

*Tape two, side one:*

JF: This is tape two, side one, of an interview with Mr. Myer Adler on November 10, 1982, with Josey Fisher. We were talking, Mr. Adler, about your finding out about what was happening in the rest of Europe, in the late '30s, and whether or not you felt that this was going to influence Poland.

MA: Well, the Polish government assured us that they're strong and that they're not afraid.

JF: Were you afraid?

MA: We were afraid.

JF: Did you think at any time of the possibility of leaving Poland?

MA: How could you? We, I was thinking many times, and everybody, who could leave, left. Palestine didn't let you in. My brother had a chance. He left for Palestine and took quite a couple years. He was on *hachsharah*. You know what a *hachsharah* is?

JF: Describe it to me.

MA: If a young man or girl did want to leave for Palestine through an organization, they had to go into a camp, and to get used to the, to prepare them to the life in Palestine. And at the same time they taught them how to fight too, because there always was, the Jews were always, you know, attacked by the Arabs. And he was for two years in a *hachsharah* on and off. And after, if you qualify, if you, see, there were a certain, a limited, a kind of certificate what they used to call. The English government gave out so many thousands, not much was it. I don't remember how many thousand a year. And so they, the people who qualified, they got the certificate and they could emigrate. And my brother was one of them. And he left in 19-, just in time when Hitler came to power. My other brother left for Germany in 1927, before Hitler came to power. When Hitler came to power, he sent them back to Poland.

JF: He sent him back to Poland.

MA: And, that's right. And when he came to Poland, there was a, right on the border, a town. It's called Zbonszyn. He dumped a lot of Polish Jews there. Little did he know...that he did him a big favor, Hitler did. And when he came to Zbonszyn, my brother, and he didn't want to go back to Poland. He hated Poland more than Germany. So he smuggled his way back to Germany, and from Germany to Belgium and France and he, well, he couldn't stay there because he came illegally. And finally in 1938—or in '37 was it? I don't remember which year; it doesn't, or earlier, no, in '36 I think was it—the relief organization sent him to Brazil. He found out that Brazil needed farmers, so he says, "I'm a farmer." [laughs] He went to Brazil and he was in Brazil till my other brother who is here in this country, Felix, he brought him over in 1941, he brought him over here. And when he came here, he joined the army right away.

JF: There was no chance for you to get out, then?

MA: No, I, mother, maybe I would have a chance, but I didn't try because I didn't want to do it to mother. Like I said, mother said she wants one *kaddish* [A son to recite memorial prayers following her death.] with her, so.

JF: So you stayed...

MA: So I stayed.

JF: To be with your mother.

MA: And I lived in Krakow and my mother still lived in Rudnik.

JF: Now what happened in 1939? You were living in Krakow at that time?

MA: I was living in Krakow at that time and that was the September the 1st, this was on a Friday.

JF: Did you have any feeling, or knowledge before that time that the invasion would occur?

MA: No. No, I knew it. But it happened they prepared. They mobilized the Polish Army because Poland made a big mistake that time. The biggest mistake they made, when Hitler, before Hitler occupied Czechoslovakia, he talked in Poland to attack the Sudeten part of Czechoslovakia.<sup>1</sup> And Poland took it. And after Poland took Sudeten, Hitler says he wants all of Poland. And in September 1st, 1939, he marched in. And Krakow wasn't far from the border.

JF: What happened in Krakow with you?

MA: First of all they bombed Krakow right in the first day.

JF: Where were you when the bombing started?

MA: In Krakow. There were shelters. We run to the shelters and that was on a Friday. And on Tuesday I left Krakow. I had a sister there, a sister and two children and her husband.

JF: In Krakow?

MA: In Krakow. So I asked...my sister and my brother-in-law, "What should I do?" Everybody runned. They didn't know where they run and they didn't, but everybody runned, and asking what they do. So my brother-in-law told me, he says, "How can anybody advise you what to do? You have to use your own with this." So I said to him, "What would you do if you would be in my situation?" And he says, "If I would be single, with no wife or children attached to me, and I have a mother somewhere, I would go to unite with my mother." And that's what I did. And I walked all the way. And, which on the way the Polacks, even the war was going on, they were robbing us blind, beating us. We had to be afraid of them.

JF: The Poles?

MA: The Poles, yeah.

JF: Something...was set off in the Polish population, then, by the invasion?  
Once the...

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<sup>1</sup>Poland invaded Teschen not Sudeten.

MA: What do you mean? The...

JF: The Poles became...

MA: Propaganda?

JF: The Polish became...

