their own. Some tailors made extra money on it for a dollar or two, whatever. They used to make it, to buy, most people made their own. It had to be uniform. It had to be a certain standard, white and blue that was the color.

Q: At what point was there a ghetto established?

A: The ghetto was established April 1, 1942.

Q: Was there anything else significant that happened between that time?

A: Oh, yes, a lot of things happened. You know again it's with our registration. When we registered for the food rations, the Jewish community building had a list of everybody. There were some people they didn't register. The only people they did not register were the ones, we found out later, they couldn't make it to Russia. They came back and they were members of Communist Youth or somewhere. One guy was a policeman for the Russians so they didn't want to be exposed at all. They were in hiding like and they didn't register. Because they didn't want anybody to know that they are here because otherwise the German, the first thing they would call to them. They were part of the Russian establishment. So with those names and addresses and the lists of the professions, what happened in

October, I think one day it was in October, we woke up in the morning and we found out that during the night, the Germans came and took away 150 people. I think it was in August, I'm not sure. In the book I have it exactly, it might have been August. I think it was in August; they came one night and they took out 150 _____ from different addresses, 150 people, doctors, lawyers, accountants. They told the families they taking them to work and the next day the peasants told us they took them to a forest outside the city and they were shot. This took away the leadership, the intelligentsia; it was the people that they could be a potential leadership or something, that knocked out 99%. They left a few single doctors, surgeons, they left a few. Like lawyers, it was only the vice-mayor that he was the chief of the -- they called it Judenrat at that time. I don't think there was any other lawyers left that I recall. With one shot they knocked out the cream of the population. They organized in October, they organized a certain amount of people to go from the city to a labor camp, somewhere 80 kilometers away or whatever. We didn't know at that time where. Of course, they came and brought -- no, they got our name too. We had a notice that I had to report next day to the Judenrat to go to that camp. Again, you know, was in the house between my mother and father. My mother didn't want me to let me go; my father said well I'll have to go. In the meantime they are preparing a knapsack for me with food and clothing whatever. They didn't know for how long; I think they said for three months. Then you'll come back and other people will take your place. The decision was finally that no, I should not go. That's when I went to that Ukrainian's house where I stayed two or three nights. It was my mother's idea. My father was -- he didn't, he couldn't decide one way or the other. It was just a plain labor camp, they didn't shoot people there but a lot of youngsters died there; a lot of men died because it was very hard labor, very hard. The work they were doing had nothing to do with labor. They were moving tremendous sizes blocks or stones or whatever from one place to another, up a mountain, down a mountain. It was in the winter, people came back frozen. They were lucky they came back frozen because they were bought from the families. They went and paid up some money to the Judenrat and they were able to send a certain amount back. Then the Judenrat sent other people there, mobilized other people. They didn't want to go, they came to the house, it was Jewish police already, and they took them. There was no question, there was no place where to run. These people they came back, one of my friends came back and he had one of his toes frozen up completely, more than one.

Q: Did your father ever get called for labor?

A: No, my father -- they called a certain amount of age groups. Like from 18 to 30 or something like that -- my father at that time was already fifty --, was born in 1890, so he was already 52 years old, 51. They wouldn't call him; they first called the people that could do labor.

Q: So the ghetto was formed -- so up to that point you managed to avoid having to go to any camps?

A: Up to that point, yes. That camp was eventually liquidated, burned with people in it.

Q: What was the name of that camp, do you know?

A: Yes, there were two. One was in Kamunka and the other was Boogerkey. It was in the same state like but it was a good couple hours traveling by horse and buggy if not more.

Q: So a typical day for you was --?

A: My day?

Q: Yes.

A: I didn't go no place. I had to report to the Judenrat once a week for labor there. They took me wherever they assigned me to go, to a factory or something. Very few times that I reported but I had no choice because otherwise they would take me. From there they would take me to the camp but once they were taken October to camp already, I didn't report after that, I just stayed home.

Q: I see. What was --?

