INTERVIEW WITH ISRAEL MILKOW

APRIL 1, 1992

FRAMINGHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

The date is April 1, 1992. We're speaking with Mr. Izzy Milkow in Framingham, Massachusetts. Mr. Milkow, could you please tell me your name, your date of birth, your place of birth and whatever you possibly can about your childhood.

Hi, my name is Israel Milkow. I was born in Slonim on February 15, 1937. From 1937 until I believe 1941, I lived with my parents in Slonim. I also had four brothers beside me.

Do you want to tell me their names?

Okay. The names were Yerachmiel, he was the oldest. And then came Shevach, Yosef and Moshe and I believe I was the youngest. What was happening is that my father, I believe, was a baker. He worked for different bakeries, I believe. And I would classify them as--they were poor people, poor working people. I believe my mother's relatives lived about 30 kilometers away from Slonim in a small shtetl. Each year, each summer, what was happening is that one of us brothers would go into the shtetl--the name of it was Kaslovchina, I still remember it. And in 1941, in the summer of 1941, it was my turn apparently to come to my uncle. I lived during the summer there and in 1939 when the war broke out, the Russians came to our part of Poland. So I remember that there were a lot of refugees from Poland who escaped the Germans and there was a lot of talk about it. Most of them were living around the synagogues or in the Jewish community and we could see them.

Did you have any sense at this point about what was going on? Did you understand at all? You were still young.

Not really, all I know is that there was a lot of commotion and a lot of talk. In 1941 when the Germans attacked the second half of Russia, I was with my uncle, that I remember. What happened is, my uncle was a farmer. He was--they did not have any children. My aunt and uncle didn't have any children. My mother's whole family lived in that shtetl so there were a lot of aunts and uncles and relatives there. Now this particular uncle, his name was Hershel, he was a farmer. He knew the

language, he knew Russian and Polish and he knew how to trade with the gentiles. When the Russians came, he got a position with them. He was very well-known in the community, not as a Jewish scholar but rather as a so-to-say horse trader. He knew the language, he was like a policeman and a fireman and he was well-known in the gentile community. So any transaction that had to go through would go through his hands. So when the Russians came, most of the Jews who did not agree with their philosophy would be persecuted and sent to Siberia and we knew that every time people somehow were eliminated. In his case, I believe that he felt comfortable with the new regime. He had horses and he was able to do his trade. By the Russians coming in, in 1939 did not do him any harm. In 1941, when the Germans started to attack, we knew ahead of time because we could... Well, first the uncle was well-informed of anything that was going on. He could not drop me off back to Slonim where my parents were because Slonim was already being occupied by the Germans. Since he lived in this small shtetl there, a village, we were able to run away through the forest. So he packed up the wagon, took his wife, other relatives and myself and we got traveling through the countryside. We reached some of the big cities like Minsk but that was being attacked and then we reached the city of Mogulovin (ph)(c.79) and Kiev and that was being attacked. By then the horses were of no use to us and whoever remained of the relatives, the group that ran away from the shtetl, we traveled by train to the southern part of Russia. I remember lots of times, the trains would be bombarded by German planes. Every time planes would be overhead, we would run out of--and hide and then continue with the trains. I don't know the exact time but the train took us all the way to the city of Samarkand which is in Uzbekistan in the southern part, southwestern part of Russia. There we settled among the natives. It was very hot.

Were there other refugees at that time?

Yes, yes. We were a whole group of people coming--a lot of Jewish people especially--coming on the train and other trains. Because that was the only safe place, is the further away from central Russia. When we settled there, we had to get used to the environment. It was very hot, a totally new language, even though some of the people spoke Russian, but the natives did not. A lot of us, the European people got sick, either malaria or typhus. The water looked like black coffee with cream and mosquitos and ...

Where did you sleep?

