

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

MYER ADLER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Josey G. Fisher
Date: November 10, 1982

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MA - Myer Adler [interviewee]

JF - Josey Fisher [interviewer]

Date: November 10, 1982

Tape one, side one:

JF: This is an interview with Mr. Myer Adler [address, phone] on November 10, 1982, with Josey Fisher. Mr. Adler, can you tell me where and when you were born, please?

MA: I was born in a little town in Galicia. It's called Rudnik.

JF: How do you spell that?

MA: R-U-D-N-I-K, and that was right on the Russian border. Five kilometers from us was the Russian border.

JF: When you were born, what country was, were the...

MA: This was Austria, Austria.

JF: It was Austria. And what was the date of your birth?

MA: The date of the birth, my mother didn't remember. And because, when I was born, the war was already on. The, in 1914, the...

JF: You were born in 1914?

MA: In 1914. The Russians, in that day when, when I was born, my mother recalls that the Austrian Army crossed to the Russian border, crossed to the Russian border. And it was, and the whole town was you know, like, in a war on the battlefield. But then in Poland it was a law—it became later Poland—it was a law that every one 18 has to register to the...draft, and when I was 18, I didn't know any other way. I went to register. When I came to register, they find out they have no record about me, because it was during the war. Nobody kept records.

JF: So that...

MA: So...

JF: You were born probably in the fall of 1914.

MA: One minute.

JF: Yes?

MA: So later I had to...apply for a birth certificate. And I had to bring two witnesses when I was born. So, of course the one witness could be the mother, which, she didn't remember. She just said, "It was the day when the Austrian Army crossed this." And the *hebamme* was still alive. You know what a *hebamme* is? A midwife. She was still alive. And the doctor...who was in our town, he was still alive. And they called in the doctor too, and she, and the midwife claimed, said that she remembers that mother had a little complication. I guess the excitement from the war, that is, and she sent for the doctor. And the doctor answered he cannot come because he has to help people who are hurt in the country already because it was a lot of wounded soldiers. He says, "Here is a guy he comes

now, came in the world, who needed him?" But anyhow, they established that that was September the 2nd.

JF: September the 2nd.

MA: Yeah, and that's when I keep my birthday, September the 2nd.

JF: O.K. Was your father in that war?

MA: Yeah. Yes, he was that war. A matter of fact, he died in 1922, or '21 I think.

And he died still from what he suffered from the war.

JF: War injuries.

MA: War injuries, yeah.

JF: What kind of injuries did he receive in the war?

MA: I was a little boy...it isn't, I don't know exactly and you know, they actually didn't diagnose his sickness. He was very long sick and...

JF: He was sick from the time he came home?

MA: Not exactly. Later. He wasn't the same after the war, no.

JF: His personality wasn't the same? Or his physical...

MA: No, his personality was all right. But his health wasn't...

JF: His health.

MA: Wasn't the same.

JF: Did you have a chance, I realize you were a very young child when he died, but did you have a chance to ever talk to him about his war experiences?

MA: No.

JF: Or did...your mother ever relay anything about it?

MA: No, she never talked about it. She never talked about it. You know...I remember a couple incidents with my father only when I walked with him to the *shul* back and forward. But the one thing what I never forget I guess because I keep it on reminding myself, when I was three years old, when he took me, you see in, at home, if a child, if a boy was three years old, the father carried him to the *cheder* the first time. I remember that.

JF: You remember that. Aw.

MA: He carried me to that *cheder*. I'll never forget it.

JF: That's wonderful.

MA: And I keep it on repeating every time when I have a chance, you know, so I wouldn't forget it.

JF: You still keep it in your mind.

MA: Yeah, oh yes.

JF: That's beautiful.

MA: Yeah, that's all what I remember good my father. And the rest is, I was a little boy of seven years old.

JF: Was your father able to work after he got out of the war?

MA: He had a business, yeah. Mother...well, you know, the life there was a difference.

JF: Maybe you can tell me a little bit about it.

MA: Yeah, I can tell you. Well, when I was born, right after when I was born, they evacuated the whole family, because it was the battlefield. So they evacuated everybody from there and our family wind up in Czechoslovakia somewhere. And over there, his father died.

JF: This was when you were an infant you were in Czechoslovakia.

MA: I don't remember this. I just know about it. His father died there. And later they took him to the army there, and how long he was, I don't know. I never remember him in a army uniform. And we came back in 1918. We came back from Czechoslovakia.

JF: Do you have any idea where you were in Czechoslovakia?

MA: Yeah. Mother used to talk about it, because we always had beautiful china, not much, but china dishes, beautiful, very beautiful. And we kept there only for Passover. And we put this away for Passover. And Passover we brought these up from the basement. It was made in a *Glasshütte, Glasshütte*. That's mean it was a village where they manufactured china.

JF: Oh!

MA: And everybody who went back, they gave them a set of china. And Mother worked there too, she worked there too.

JF: Who gave that? Who gave you this set of china?

MA: The factory.

JF: The factory?

MA: Yeah, the china factory. That's called *Glasshütte*, in Czechoslovakian.

JF: And they gave everyone who left the town...

MA: Everyone who worked there, yeah, yeah.

JF: In the factory.

MA: In the factory, yeah, yeah, yeah.