A: They also took women. They took my sister a few times to work. There was quite a -- this city was like a county seat. All the main offices from the German authorities were in that city, not in the other cities, was in that state like in that part of the county. They had police, they had Gestapo, they had zonderdees, they had all kinds of different civilian authorities. All these people needed labor for nothing. They were taking some to clean homes, offices for the Germans; they were taking women, young girls or women. To do heavier labor, they would take men. If some factory was short of some kind of labor, they'd tell the Judenrat, I need 50 people today, I need 30 people today and they would have to supply.

Q Was there any violence at that time against Jews?

A: Well, there was, but again it was on a very small scale. The Germans used to come at night even though there was no ghetto yet but they used to come in the Jewish section. They would come to a certain house and take away the silverware and other things. They would just come and take it. Some would walk in dogs and they would see a Jew with a beard, they would let the dog go and sic him or they'd catch one, they'd cut his beard off in the street. They wanted to beat somebody, there were cases where some people were beaten up. That's why I tried not to be on the street at all, not to show myself. Being we lived outside, we didn't live in the middle of the town, I could do it. People that live in the town had no choice because the police were there, the others were there and that's

where they were walking, day and night. They also had the -- it was something like nobody could have a radio. They went into one house and they spotted a radio. So they took the whole family. First the man that had the radio went away, they found a radio, he went out, he went away. They said if they don't find him, the Jewish community would not find that man, they would kill the people from the house, this family. I don't recall already what happened, did they shot the whole family or did they got the man back because word came to him about how they're going to kill the family. Also later, with the fur, they caught some fur in somebody's house and they killed the family, the whole family. But on a scale like, a big scale, no, not yet.

Q: The ghetto was formed in April?

A: The ghetto was formed in April, yes.

Q: How did that come about?

A: Well they hung out posters a few weeks before that, I think it was the first week of March or something, that by April 1st all the Jews from surrounding streets which are not on the map and they included the map where the ghetto would be, have to be out. If they wouldn't be out, they would be shot. Everything was under the threat of being shot. The same thing to the gentiles. If they lived in the parts where there's going to be the ghetto on those streets and if they're found there after the 1st, they would be shot. The majority of movement was from the outskirts in, not from the ghetto out because very few gentiles lived in the middle of the town; the majority was Jewish. But some of them did leave there to go out, find a place or whatever.

Q: So you had to leave your home, I guess?

A: We had to leave our home, yes. We left our home and my father had an acquaintance that lived in the part that was going to be the ghetto. He let us have one room. He says we could use the kitchen together with his wife or whatever, something like that. Of course we had so much belongings and furniture that we couldn't put it there. We had to put it in his basement, everything went in the basement.

Q: You were able to take most of your things?

A: Yeah, you could take anything you wanted if you had where to put it.

Q: You, your mother, father and sister shared a room?

A: We shared a room, one room. It was like about three or four families in that building or something like that. Was a one-story building and a family in the basement living too.

Q: Was this ghetto barricaded in any way?

A: No, actually they had two ghettos. Our ghetto was on the small part, it was a very small section of the ghetto. It was maybe, maybe a fourth of the size of the main ghetto. What I say main ghetto is, there were separated by one of the main streets of the city. That side was separated and there was a main street running through the town from one end to the other, to the railroad station. The majority was on the right side of that thing and we were on the left side. Of course, we could not go from one to the other except during the day, certain hours. We were not allowed to be from six o'clock on or five, I think from six o'clock on, we were not allowed to be on the street at all. It was a curfew like for the Jewish people, you could not be on the street. If they caught you on the street you could be shot. In order to cross from one ghetto to the other, also you expose yourself because there was the main street. There could be German traffic, it could be Ukrainian police traffic and very seldom did I venture from here to there except on a Sunday. On a Sunday, the Germans did their thing home and it was like a -- there was no business going on like that. I ventured on a Sunday to the main ghetto and I had a lot of friends there and on the streets and so on.

Q: You would still report to the Judenrat office to get rations?