Well, we had little houses there, I remember, little mud houses. Apparently the uncle did bring with him some kind of money because we were able to get a house. But as soon as we came there within six months, his wife died, other relatives died and then he became sick. And I think he became disillusioned because he thought that he was a big shot and he thought that the Russians were going to help him, the government and everything else. But once we were there, everything stopped and everybody was on their own. So within a year also he died even though he was physically a very

strong man and capable of taking care of himself but he just---I believe he died either of malaria or of typhus. He was in the hospital. I used to come and visit him and somehow some of the other relatives or acquaintances died and then what happened was that I was taken into a children's home. That particular place was a mixture of I would say mostly Jewish kids but there were also some Christians. It was run by the Russian government probably. I don't have too many recollections there For those who survived--I believe it was really a miracle to get out of that place because the facilities was terrible. We slept on the floor and the mattresses were lined up on the floor one next to the other. You had a little place just to put your head there. The food was terrible. I remember that--I mean the children there ran probably from the age of three and four to the age of fifteen and sixteen, whoever they could... It was a gathering point. Every morning, we would take the mattresses to dry out because the facilities.... First of all, we did not have indoor plumbing, okay. We lived among the natives and the authorities were kind of harsh on us. Anything you would do, they would beat you and yell and reprimand.

What language, did you speak Russian?

Russian. At that time we spoke Russian there.

You had learned it just by ...?

Yeah, but among ourselves we did talk Yiddish. We knew that we were Jewish people. There was some kind of Jewish influence because I remember the older people, the older children would even try to recite some of the prayers, like the Shema to let us know, especially the younger children that there is hope and that sooner or later, all of this will be over and we'll go back to Poland. Now, also there was a lot of activities from Samarkand in those years that Jews went to Palestine through--we were right on the Iranian border. If you look at a map you'll see that Iran was next to--and at that time they would go. And especially the Polish army started there and they would go from Samarkand and the other places to Iran, then Iraq, and then to Palestine. As a matter of fact, I was reading about Menachem Begin. He went through this same route and that's how he came to Palestine then. So a lot of people, a lot of the Jewish people escaped, came to Israel, Palestine through that part. Well I did not. I remember a lot of the children who were in the children's home died and there was somehow every time you could see a new child would come and somebody would die. There was very little fuss about it. A child died, it died. There was like nobody to cry for the child because the parents have died already and there were no relatives. To the authorities we were just another name or whatever.

Did you have a sense at this point about your family, that you wouldn't see them again? Did you understand that?

Honestly speaking, somehow I didn't think of them. I start to think about my family much later. In those days, I think I was too naive. It was a question of survival. We would, no, no.... I never dreamt of going back to Poland or to my city where I was born, Slonim, to go back there and meet people. It was so far away and such a different life that nothing really materialized. The--so I believe in 1945, I always mix up the years, '45 and '46 so, but ....

You were liberated in '45?

In '45, after the war. I was then considered as a Polish refugee. All the refugees were allowed to go back to Poland since Poland was under the Russian rule anyway so they did not make a fuss. So what happened was that we came back to Poland so we traveled by train from Samarkand back to Poland and we came to the city of Warsaw . That was the capital of Poland. There we were put into a big gathering place and from there probably we were supposed to be dispersed to other places.

At that point, did you know what had happened? Did anyone know?

We heard that--well when we came back we saw a lot of destruction, physical destruction. I really did not know at that point the magnitude what happened. I did not know about the camps. That I learned later when I was with the Jewish organizations in the kibbutz. But I must say I was very naive, I knew very little. It was just a question of survival. If you could--there was a point where you could steal a piece of bread or outmaneuver somebody, you would go for it. I really, in those days, never knew what was really going on. I had no idea. But when we came back to Poland, to that gathering place, there was a feeling of--they start to call us Zyd which is Jew in Polish and that was a derogatory remark. Somehow the Jewish kids were not welcomed there. There was a lot of bad feelings. That I do remember that Jewish people, they would call them messengers, would come and find out who is a Jew because a lot of the Jewish kids then did speak Yiddish among themselves or they knew... Because somehow, I believe, when I was in Samarkand, the Jewish people there were not what the--what I would call the modern Jew or the sophisticated Jew who forgot their Judaism. because among ourselves we did know Yiddish. At least my uncle spoke always in Yiddish to me and my aunt and the people who were around me. So those people from eastern Europe, we still knew Yiddish. With the kids that I was back in Poland, it was very easily, we could be very easily detected that we were Jewish kids, okay. So as a result of that, the messengers, the Jewish messengers tried to separate us and take us away, steal us away from the Polish authorities. In those days, in 1946, I believe, the Jewish organizations started to blossom in Poland. As the picture indicates, I joined a kibbutz. At that time, I was taken to the city of Lodz and there was a lot of Jewish activity there. That was a stepping place for us to travel to Palestine. The food was good, Friday night we were singing traditional songs. They taught us a lot of