JF: They gave them a set of china. I see.

MA: Yeah, of course we didn't have the whole set. On the way it got broken. They didn't pack it right.

JF: Right.

MA: But some of them was...it was so beautiful we kept it only for Passover.

JF: Oh. So your father was inducted into the army then while you were living in Czechoslovakia.

MA: I guess so, yeah, yeah.

JF: That was the time that he was there.

MA: Yeah, yeah.

JF: And that was the name of the town or the name of the factory?

MA: The village was named after the factory.

JF: After the factory. I see.

MA: Yeah, it was a village. It was not far from Karlsbad. Karlsbad is a big resort. Not a big city actually, a big resort place.

JF: And how do you think you spell the name? *Glasshütte*. [tape off then on]
So it's probably G-L-A-S-S and then H-U-T-A.

MA: G-L-A-S-S, and the H-U-T-A. [*Glasshütte* is German spelling.]

JF: Right. Thank you. When you were able to return to your home, you were about four years old.

MA: Something like it, yeah.

JF: Can you tell me about Rudnik and what it was like as a community at that point?

MA: Yeah! Certain things, you know, it's funny, you don't remember what you ate yesterday but certain things it cannot get out from your mind. First of all, when we came back the house was a battleground. And I don't remember that, but Mother also told me it was our neighbor and she, like, our house, we had our house here on the street, our house here. And the yard reached to the street on the other side. You know what I mean? And here was another street. And here was house that survived and we rented a room in this neighbor's house. Mother always told me later. I don't remember that when we lived there. In the meantime the Father fixed up one room in our house.

JF: In what was left of your house.

MA: Yeah, fixed up one room. The first thing is he put up a roof from it, and fixed up one room. This room, I remember, was the store, and we lived in the room.

JF: What kind of store was it?

MA: A grocery store. But the type of grocery store was different than now, you know. It wasn't the cans. Wasn't packages. Wasn't refrigerated. I guess here it was the same way in that time, everything was in the bags.

JF: Bags and barrels and...

MA: Bags and barrels and...

JF: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

MA: I am the youngest. Two sisters and three brothers. Now, one brother, when we came back from Czechoslovakia, he didn't come back. He was at that time about 12 or 13 years old. We had an uncle in Germany, in Cologne. He went right to, he went to Cologne from there. And the rest of us came all back home. I was the youngest, from two sisters and two brothers.

JF: So all of you were living then in this room.

MA: One room, yeah.

JF: In one room.

MA: And that was the store too. I'll never forget. It was, the room was divided here, and that was the little store. And here we lived. Here was a window, you know. And we came in from the store because here was the door and here was the attic too so I never forget it! [chuckling]

JF: Did you live in a Jewish community in the town? Or was it a mixed kind of housing?

MA: It was a small town. It was about 200 Jewish families.

JF: Out of how many, do you think, total?

MA: 10,000.

JF: Total population?

MA: Total population, was 200 Jews. And the Jews were the main business people because they couldn't, for years they couldn't own land. You know, that was only lately in Austria where the Jews could own land. When the Rothschilds became famous and they became lords and they pushed through a law a Jew can own land. But before, you know. And a Jew had no choice. He had to go to business.

JF: Could you own the land that your house was on?

MA: Yeah, yeah, we owned the land, right, yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

JF: That you could own.

MA: Yeah. We, we...

JF: Now, was this a Jewish area where you lived?

MA: Yeah. It is hard to explain to people who weren't there, you know. It was a Jewish area but a church was on our street.

JF: So were your customers non-Jews as well as Jews?

MA: Non-Jews as well as Jews, yeah.

JF: And what experience did you have with the non-Jewish population in your town?

MA: Well, it varied, you see. It changed around. And right after the war, it was still, you know, Poland was always an antisemitic country.

JF: That's right.

MA: Always. Jesuits run the country and you have to read the Jewish history to know more about it. You know, the history records that in the 18th Century, a Jesuit student threw a stone on a Jewish boy in L'vov, throw a stone on him. And the Jewish boy managed to duck. And the stone broke a window. So they took him to court and the Jewish boy had to pay for the window because he ducked. If he wouldn't ducked, the window wouldn't broke. You know what I mean? And right after the war, I remember was a General Haller. [phonetic] You know, right after the war there was like they were organizing Poland: the noblemen ruled the country. And every nobleman had his own army, you know, and he was the law. He could prosecute people without judge and jury. He was the judge and he was the jury. And right after the war it was a Haller, a General by the name Haller. And his army they called the Hallerchickets. [phonetic] And anywhere they go it was, they just, I don't know how to explain it in English. Destruction for the Jews, you know. They just hit. I remember father came once from the railroad station with another...neighbor. You know, most business was with the railroad station because they shipped through the rail there. And he came, and the other guy, he didn't have a beard, you know, he was beardless.

JF: Your father was bearded?

MA: Oh yes, he wore a beard. I'm going to show you a picture of him. And he came, with the beard cut off and his face roughed up. The Haller's army went through and they stopped for five minutes. So the minute he jumped down and how many Jews were on the station, they beat them up. Now to my father they said to him, you know, they used a word like "son of a gun". "Why do you wear a beard? You dirty Jew." And to the other guy they hit him because, "Why don't you wear a beard?" So either way it is no good, if you wear or you don't. You know what I mean?