A: No, no. Well rations were given till the ghetto. Like in the beginning there were rations going on. When the ghetto was established there was no rations for Jews, they did away with rations.

Q: So food became relatively scarce?

A: Oh, food became a very difficult thing for some people, yes. People had to trade whatever they had, their belongings; would go to the edge of the ghetto and trade with the gentiles and all that. They would come to the fence and barter this for that but most of the people still had something. But then after April 1st, they started to bring into the ghetto, people from surrounding communities, from little villages, not little villages where the Jews were killed already, from little towns. They didn't want little ghettos in each town. Their plan was to concentrate in biggest cities so they can get to them better. They brought in more people and that made it worse. Not only just with food, there's no place where to stay. People slept in hallways; it was a pity for those people that they came from outside. We were in already there with people, more or less established. But it didn't last that long. It lasted till August and they liquidated, they made actions, they started actions.

Q: What do you remember about the actions?

A: Well, again it's -- if I have to tell you details, it would take a long time and you're probably going to pick something what you want from the book. I have it detailed

exactly and it's a fast reading book, no matter what and it's also not so pleasant. I also have an account that I copied from the Memorial Book from one girl that she lives in Brooklyn. She was actually caught on the train the same day when my sister and father, we were all taken out together from the house. But it's a long story and I don't know if you want to -- specially if you're going to have there exactly.

Q: Right, right. You eventually were deported, the ghetto was liquidated?

A: No, no, I wasn't deported. From our territories they did not take any to concentration camps. If they would have taken maybe some people would have remained, people that could have lasted or were strong enough to survive. But they did not take to any concentration camps. They killed them right there on the spot and they had special woods, on the airfield where the airfield was built, they made mass graves there, you know.

Q: How did you manage to avoid the --?

A: Again, it's a detailed story.

Q: I see. I'll get that from the book.

A: Mostly it's my mother had a big part in it too. Probably if not for her, I don't think I would be able to manage. She got into a few different situations where she knew some people and we bought our way out or something like that. Otherwise I'd probably be there, you know.

Q: Had you heard about the Anslagrupen?

A: Of course, of course we heard about it. They were doing it; there were rumors just before our actions. There were rumors that they were doing it in the Russian territory. Right over the border was Russia where they're going with those trucks and they put the exhaust systems and they take the people. By the time they come to where they tell them they take them, they're half dead.

Q: What about liberation for you?

A: Well, that's -- I was liberated by the Russian soldiers but actually taken out of a grave. Not just me, about eight people, we dug a grave.

Q: It's incredible. You dug a grave?

A: No, we dug a place to hide. We had a place to hide before for a couple weeks and then we had to come out toward the end when the Germans were retreating. We knew it's a matter of days, we were in the open all the time. I was in the open most of the time, on a farm. We tried to find a place to hide between when the

fronts are going to go through. We were discovered in one place; we didn't want to be there. We dug a place where we thought nobody would be looking; then went in there. The next day after we went in there, the Russians came through and we did not know for two weeks. We did not know. The city was liberated already for ten days or something like that.

Q: You were still --?

A: We were still there. We had prepared food and water. Then we had to go for water more. It's a --.

Q: Very compelling.

A: Finally we came out of the hole and the soldiers were crying. Was a Jewish officer and a few Russian soldiers; they were crying. Somebody came with them that knew that we are there but they didn't know exactly where. He came and he was a few hours there trying to find us in which spot. It was dangerous for them to be there because again, the place where I was on that farm in the village, it was the center of the Ukrainian nationalists. They were fighting the Russians and the Germans because the independent Ukraine lasted only three months. After that, the Germans annulled it. They were already against the Germans and special for the Russians, they were against the Russians. It's a story, the liberation itself. It's a separate chapter.

Q: How long did you remain in your town after _____?