traditional songs and there was a renewed spirit--it was a very good feeling then. We were happy, we were able to sing, able to express ourselves and there was some kind of feel that we are on the way--away from Poland--to be among the Jewish people. So I believe we were about 150 kids, gathered from all over. Some of the people knew Hebrew, we were taught a little bit of Hebrew and a lot of Hebrew songs. From there we were on--I think we were about six months in Poland and we were traveling illegally throughout Europe. So we traveled from Poland to Czechoslovakia, from Czechoslovakia we came to Austria, from Austria to Italy and we just passed through those places. In Italy was the stepping--was the gathering place for the illegal migration travels to Palestine, Israel. Here a very important thing happened that changed my whole life again. On the way to the southern port of Italy, the city was Bari, B-a-r-i, somehow I got sick. They could not take me because they--I'm sure they did not have the accommodations since everything was illegal. I was taken back to Rome and all of a sudden I was not any more among my own people. Then, okay what happened was, as long as I was in the kibbutz, I was protected from the outside elements. By that I mean nobody else had authority over me.

Was this done by the Joint or by the Hechalutz?

The Hechalutz movement with the cooperation of the Joint and the Jewish agencies to have us, whoever was in charge of the aliyah. I really don't know. But everything was organized. We were fed good, we were given clothing. There was always people to show us the way and ...

Do you remember any individuals or any names?

No, I would not know. I don't know any names. But all I know is that once I start in the kibbutz, we were well taken care of. And even though we had to travel by foot to a lot of the places, like from Austria to Italy, we traveled by foot illegally through the borders... The way I understand this is that the borders were-- the border guards or whoever the authorities, they were taken care of so we could go through. That was a fact but it was still illegal to go through all of these places but we managed to go through. Like I say, when I was with these people, I think we were 150, I was protected from the outside elements, meaning Jewish or anything else. All of a sudden when I came--when I got sick and I came back to Rome, I was vulnerable to the outside people and this is where I change my life took place. Because what happened then was that the religious people, the religious groups, like Agudat Yisrael. You see in those days, everything you had to belong to a group. You had to belong whether it was to the left or to the right, or to the orthodox groups because I believe everything was registered and the groups or the associations would receive money to support you. So all of a sudden, out of nowhere, some people came and they started to talk to me and give me food and give me probably money or whatever and make me feel good and tell me that I should go with them. All of a sudden I was in an organization, Agudat Yisrael which was an orthodox group. I stayed with them for awhile. They prepared me in the orthodox way of life and

they also said that they were going to Israel. But to them, Israel was not as important politically speaking because those people tried to migrate to the United States, a lot of them to Israel.

But they were all based in Rome? Everyone was...?

In Rome and they were in other outside places of Rome. They functioned quite well. So I was taken to that place and a few months later, I was actually--I was in the Agudat Yisrael in Livorno, in southern probably about 100 miles away from Rome. It's also on the coast. That's where they were. Then I was taken back to Rome and I was put into a yeshiva. The yeshiva as you can see from the pictures was also made out of refugees from Poland, Hungary, Rumania, Czechoslovakia. Most of those people were the real Hasidim from--who survived the war and from way back. Because each one belonged to different Hasidic groups like to the Gerer and the Satmar. Since I called myself a Litvak, I had nothing to do with the Hasidic movement. But I was in the yeshiva because that's where I was taken in. Somehow, as soon as I was taken in to the yeshiva, I remembered the very first thing they did to me is they cut my hair. As you can see in the picture, that was a total different style of life and after a while they called me a shaygitz[gentile boy] because I did not conform to their way of life. I did not wear the tzitzis outside and I did not have peyes and suffered. Anyways...

That makes you a shaygitz?