JF: Was your father beaten at that time?

MA: What?

JF: Was your father beaten up by the...

MA: They were all beaten up at that time, yeah.

JF: Your, at that time.

MA: Yeah, yeah. His face was all messed up. And he wasn't the one only that... Now later, when finally the government stabilized a little, and Pilsudski, he was actually a dictator, he was very good to the Jews. It's very seldom that a dictator is good to Jews. And we enjoyed... we had protection. But still, a Jew couldn't get a decent job. I mean, a government job? Forget about it.

JF: What experience did you have with the people of the town, the people who might have come into your store, the kids in the neighborhood, who were not Jewish?

MA: Yeah, they...

JF: Did you have any friendships with these kids or was it all...

MA: What do you mean, friendship? We...

JF: Did you play with them?

MA: No. No! You couldn't play with them. We went to school with them, and you see, we were dressed different. We had...

JF: You had the *payes* and...

MA: The *payes* and I always was a target. They pulled me by the *payes*. But you see, you know, you judge things accordingly. You know? The way it was, that was already a big improvement. And we did...appreciate, you know, that...there is not guys like...the Haller's army.

JF: I see.

MA: You know what I mean? It's a...

JF: So it was relatively better.

MA: Relatively better. If I was beaten up, I could go to the police and that boy was punished.

JF: I see.

MA: You know what I mean? But when it came to our job, you know, I moved later to a big city in... Krakow. And there was public latrines. You know what latrines is?

JF: Latrines.

MA: Yeah. Latrines. Here you don't see them. And there was always a man was sitting there, taking care, you know, to see, to clean, not to mess it. And this always was a smelly. The man always had with a...cold towel on his head always with a headache. Even a job like this a Jew couldn't get. So I'll never forget, we...

JF: Because it was a government job.

MA: A government job. Everything connected with the government, and everything did belong to the government: the railroad to the government, the post office to the government. You know, I remember I went to once stay with a boyfriend Shulan Katz [phonetic] was his name. And he says to me, "Aren't you glad you're a Jew and you cannot get a job like this." [laughing]

JF: [unclear]

MA: Aren't you happy?

JF: Oh. So you went to a public school then?

MA: Oh, it was, you had to go to a public school. You see, during the, when Russia, during the Czar, practically 90% of the people were illiterate.

JF: The section that you were living in was Poland at the time?

MA: Was Poland, yeah, yeah.

JF: Right? O.K.

MA: Yeah. Yeah, but it, you see, it has to do with, it was, used to be Austria but it was Poland.

JF: Right.

MA: Now, Poland also took away...the part of...what used to be Russia.

JF: Right.

MA: You see, Poland was divided three times.

JF: Right.

MA: Between Russia and Austria, and Russia, Austria, and...

JF: Germany?

MA: And Germany. You see, now, the part what they took...from Russia, they were 90% illiterate people. So they put up quick seminars. And they manufactured teachers. And they make that...everyone has to go in school. Once you get seven years old you has to be enrolled...

JF: I see.

MA: To a school. The school was six days a week. And they taught religion in school.

JF: Now what did you do during those classes?

MA: When they taught religion the Jews were, could go home.

JF: I see.

MA: Just go home. In later years when I was out from school, there was a Jewish teacher who taught Jewish religion for the Jewish student. Later, I never enjoyed that.

JF: That wasn't present when you were a child?

MA: No, that wasn't present. You see, and the reason what it wasn't present because there was not trained Jewish teachers. Because there was no Jewish seminars. And one way a guy became a *melamed*, you know what a *melamed* is?

JF: A teacher.

MA: A teacher. And a *melamed*, they were mostly illiterate people. Very seldom there was a good *melamed*, very seldom. Because the reason somebody became a *melamed*, was because, if he couldn't make any other living, if he couldn't be even a beggar [laughs], he became a *melamed*.

JF: So you went, then to a Hebrew school also for your Jewish...

MA: To a *cheder*.

JF: To *cheder*.

MA: I start, three years in *cheder*.

JF: And you continued that?

MA: Oh I continued that till I went to the *yeshiva*.

JF: And when you were in the public school, you were describing before your *payes* and the boys, the non-Jewish boys, pulling your *payes*. Was there difficulty in the classroom for the Jewish kids?

MA: It was more difficult, of course it was a little difficult because when I started school I didn't know a word Polish.

JF: You only spoke Yiddish.

MA: Yiddish. You see, first of all, I couldn't understand what the teacher talks to me. And...

JF: Your parents only spoke Yiddish in the home.

MA: Yes. Yiddish in the home.

JF: Now when people would come into the store who were not Jewish, would they speak Polish to them?

MA: Oh, Polish, yeah. Oh yeah.

JF: But you had not learned Polish.

MA: No, I was a little child. I...

JF: And they didn't teach you Polish.

MA: They didn't teach you Polish and they didn't talk Polish. And again, you see, but we make progress. My sister got married, she taught the children Polish right away. She taught them both, Yiddish and Polish.

JF: So your not knowing Polish when you started school was difficult.

MA: I didn't know a word Polish, no.

JF: It made it hard for you with the Polish kids?

MA: It made it very hard, yeah. You see, it was, the barrier was there. Maybe if I would have known Polish, I would have been able to communicate with them.