A: Not too long. First of all whoever we knew, the gentile people didn't -- they were not so happy we even came, to see anybody survive. We had like I say about ten thousand Jewish people in this city before and there was about 50 or 60 survived from the German occupation. Some survived that they went to Russia; they managed to get there. Some survived, maybe 150 or so. But the few that survived, we didn't want to be there because everything was against us. I managed to get a job back in the same concern; the Russians came back, the concern opened up and I met somebody that worked from before, just one person. She was happy to see me, it was a Russian woman, very happy to see me. But then again it was a problem with the army and I didn't want to leave my mother alone.

Q: Your mother survived?

A: Yes.

Q: Your father?

- A: My father and my sister went in the first action. They had four. We went through two actions, in August and October. December 1st we were already out of the city. We went to a small village, a farm.
- Q: You were in labor there?
- A: Well, it was wintertime, there was no work. But in the spring, they kept us to work on that farm. From that farm I went to another farm. Right after I left the farm, people were killed on that farm.
- Q: This is where you were carrying your sacks with pictures?
- A: Right, right.
- Q: I remember from some of the photographs in the book where in Italy --?
- A: I'll show you some. As I say, very few pictures that I was able to save but they were in my pocket. Some of the pictures, this is my father, this is my sister. See this picture was in my wallet. This picture I got -- this was also in the wallet. This is from Italy. Let's see, these I made copies of them. This is my father. This is a picture of my -- I played in a band, a school band.
- Q: What instrument is this?
- A: It's like a mandolin type or a lyca type. This is Italy.
- Q: So your plan was to go to Palestine?
- A: Yes, of course, of course. We had no names or addresses, nothing. We had family here but I had nothing.
- Q: Didn't know where they were?
- A: Didn't know where they were, didn't know their names, nothing. Again yes. This is -- my mother from her young years yet, okay, it's from Russia yet that picture. Here we had a protest in Bari. Did you ever hear of Bari?
- Q: Sure.
- A: I was there maybe a year or more. That time we protested against Bevin. He was a foreign minister from England and he's the one that was catching the people that tried to get into Palestine, put them in Cyprus in camps.
- Q: Right, we were hearing about that, yes.

- A: So we were protesting, I think he was in Italy at that time. This is in Italy, a picture. This friend here he was one in that labor camp that I was telling you about, he's in Israel. This is my mother's picture. That's the fur coat what she had that I was telling you.
- Q: That's the one she traded away?
- A: She didn't trade it, she just gave it away because they took me for two, three nights there. These are people that came to visit us from Russia in 1940, they came to visit. They went to a resort place and my mother and my sister went there. That's my mother and that's my sister and they met the family there. That's my father's sister, they were from Kiev, they came to visit us. Let's see. That's my mother and father. I think that's the first picture they took in the city when I was born.
- Q: Your mother's very pretty.
- A: This is my business school picture.
- Q: You were bookkeeping then? Is that what you considered yourself?
- A: Yeah, we were studying there for accountancy and I graduated, I had my diploma. I had a picture of all the graduates, that went too with the sack. That's a cousin from Kiev and this is my sister. I don't know how it wound up that this was in a different place. As I said I had two sacks actually. This wound up in the other sack. They're not even my family; they're somebody's family that we knew and the family is here. There is a sister to that woman and we made copies, we gave them. Here's my father and my sister; the picture's taken, I don't know, 1933 or 4. I think I sent this picture also. I gave one of these pictures, made copies, they should have it here.
- Q: Ben Liss?
- A: He should have it there. If you want to take an extra one, I have it, you can have an extra one. This is my sister, that's a friend at the Jewish gymnasium. The Russians came in 1939, they set the Jewish gymnasium. I made copies for that reason to --. That's why you have these, you saw that _____. I should have that too and I think I sent this here. I sent a copy of that and that's a copy of my sister.
- Q: Your mother and father?
- A: My sister. I think I sent from my mother and me later too. I sent pictures, you know.
- Q: I'll check with Ben Liss. If I can't get them from you, will I be able to borrow photos for copies?

A: Yeah, yeah. Now here again this is in the resort area; my sister and my cousin from Kiev. This is in Romania.

(TAPE ENDS AT THIS POINT.)