Oh, yeah... Okay. From the yeshiva what happened was--they started--okay they ask me if I have relatives in the United States. I said yes because everybody has relatives. So they took my name and they spread it, I think it was in the newspapers. As a matter of fact, they send my name like in those days what happened was--names of survivors appeared in the Jewish newspapers like the Forwards and Der Tog and the Morgen Journal, in all the papers. Here of all the names I had an aunt here in Boston, Dorchester that was reading, went through the names and saw my name. Remembering that as a maiden her name was the same way, so she put two and two together and somehow correspondence started. I am a nephew--I was recognized as being part of the family. This is interesting because my grandfather had 14 children with two wives, okay. He had ten children with the first wife. Most of those children came to the United States in the early twenties, okay. The youngest of the aunts whom I had here left my father who was a little child in Europe. My father was the youngest child from the second wife. So of the 14 children, he was the very youngest. He hardly knew any--I would say that if they would have met him, they could not recognize him that it is their brother. They send me a picture, they send a picture to Italy in the yeshiva of my parents and I did recognize that they were my parents. So that was proof that I am a Milkow. Then what happened was they started the proceedings for me to come to the United States. Okay, the yeshiva was 100% in favor for me to go to the United States rather than to go to Israel and join the old kibbutz. As far as they were concerned, I should have totally forgotten my previous

association with the kibbutz because they were not orthodox and so forth. Now what happened was that, okay, here are another turn of events happened and this I just received papers, documentation that it really--even though it happened but I never had any proof. What happened was the yeshiva as a unit came to Canada.

What was the name of the yeshiva?

Yeshiva Meor Hagolah. The Light of the Diaspora. Okay? I could have gone with them as part of the yeshiva and there would have been no problem. However, my relatives wanted me to come to the United States, okay. I was--so what happened, the yeshiva migrated in 1948 as a unit to Canada, Montreal. I remained in Italy. Once again, you see, that's the second time I was left out. Once I was left out because I got sick and I couldn't go with my kibbutz and now the yeshiva left and I remained in Italy but under the supervision of other orthodox groups who were in touch with the yeshiva. I was still under their domination.

How would you _____domination?

Whatever. Anyway, but meanwhile a lot of correspondence was going on from the relatives who lived in Boston to Canada, to Italy to get me into the United States. Well, the United States consulate refused to give me a visa, okay. Somebody decided that the best thing for me would be to go to Canada and from Canada I'll go to the United States. The year was already 1949, the end of 1949 and most of the refugees who lived in refugee camps in Italy and there were hundreds and thousands of them migrated, either to the United States or to Israel or South Africa, wherever. But there were already---

They were closing the quotas?

Right, they were closing the borders. It subsided. I was the refugee where in '46 and '47, you could see hundreds and thousands. All of a sudden, everything became smaller. Everybody tried to get out of Italy and find a place. Well, I am still in Italy. So what they decided is for me to go to Canada and from Canada I would go to--migrate to my relatives in the United States. Well, in 1949, December 1949, I arrived in Canada by ship. I came to the yeshiva.

You did it all by yourself?

Yeah, well, yeah, yeah. But the Jewish agency, the Joint and the IRO took care of that. Actually also the relatives, at this point, I think had to contribute some kind of money or whatever. Oh, yeah, I traveled, I was very sophisticated. I mean, there was no problem. So I came to Canada, I was in the yeshiva. And within a week or so, one of my cousins came to visit me. This particular people--(a)--they were very prosperous in the United States. They had--so and I would say they were sophisticated. I mean they were professional business people. They came to Canada and they saw me. Somehow, from the image that they had of me, before they saw me, and the image that they had of me and the environment that I was in was a total different picture, okay. All of a sudden, they walk in. They saw the Hasidic movement and they saw me and I believe that somehow, they lost their appetite. They tried desperately, maybe they lost their appetite for the environment that I was in rather than the appetite for me, I'm not sure what happened. But they tried desperately to get me out of Canada to the United States. They were not successful. And I was in Montreal until, I believe, May 15. They took me out from the yeshiva and they set me up from the Jewish agency, Jewish Children and Family Service in Montreal and they even send me to a public school. And I was living with a--like a private family, okay. Then as I was doing that, they were working for me to go back to Italy. Yeah, I know it's strange. Anyways, on May 15, they decided that I should go back to Italy.

Who decided this?

The cousins. Because from Canada, I was unable to come to the United States. I had to wait to become a Canadian citizen and then go to the United States. Supposedly, I was supposed to go back to Italy for two weeks and everything was arranged in Italy for me to come directly to the United States. Well, needless to say, this never materialized and two weeks passed and a month passed and another month passed. And I was stuck in Italy. I couldn't go back to Canada because I only had a two-week visa so I couldn't go back to Canada, I couldn't come to the United States. From that period of time, letters and documentation was written. It went as far as to the Congressman Christian Herter who later became the governor. I have a whole bunch of letters proving that everybody worked on my behalf and nobody could do anything. Well anyways, finally in August 15, 1950, I came to the United States. And basically, a whole new chapter started because I came to the United States and I was not prepared for my family. I would say that not that I was not prepared for them, they were not prepared for me. I had five aunts and uncles here. The youngest was 65 and over. I had a cousin who was in her sixties. Her mother--I had an uncle here who was in the nineties.