JF: What about with the teachers? What kind of attitude did the teachers have towards you?

MA: The teachers? They were very nice. I would say that some of them were really nice and they're people like other people. I don't think they discriminate. They didn't like it the way we dressed or, I guess they would have enjoyed it if they can talk to me right away Polish. But it didn't take long. I learned. You see, if I would, now, in the area where Jewish boys lived with Gentiles, they knew Polish because they learned. Kids from kids. Kids doesn't know from any discrimination. It's the parents. You know, now, I must tell you something.

JF: Yeah.

MA: I told you I lived on the street with the church. When they did go to the church I could play on the street. But when they did go home from church, we had to lock the door.

JF: What would happen?

MA: Sounds like, I don't know, sounds like was something in the sermon what the priest gave them, that the Jew is a Christ-killer and you have to beat him up.

JF: So you were in danger, then, right after a church service.

MA: We locked ourselves and put on the shutters closed, when the church was letting out.

JF: Did you ever experience being beaten up by the Polish children?

MA: Yeah. Oh yeah.

JF: A lot? Or a couple of times?

MA: About, listen, enough of it that I had, that some dreams still follow me now, that I get beaten up. You know, the worst dream is, and I had it so many times that I just cannot run. I mean, here they let out from the church and I...

JF: And you're caught.

MA: And caught. The power is not in me to run. You know, the worst thing was on Easter. They made, dressed a guy like a dummy, a Jew with a Jew's head with a beard. And they dropped him and everybody beat him and killed him and that was going on in the town square and they hung him up on a pole.

JF: This was on Easter Sunday?

MA: Yeah. Every Easter Sunday. And you know, one...

JF: That's enough to give a child nightmares.

MA: One...year, when my wife died, so I had a nephew, when my first wife died, she died in 1959, and the children were small. So for Passover I had a nephew in Brooklyn. He lives now in Israel. So he did want to stay Passover with him. No, that wasn't Passover. That was *Succos*. I thought it was Passover but it was *Succos*. On *Succos*, I came for Passover and later for *Succos*. On *Succos* I was there in Borough Park, and listen to it, on the second floor. And my window was right near, it was a corner there. It was on a telephone pole or on an electric pole. And I woke up in the morning and I see a dummy hangs. I start screaming, and the whole picture got back to me from my hometown. And later slowly I realize, I calmed down and I realize what that is. That was the first year, or

the first couple years when the Dodgers moved out from Brooklyn. And the Brooklyn people were trying to adopt the Yankees as their team, you know? But they lost the World Series! [laughs] So they made a dummy, and that's it. I saw a Yankee. [laughing]

JF: Oh! But it brought back a lot of memories.

MA: It brought back memories. You know, it's a funny thing, yeah, a good thing, you forget it. Bad things you try to forget.

JF: But they come back.

MA: You cannot. Like a guy, I had a friend and he was a customer in the store, a gentleman. And he says, "I know what we Germans did," he says. "I'm not proud of it. But you should forgive and forget." So I told to him, "O.K., you forgive them but how can you forget?"

JF: This is a customer of yours in your own grocery store?

MA: Yeah, here, here.

JF: Here in the United States.

MA: In Philadelphia. Yeah, he's a very nice fellow. He's a German. He was born here.

JF: You said that you went to the public school and then you went to *yeshiva*.

MA: Yeah.

JF: How old were you when you started the *yeshiva*?

MA: 14. Well, the *cheder* I started, you see, 14 I was when I left home to a *yeshiva*. You see, in our town wasn't a *yeshiva*.

JF: So you left home at 14.

MA: At 14, yeah.

JF: And where was the *yeshiva* that you went to?

MA: First I went to a small town. It was a rabbi there, Kreshew. Kreshew.

JF: The rabbi's name was Kreshew?

MA: No, the rabbi's name was, they named, the rabbi they named after that city. The rabbi from Kreshew.

JF: Ah. I see.

MA: They didn't know a name of. Very hardly anybody knew a name of a rabbi. You see, like the names like they say the Kotsker rabbi, the Belzer rabbi.

JF: Right, right.

MA: Yeah, you know, very few rabbi, only the Baal Shem they call by the name. That's about all, because, and he was in different cities.

JF: Kreshew was spelled how? Do you know? [tape off then on]

MA: Kreshew.

JF: K-R-E-S-H-E-W.

MA: That's right, Kreshew. And that was in the...state of Lublin, Lublin. Lublin you know how to spell.

JF: And how did you go there? Did you, were you staying with family?

MA: No.

JF: Or did you stay in the school?

MA: No, I was staying, I was sleeping by the rabbi. And they sent me, this was not far from home. And they sent me food from home and the maid, the rabbi's maid, cooked it for me. And I was sleeping in the *bes hamidrash*, in the synagogue I was sleeping.

Tape one, side two:

JF: This is tape one, side two of an interview with Mr. Myer Adler, on November 10th, 1982. Was life any different in the *yeshiva* than it had been in your hometown?

MA: Was in a way it was different, because my father wasn't alive any more at that time. And there was no, and mother had to work for a living, and everybody had to pitch in.

JF: Were you helped at all during that time of your father's illness and death by the Jewish community, by the...

MA: No, no, we didn't. We weren't in such a bad shape to need it help, no.

JF: You were in that bad shape?

MA: No, I wasn't in a bad shape, because, a matter of fact, we were considered in a very good shape because my mother's brother was here in America. And if you sent \$5.00 a month, you was already a rich man.

JF: I see. Were you involved, or was the family involved, in the *kehillah* at all?

MA: Everybody was automatically involved, oh yeah. Oh yeah. It is a, that's how we survived all those years. You see, over there, the *kehillah* was different than here, a congregation. A city, it doesn't matter how big that city was, or how many synagogues there were. They all were ruled by one body. It was like a city hall. And it was, one rabbi for the whole city could be, it was a city like Krakow was about, I don't know, 50, 60 synagogues there. But there it was only one rabbi. And there was, besides the rabbi was ten more helpers. That means a *bezin*, what they call it a *bes din*. And in every city it was very organized and every city had...all kinds of organizations. But the organizations were not only to, you know, have meetings. Because this organization didn't have any meetings. They just did work. We did get help, I remember. It was a *chevra lena*.

JF: What is that?

MA: What is that? So I'm going to explain it what's that mean, *lena*. The word *lena* means, in Hebrew, to sleep.

JF: O.K.

MA: Because if somebody was sick in a family, the people from the family usually were exhausted. They were, so somebody came in the nighttime to take care just to watch over the sick person.

JF: I see.

MA: And to, so the family can take a rest. My father was a member of this *chevra lena*. He always used to go somewhere else, if somebody was sick.

JF: So then...

MA: But even, you didn't have to be a member. They went in the whole city, you see.

JF: But when your father was sick, a member of the *chevra*...

MA: So they took good care of him because he was...

JF: Would come.

MA: Yeah, because it was fellow members, you know what I mean? He always, also was a member in the *chevra kiddushah*. You know what a *chevra kiddushah* is? He was always a member and mother was a member. You see, mother was, women, they were separate because they took care of the, you know, the female deaths. They dressed and washed and dressed them. And they did the work of what an undertaker usually do. But they didn't get paid. They did it because it was, I guess the responsibility what one Jew has to the other one.

JF: So, was there any difference that you noticed, between the two communities?

MA: It was a big difference. First of all my life was a little different. I didn't have to do any... I was devoted nothing but to study. I... got away from the daily routine.

JF: Was the goal for you to become a rabbi at that point?

MA: Not my goal, but mother's goal. [both laugh] If my goal would have been, I guess I would have been, became a rabbi, I guess. But...

JF: You would have been what?

MA: If... that would have been my goal, I would have been a rabbi, I guess. But I never wanted to be a rabbi.

JF: I see. I see.

MA: And to study in the *yeshiva* at home is not everybody wanted to be a rabbi. Just everybody studied. But very few only...

JF: Actually went...

MA: Became rabbis.

JF: Became a rabbi.

MA: And my mother's dream was, I guess every mother's dream is [chuckles].

JF: What did you want to do?

MA: I... didn't know. I liked art work. I always wanted, but I was thinking that's a impossible dream. [chuckles] I always did something, made something, painted something.

JF: That's quite a contrast to a traditional upbringing.

MA: Right away was [tape off then on].

JF: Mr. Adler, your interest in art, dating from the time of your childhood, apparently has developed into one of your current talents which has been written up in the *Jewish Exponent* and is now on display at the Jewish Museum in Philadelphia.

MA: Yes.

JF: Can you tell me just a little bit about it? Let's take a diversion for just a second.

MA: Well, I always liked to do something. We, I always was good in art at school. I always got an A in art. And I liked to work with wood even, because that was the main what I had a chance to do. We, you know, everything came packed in...

JF: Crates?

MA: At home, in the crates. And the wood was tempting. You can do something with this. So, I always builded something and that's how I started...a *grager* [noisemaker used on Jewish holiday of Purim.] My brother, my older brother, he is now, he is a painter. And...

JF: He's an artist.

MA: He's an artist. He's considered a good artist. I can show you all the pictures here what I have. That's his pictures. See, he painted them.

JF: So you were making *gragers* for Purim.

MA: Well, I wasn't a professional *grager* maker. Just I make myself a *grager* every year Purim.

JF: From the time you were a young person?

MA: A small boy, yeah. At home, if you did want a toy you had to build it. But we even, I even made myself a football. We, who could afford it to buy a football?

JF: What did you make a football out of?

MA: You know, we went to the slaughterhouse, and there was a certain things in the animal, it's like a bag, like a, like the inner tube of the football, you know, but that's not from rubber. It didn't last long but...the guys in the slaughterhouse, they knew, they saved this for us. And we filled this up with air and we made a cover, from old shoes. We collected old shoes pieces and made a cover. And this football, it didn't last too long, the inner tube, but, and so, they slaughtered every day there!

JF: This was, was the inner, the, an organ from inside the animal?

MA: Animal, from the animal something. We used to call it in Polish a *pecherz*. [bladder] I don't know how it would be in... English.

JF: But the *gragers* that you're making now are now famous in the city and now on display at the Jewish Museum.

MA: The Jewish Museum. And they bought from me from New York Museum they bought four *gragers* this week.

JF: So four of yours are also in New York.