Can I stop the tape and flip it over for a second?

Okay, go ahead. So anyways, when I came to the United States, somehow I don't think the family really know what to do with me, how to handle me. The simple reason is, they were uneducated,

they still were reading the Jewish paper. Okay, what happened is some were--two families were real orthodox, the others were not and there was a clash between them and their own children. The children started to move away from--what I call the Jewish ghetto, self-imposed Jewish ghetto, and move out a little bit to suburbia.

This is all in Massachusetts?

This is all in Massachusetts, yeah. As you know, the Jewish people lived among themselves. So, they really did not know what to do with me. Some said for me to continue life like I--to send me to New York to a yeshiva and continue there. Some wanted me to be the all-American boy and go to public school. I was torn between them because I was going to one uncle's place and I did not have to wear a yamulka. Going to another place, I did have to wear a yamulka. For Shabbat, the orthodox families wanted me to have them with me because they didn't trust the other family and then the cousins who worked all of that--to get me into the United States--they did not agree with anybody. Finally, the end result was that I was put into---with a Jewish Family and Children's Service in Boston and they took care of me. I was put into a small children's home; there were only about 20, 25 kids. Mostly from natives who lost their parents or the parents were divorced or whatever. So I was put into that kind of place. I believe I stayed at least a year. Then I was put into a foster home. All of this, the children's home and the foster home was within the perimeter of my uncles because everything was in walking distance. So here I had an uncle two blocks away on one side, two blocks away on the other side and I lived with foster parents and in between. So I could walk over to one family, walk over to the other family but I could not sleep over.

Did the Jewish Social Services take over because there was so much feuding with the family or..?

Yes. Well the cousins saw to it. Actually--probably they meant good. The cousins saw to it that I really did not have a life among my aunts and uncles. They were so diversified, like I said. The orthodox people really did not know what to do with me. And those who--traditional but like the uncle worked... By the way the uncles were married to my father's sisters so they were really the outsiders. And so I lived with the foster parents...

You were about what fourteen or thirteen years old at this time?

Yes, something like it, yeah.

What schooling... now I assume you didn't have schooling when you lived in Samarkand..?

Okay, let's go back to schooling. While I was in the children's home in Samarkand, I think we did have some kind of schooling there. I remember very little of that. It was--we did not go to a formal school. Probably the schooling was within the children's home itself. We did know Russian, some Polish and I really don't know how formal it was. Now, until on the way back to Poland,-- okay. When I was in the kibbutz, I learned some kind of Hebrew and probably mostly Zionism because I would hear words like Jabotinsky (ph)(c.684) and I know about Menachim Begin in Italy. So there was no formal education, no.

No math and science and things like that?

No, no, no. Then when I came to the yeshiva, all I learned was the Siddur and Humash and all of that kind of stuff. But definitely nothing to do with math or science. As a matter of act, an incident happened that I knew how to read Yiddish. Once while I was in the yeshiva, I picked up a book, which at that time I did not realize it, but it was a book by Mendele Mocher Seforim. And when I looked at it, first of all I associated that seferim is sefer which would be orthodox. Because they were talking about seferim so I thought it was an orthodox book and I was reading it. Then I showed it to some of the boys in the yeshiva and next time--and I was very proud of it. Next, I was called to the rosh hayeshiva and he started to hit me in my face. And start to yell at me, how dare I to read books that are forbidden, forbidden books. I couldn't reason with them and there was nothing to reason. I mean, they knew what they were talking about so then probably... The more they were in their beliefs, the more I was in my belief that I--the opposite way. No, okay--when I came in Canada for three months, I was going to--I was a fourth grader because I have a report card to prove it. I didn't even remember that. I did good in math but I didn't do good in any of the other subjects. Like I was supposed to take French and English and all of that kind of stuff, I didn't do good. English I did better than French, okay. Then when I came to the United States, I came here in August, 1950. From 1950, September 1950 through probably June '51, I went to a preparatory school. And then in 1951, I was put into a regular high school. So I went through the mandatory four years of high school and I did graduate from high school. I did good through the four years in math, I did good. As a matter of fact, one year I got an A in algebra and stuff like that so I did good in math. I took German, I did good and I took Latin, I did good. Because Latin was the closest to Italian, so I was able to do good in that... American history, I could not understand. a. I could not--I was unable to understand the inner workings of the American history and the language was hard so I didn't do good in that subject. But I did graduate and while I was in high school, I had an afternoon job and I was working. And while--and then--I'm thinking---six years--so in 1954 I entered the Hebrew College.