MA: Yeah, three of them I think wound up. The fourth one is the, the girl who bought this, I think she will keep one.

JF: Oh. Wonderful. But at the time, you were supposed to be a rabbi. You were supposed to be in *yeshiva*, not making *gragers*. Was this looked down upon, for you to have an interest in art when you were in the *yeshiva*?

MA: Well...

JF: Was it a conflict?

MA: No, it wasn't a conflict. I always liked. I was sitting down on the balcony and draw the scenery. It's a matter of fact, when the *yeshiva* needed some artwork, they always called me. They knew about it. They called me to make signs. They usually they make signs for collecting money, you know, on the street. So they put up signs. So they called me. I always painted the signs. I'll never forget there once was, you know, our *yeshiva*, the *yeshivas* in Poland used to be owned by the rabbis. They used to call them the Gedereben *yeshiva*, the Bubaveis *yeshiva*, [phonetic] you know. I was in a *yeshiva* what used to be run by the *Hasidim* from the Radomsker rabbi. And I remember the Radomsker rabbi came once to Krakow and he wasn't a very well man. He was always a little on the sick side. He was a diabetes. And they didn't let in any people, only the crews, the big shots, you know. They made him, and the dinner. So they hollered out, "Myer Adler!" I was thinking. So they took me in. The crowd was outside by thousands of people. So they paged me and they took me in and they gave me paper to make a sign, "*Baruch habah.*" They wanted to paint a sign.

JF: What does that say?

MA: *Baruch habah. Baruch habah.* That means welcome. Welcome Rabbi.

JF: Oh, Welcome Rabbi. Uh huh.

MA: And of course I made the sign and I was get to stay there, which that was...

JF: Oh, I see.

MA: I was thinking that was the biggest reward, the biggest paid I ever got!
[chuckles]

JF: So you were in a *Hasidic yeshiva*.

MA: Oh yeah, a *Hasidic yeshiva*.

JF: And the, it sounds from what you're describing of your upbringing that your upbringing was *Hasidic*.

MA: Well, my father, he was religious, but not *Hasidic*.

JF: He was not *Hasidic*.

MA: You see, there is, religious and *Hasidic* is two different things. He wasn't fanatic. Let's put it that way. He was just a religious person. But he was also an educated man. You know what I mean?

JF: Yes.

MA: The *Hasidim* usually didn't...

JF: He had a secular education as well.

MA: A secular education, yeah. He went...you see, his mother educated all the children.

JF: Why then, given that, and also the fact that you had gone to a public school, did you choose a *Hasidic yeshiva*? Or was it because of the quality of the education there? Or...

MA: It was because, that's right. No, there is something else to it. I'm glad you mention it. You see, after the father died, my sister got married. And the husband came

into the family, because this was a, the man in the family, you know what I mean? And we lived together. He was strictly religious. And he changed the life of our family.

JF: He was a *Hasid*?

MA: He was the *Hasid*, you know what I mean? And that's how...

JF: That's where the influence came from.

MA: The influence came.

JF: It was after your father's death.

MA: After my father's death.

JF: I see.

MA: A matter of fact, I mentioned I have three more brothers. The one brother didn't come home, went from Czechoslovakia to Germany. And from Germany he wound up in 1922 or '23 he came to Philadelphia. And he went to college here. He became an accountant, which he was a big help to our family, to my mother. Without him, I don't know, we would have been forced to... receive from the ...*tsedukah*, you know what that's mean?

JF: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm.

MA: The Jewish welfare.

JF: Yes.

MA: And accounting on him we were a respectful family. We even gave *tsedukah*, you know what I mean?

JF: Right.

MA: And you know something? I find out later, when I came here in this country? That when he sent out money, he borrowed some money. He paid interest. He paid interest for the money and he sent us.

JF: So...

MA: And the other brother left to Germany. The other brother later left to Germany. And now I was, and he is not here, that brother what left Germany. He is not here. A matter of fact, he came here and he had to run away from Germany when Hitler came to power. And he went to Brazil, and from Brazil the brother who was here brought him over. And later both brothers brought me over here. And later I had another brother, even till 1932 he went to Israel. He was one of the pioneers, and he started off a *kibbutz* in Israel. And every time when I go to Israel I stay in the *kibbutz*. I wait all day. They take good care of me. They all remember my brother, you know. He was one of the founders of the *kibbutz*. And I was the one only left at home. My mother says, "I have one *kaddish* with me." [laughs]

JF: So, when you, were at the *yeshiva*, how long were you able to study there?

MA: What do you mean?

JF: How many years were you able to study?

MA: In the *yeshiva*?

JF: Yeah.

MA: Oh, years. I was there till I was, oh, till I was about 21.

JF: So you were there seven years.

MA: I studied in a *yeshiva* on and off, in different *yeshivas*, yeah.

JF: I see.

MA: Till I was 21. And when I was 21, you know, that's, you see, like I told you, when you're 18, you had to register for the draft. And you, when you're 21 you had to report to the draft. [laughs]

JF: So what happened?

MA: You see, when you're 18, you just register. That's all.

JF: And was it at this point that you got your birth certificate?

MA: Oh I got my cer-...

JF: Did you have the witnesses...

MA: Yeah, oh yeah. I got my birth certificate.

JF: That was when you were 18.

MA: When I was 18. And when I was 21, they call you to the draft and they qualify you. If you qualify it, you are, you, they take you to the army. And if they don't qualify you, they, you get a, they were so, "A", "B", "C", and you know, qualification. "A" was, that's mean you are in the army. "B", you are in the reserve.

JF: And where, how did you qualify?

MA: I qualified "C".

JF: Which is?

MA: "C", that's mean only if a war breaks out. And the reason what I qualified "C" because all the *Hasidim*, they...gave "C", because they didn't want them in the army either.

JF: Why?

MA: I don't know. They claimed that the rabbis had an agreement with them something. [laughs] I don't know. Maybe it is, maybe not. But it was not such a big deal to be in the Polish Army because you know, you, it was no future. It isn't, it wasn't the army like it is here—you can learn something, you...became out a *mensch* from the army, you know, the army makes men they say here. But over there you just was discriminated and you were, and there were very little Jews in the army. And people spent fortunes to get out.

JF: But the *Hasidim* were excused?

MA: Mostly excused, yeah. Yeah, mostly excused.

JF: Now during the time that you were in your *yeshiva* studies, Hitler came to power and...

MA: No. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

JF: No?

MA: Hitler came to power later. Hitler came to power in 1939.

JF: Well he...

MA: Oh, oh, oh. I mean...the war. Yeah, Hitler came to power. That's right.

JF: Right.

MA: Yeah.

JF: Now, were you receiving much news about what was going on in Germany when that happened?

MA: We didn't read papers at all, no.

JF: You were in your own studies.

MA: We were in our own world, that's all. We didn't read any papers. A matter of fact, you wasn't allowed to read papers.

JF: This was forbidden by the *yeshiva*?

MA: By the *yeshiva*, yeah. No papers reading. You see, and that's how I got out from the *yeshiva*, because I started reading the paper.

JF: When you were 21.

MA: When I was 21. Yeah, I started reading paper, and you know, when you find out, and when you read, you...not only do you read the [unclear] news, but articles, you know? And it was a very...

JF: What made you start? Excuse me. What made you start reading the newspapers?

MA: I don't know. I just started. I just, you became aware that there is a world going on there, you know what I mean, that...this is not, the whole world, if the world would depend on us, that there would be no world. [laughs]

JF: But you were in another one.

MA: I found out there is another world there...what keeps the world going.

JF: Yeah.

MA: And I start reading the paper, you know? According to the studies is the world is flat. And if somebody would told me that the world is round, I would argue with him because, it says clearly in the *Gemora* that the world has four corners, and in every corner stays an angel, you know, and the names of the angels: Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, and Uriel. That's the four angels what they hold the world on their shoulders. And if I will not do, if I will not be so religious or good, if I will not stop studying, and one of the angels can slip his shoulder, you know what I mean, and the whole world can collapse. And when I start reading in articles, I remember I read once an article about the galaxy, how many galaxies there are, and then how, in order to maintain the gravity it has to speed so many thousand miles per hour and... It was a new world for me. I was trying to find out what [laughs]. I was trying to find out more and I...remember I asked a guy to, you know, he was, he was, his beard, he trimmed his beard a little, you know? So I was thinking he probably is a little modern and that he, to recommend me a good book to read. So he slapped me in the face! [laughs] He slapped me in the face and I enrolled in the...library. There was private libraries there was a lot of. Libraries was a business. It wasn't free libraries like here.

JF: You're talking about a library in the community.

MA: In... well, some communities had libraries, yeah. Oh yeah. Our town had a library in our community, and...

JF: Was this a Jewish library or this was a...

MA: A Jew-, all kinds of books. Jewish and... Polish.

JF: But private, for the J-, owned by the Jewish community?

MA: No, a private people-owned library.

JF: Private people.

MA: Private people. There were community libraries too, oh yeah. But the libraries was a business. It was a lot of private libraries. And when the, and he was a very nice man, he recommended me books, and later I got myself a job.

JF: So were you enrolled in this library while you were still in the *yeshiva*? Or had you left the *yeshiva*?

MA: No, I left the *yeshiva*.

JF: Now, you said before that they found out that you were reading newspapers, or...

MA: If they would find out, they didn't...first of all, I quit the *yeshiva*.

JF: You quit the *yeshiva*.

MA: Yeah, I quit the *yeshiva*, yeah.

JF: O.K., when you started being interested in the newspapers and other reading.

MA: Yeah, yeah.

JF: This must have been quite a crisis for...

MA: Mother, mother, I was thinking she will never forgive me. To her was it a shock.

JF: Did you go home to explain it to her?

MA: Yeah, oh yeah. I told her and I explained it to her and I told her I will be religious, but you know, it is, you couldn't talk much with mother. I remember mother once caught me reading a paper. I read a paper and mother didn't know it. And she caught me once reading and not a just a paper, but a paper it was published by...a religious organization. You know what her saying was?

JF: Hmm?

MA: [Yiddish] *Kenst du itst geynen shmadrn.*

JF: Can you translate that for me?

MA: Now you can convert to a Catholic.

JF: And this was a Jewish newspaper.

MA: Yeah. Mother, she wasn't so, you see, I don't remember so much because when my brother-in-law came to us, I was still small. But my brothers and my sisters told me that mother never was so...fanatic religious. It's only since father died and the brother-in-law came.