In Boston?

In Boston, in Brookline. And I was--took me two years in the high school instead of four years and four years in the college program. So in six years, I graduated the high school in two years and the college in four years. So there I had a good Hebrew education. One year, in my junior year, they send me for a year to Israel to study. So that was good, I liked that.

Did you ever go look up your kibbutz people?

No, I did not. I had no idea, I should have, I should have. Because at that time, I still could have probably located them. But, honestly speaking, in 1958, I was very insecure of myself, very insecure. By then, I had lost my association with the family here. Most of them died, the cousins hardly knew me and everything that I did, I did on my own. So as long as I was still in school, especially in the Hebrew college, I felt I was among my own people, who in a way understood me. I could express myself with them, I also had spent about ten years in Camp Yavneh which is associated with the Hebrew College. I worked there in the camp and that was very good for me and the people accepted me. I really was very--I lived with people who were not relatives even though they were very good to me. Everything I did, I had to do on my own. The best thing that I decided which was really against my family was to go to the Hebrew College. Some of them want me to be the all-American boy and forget Judaism and forget everything else and I felt that that was a part of me. So I did go to the Hebrew College and I did graduate and until about two years ago, for about thirty years, I managed to teach Hebrew school. l feel l took as much as possible an interest in Jewish life as I could.

You--basically Hebrew teaching became your career?

Yes. The only problem is that you don't make a living out of it, okay. So as a result of that, I had to work to make a living and for the past 25 years, I've been in the same place. The company accepted me for all my mishagoss that I have and everything else. And I've been with them and thank G__, I was able to make a living from them and support a family. I didn't say anything about the family so I'll say a few words about the family. In 1963, I got married. We have been--I've been very fortunate because I have a very good wife and two very nice children. And there is a lot of feeling between us. It was, I believe, that married life was good for me because I felt that I did belong to something. The important thing is that I can share my--towards--with somebody and--the problems was that when you grow up by yourself and you share everything with yourself and think of life as an individual so as a--and then being--you see the important thing was you have to be, you have to belong to something. If you are a unit by yourself, you don't belong to anything. So being married was the right thing and it lasted and it's good. I hope it continues and _____.(c.809)

Glad to hear it. Can I ask you again to go way back? Are there any incidents other than the life in the children's home in Samarkand or anything that happened in Uzbekistan that you can remember? Episodes or things that stand out in your mind?

Well, the episodes that stand out in my mind are like this. Everything was very regimented in the children's home. Before that, my uncle--I used to visit him. I don't remember how my aunt died. She died before my uncle and I really don't have too good a recollection of her. With him, I had, I believe, a closer association. So while he was in the hospital, I would go in every day to visit him. And we would sit and we would talk. What I know about my parents is what he told me. He would say to me that, I remember, the way he said it is.....He would say it, of course, in Yiddish, not to forget. I remember he would say. forgesh nisht mine kind (c.830) He would indicate to me--he would let me know that we are here in a place, that it is a temporary place and if and when I get out of the place to remember what had happened. He had a feeling that he was not going to survive. Every day, it's very --- he was a man that was not a traditional Jew in the shtetl as we would picture to be. In other words, if you would neglect to go on a Shabbat to services, it would not bother him. But he was very nationalistic and he knew he was a Jew. He spoke Yiddish even though he was, all his life working with the gentiles and trading with them. I would say horse-trading but he knew what he was.

Do you have any pictures of this uncle?

No, I don't, no I don't have anything.

The chances are slim...that's the thing.