JF: So when your father took you to *cheder* when you were three, that was not a *Hasidic* group? Not at that time?

MA: No, in this, no, that's, a *cheder* was a *cheder*. That's the...

JF: There was no difference.

MA: No, it was no difference, no, no.

JF: Mmm hmm. But the change then occurred when he died, for the family.

MA: Yeah, when the brother-in-law came in.

JF: Now when you left the *yeshiva*, you were 21, which would have made it about 1935?

MA: Something like it, about 193-, it was 1914, 1935, yeah.

JF: And what were you hearing at that point? You were reading the newspapers then, and you were in the world.

MA: Well, well the first thing what I did is to get a secular education.

JF: And how did you do that?

MA: I had it a private, I went to a private school. And I went to a private school and I...

JF: Was this an adult school of some kind?

MA: Hmm?

JF: Was this an adult school?

MA: Yes. Oh yeah. A private school, and I got private, I, and I finished that way business college I finished, privately.

JF: Was this a Polish school or was this a Jewish...

MA: Run by a Jew, no, run by a Jew. And it was...you had to, you see, they...taught you, they didn't, and you have to, they went to the Board of Education and they gave you an exam. And which I passed the exam very good. And...

JF: So you were there for how many years, in school?

MA: Oh I took in two summers. You see, in summer time, my job...didn't call for the, in summer time was very slow, was no season.

JF: I see.

MA: And they all left, you know. And only one took care of that store. A matter of fact this was about three, four months I had. In these three, four months I put in...twelve or thirteen hours' schooling. It's like a crash course. That's was for two years. And I finished...you know, the seventh grade, and later I went to...

JF: You finished seventh grade?

MA: Seventh grade privately, yeah, in the first year, and I started business college. And when I finished business college, I got a job as a bookkeeper.

JF: And what year was this?

MA: That would be in '38, I think.

JF: 1938.

MA: In 1938, I think. Yeah, that's was a year before the war, because later I was hired to another company and I never made it because the war broke out. And... in the place where I worked, they did want me to run the books.

JF: Sure.

MA: And I started, I look on the books. I don't know nothing about it. [laughs] I didn't know a thing what's going on there, you know what I mean? So I was so disgusted, so, I mean, I spent so much time, you know? I spent 50% of my wages I spent for schooling, to pay the tuition. And... here I don't know, I am graduated. I have a good report card, and I don't know nothing. So I went to the professor, to the director from the school. And there was no telephones that time. You know, you couldn't. So, when you go there, you always, in order to make sure he is home you go during dinnertime. [laughs] So, that's what I figured out. If I go during dinner, I'm sure he will be home, because it was a long way to go to. And I came there and he was eating dinner. And then I came in, and he saw right away. He says, "You are troubled. What's wrong?" So, I told him. And he says, "Sit down." And he told his wife to give me a cup of tea. "Sit down," he says slowly. So I told him my, "I don't know from nothing. And you always told me I am so good." So, he picked up a fork and a knife, he picked up, you know? He says to me, "You see, this is a fork and this is a knife. We are not here to take care of the fork and knife. The fork and knife were invented for our convenience. We're not for the convenience of the fork and knife. But they are for our convenience." I say, "What does that to do with me?" He says, so he says, "You know the whole system of bookkeeping," he says. "Never mind what the guy did there with it. You adjust it to your own convenience. You're not to, for the convenience to the fork," he says. "You're not for the convenience for the books what they, somebody else wants it. You set up a system the way you want it." And when he told me that, so you know, a couple of months later he came to find out. [laughs] I set up the system and, he says, "You know...how the system works," he says. "And if you go deeply, if you go from the beginning," he says, "you will follow his too because you know the," he says, "there is one way how the bookkeeping goes." You see, but in Poland it was actually two ways, what they used to call there now double entry and the Americanka entry. The Americanka entry is what we do now. In Poland it used to be, some people used to have there now double entry. And I learned both ways.

JF: I see. Now you, when you left the *yeshiva* and you went through this, the schooling and your business college, and now you were working, did you shave your beard at that point, and...

MA: You know something, the beard I never let grow.

JF: You never let the beard grow. You kept, you had the *payes* [earlocks].

MA: The *payes*. But the beard, I never let grow.

JF: So what happened when you left? Did you...

MA: Cut off the *payes*.

JF: You cut your *payes*.

MA: Oh, sure.

JF: Yeah.

MA: Sure. I...cut them systematically, every week a little bit. [laughs]

JF: You mean, a little shorter each week?

MA: A little shorter every week. I didn't do it all, oh no. I wouldn't...have the guts to do it.

JF: You eased into it.

MA: I wouldn't have the guts. [laughed] Every week a little bit, trimmed it off.

JF: You eased yourself into the...world.

MA: The world, that's right.

JF: Now during this time a great deal was happening in the rest of Europe. Were you aware of what was going on during these years?

MA: Not in the *yeshiva*, but later I was a...

JF: After the *yeshiva*.

MA: Oh, later I was aware. I took advantage, you see, I lived in Krakow. Krakow was a big cultured city.

JF: This was where you were working now, in Krakow?

MA: Yeah, yeah. And I took advantage every lecture what I could, you know, attend by that.