No, no, no,--because what happened was from Samarkand, I did not bring anything with me. I don't even have any proof that I was in Samarkand. The only proof is --that I was in Samarkand is what I remember. The only pictures that I have is when I was in the kibbutz and they took the formal pictures in the kibbutz of each individual and the group picture. That started my picture collection. As a matter of fact, when I was in the yeshiva, they confiscated the pictures. And for a long, long time I did not have them. Finally towards the end when they were already away, somebody gave them to me. The relatives here in the United States are all from my father's side, you see. I was from all the relatives from my mother's side so I survived, it's funny, I survived because her relatives took me away. And yet I came to the United States with my--the whole family is from my father's side. I do remember that in the children's home, they would beat us a lot and we would do a lot of stealing. Like if you would have an extra piece of bread or whatever, you would keep it under your pillow. Then you would go try to pick it up, it would be taken away so one would steal from the

other. We would also go in groups from the natives and steal things like tomatoes or eggs or whatever that you could eat; or grapes, they had a lot of grapes there.

Were you hungry all the time?

Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. But if you would get caught by the natives, they would beat you up badly. If they would bring you into the children's home, then you would get a double dose and the authorities would beat you up for going to the natives. Somehow I do remember that they would emphasize that Samarkand was the city that Alexander the Great was there. I remember they would take us sometimes to the mountains, because there were an awful lot of mountains. As a matter of fact, the building that we were in, was a one-story long building, made out of clay. And I--it's funny--I remember the mattresses. I remember them taken out. I do not remember a dining room, a place where we were eating. So I don't have too much of a -- of Samarkand. In Poland--okay let me go back to my parents. In Poland----

I assume they were orthodox?

Okay, okay. My parents--the way I understand--they were poor people. My father, being a baker--okay what I remember is-- That must have been in 1940 or '41, before I came to my uncle because I came there in the summertime, my father worked in the barracks for the Russians because the Russians came there in '39. What would happen is we would--I think where we lived we had one or two rooms at that time. Now I don't know if it was because of the war or maybe in 1939, we lived somewhere else, that I don't remember. But we had only two small rooms and he would work a whole day and at night he would come; or whenever he would come, he would bring some bread with him. The bread, most of the time, would be like broken in pieces but it was something. And then we would share it with the people who lived around us. I think where we lived at that time were like barracks, I would call it now. I don't know if it was --I'm sure it wasn't of their own choice but I do not know whether before 1939, they had a better place or in 1939 they had to run away and came.... But I feel that they were like in barracks. I remember the poverty there and I remember him going to the--coming back with bags of bread and we would all share it. I remember my mother going to the marketplace. In those days you had open marketplaces, that they would come and sell stuff. Looking at the pictures, I could see that they were troubled people. Another thing is --also I feel that my father was not too much of an educated man. For instance, here is a card, that is Milkow, okay, and here is the city of Slonim, see that, Slonim. This is in 1940, that's the only picture that he sent to Dorchester. Of course that was the uncle I came to. This is in Russian, written in Russian. Now judging from that, from the picture of my father and mother that they had sent to the United States, probably that particular picture was mailed in the 40's. That particular picture of my parents was--you could see on their faces--they were not--I mean if you look at the face, you could see that this is a disturbed man, okay. Because an earlier picture I have of them, an

earlier picture of them, you could see he was better dressed. And somehow, you see this is what I studied. No hair, so he must have been--looks like an army picture. Where here he did have hair and you could see that a disturbed face. So also taking a picture like this, it could be that this kind of picture was a documentation picture for the authorities, okay. So---this is the grandfather, this is one of his sons. Now I want to show you here, I know it is visual but--this is--look at the beautiful writing. I want to show you even if--see I have inherited---this is a beautiful handwriting.

That's your father?

No, no, that's my grandfather. My father, I show you, he was not--look this is his handwriting. Okay, this is my father's handwriting, which is not bad but----. See this is a classic. This handwriting is a classic. I showed it once when I went to the Hebrew College and I showed them this. They were all astonished because you know the.... This is before, this is also Slonim. from my father Lazer Milkow, he spells it here with an F. But in 193_, I cannot make out--- but in 193_..

'31.

Thirty-one,l okay. So that was Poland, okay. I don't know--When I was able--the relatives they gave it to me. Actually I took it from them and I kept it all the years. So basically this is what I can tell you. I realize it is not...

Do you know their approximate dates of birth? Do you know how old they were?

I have no idea. I don't even know my own. I have no idea. I wish...

So this would be you?

Well, I don't know. I don't know if this is me. Right, I don['t know when this picture was taken. I think I made a copy of this. The original one was.... Here's the original picture. See I don't know. ---It says Slonim.

[tape ends here]