MA: Oh, of course.

JF: More antisemitic at that point?

MA: Oh, they were, a couple [unclear] they became antisemitic. There was an organization, what they call them, *Endeks*. [National Democrats] And they were awful, they were open antisemitic. They didn't hide it. They just beat up Jews wherever they could. And they were trying to push us and a lot of priests belonged to this organization and a lot of, especially the...student body from the universities, which there weren't much Jews anyhow there. They were the rulers of this organization. And they were very antisemitic. And we had...pardon me, and we had a lot of trouble on the way from them, but I finally, I left, Tuesday I left Krakow and Saturday afternoon I arrived to my hometown. And when I came in my hometown, I, the whole town, there was no Polish authority more in the town. Everybody did what they want. The Polacks went...robbing everybody. If somebody left, you know, people run away, so they busted open their houses and robbed them out.

JF: What do you mean, there was no Polish authority? Do you mean the Germans were in control, or the Polish authorities had left?

MA: The Germans didn't come in yet, and the Polish authority already run away. The Polish government start running right away. As soon as the war started, they start running. So there was no Polish, no nothing. And when I came...home, I remember it was a guy by the name of Payosz. [phonetic] He was a crazy guy. Everybody knew. You know, he was a mentally disturbed guy. But he wasn't dangerous. He didn't hit nobody. A peaceful guy. He slept in the *shul*. He slept always there. But he was an idiot. So when he saw me, he says, "Heh, heh, heh, they called *me* 'idiot,'" he says. "Look now here. Everybody runs away, and *he* [to Myer] comes." [laughing]

JF: Oh!

MA: So, anyhow, I ask him if...my mother is still, and he says, "Oy," he doesn't know. He says, "Everybody run away," he says. "There are houses." And I saw all the stores open, you know. They were already being robbed, everything taken out, the Polacks. And when I came to our house, the, it was locked all over. So I say, "It isn't robbed out. Must be somebody there." So, I knock on the door. Yeah, when I came, I had, I came with a boyfriend what he was from the same town. And we lived in Krakow both. We were both in Krakow and we were both from the same town. So, we walked all the way home. Now when we came, I lived in one side of the town and he lived in the other side. So we decided we will go—I go home and he go home. But we didn't know either one family who survived, who is left. So we...agreed so. If his parents, if he, if one of the parents is left, we both stay with his parents. And if not, we will find out later what to do. But

meantime, I am going home, and if my parents are home, I stay home. If my parents are not home, I wait near my home. If my mother is not home, I wait near my home. And he will come to me either way, even if his parents are there or not, he will come to my house. So I knock on the door and nobody answers. Nobody answers. I had a sack, you know, a sack with a string, this. So I took it off and put this on the steps from my house. And I was thinking, "Oh, I will wait for my boyfriend till he comes." In the meantime I hear somebody is, walks in the house. Well so as I was sitting there I got so, I was thinking, who? Maybe somebody took it over. And I see they are slowly open, trying to open the door. And I see that's my mother. She said later because usually when the *goyim* captain, they, here was a gentle, maybe some other friend needed something, somebody. So she came to open up. And I find out mother was home still. And she said, "Everybody run away. What to do?" I say, "No, well, the worst thing if you leave home, that's the worst thing what can happen to a place." And I saw, I was walking from Krakow and I saw what happened. I say not to go. And we stayed and later my boyfriend came and his parents were home too. And we were staying and that was Saturday afternoon.

And Tuesday the German Army came in. And they came in like all hell got loose. They first thing, as soon as they came in, they didn't open the door. They knocked the doors open. And, "All the men out." Just the men. They took all the men out in the market square. And they didn't make any distinguish Jews or not Jews. Man is man. And with all the gentiles, everything. And later—it took a couple hours till they round up the whole town—and after they rounded up, they say, "Who is not a Jew shall leave." So, all the gentiles start going in the side. So later they said to the gentiles, "Anything you want from the Jews, take." So they took off from the jackets from us, if you wore a good jacket. Even the shirt they left you. And the Polacks, they listened. They took away everything. They left you without nothing. And in the meantime the whole town is on fire.

JF: They set the entire town on fire.

MA: On fire, most of the town. Not the entire. Most of the town they set on fire. And they shot a couple of people, just if they didn't like them, they took them out. Yeah, they said to give away all the watches that is. So a guy, later a Polack took from him the pants. He likes the pants so he finds a watch there. So they shot him because he didn't give the watch. But anyhow, it was like around 12:00 or 1:00 at night was it they came with a tank and they said to line up the whole thing and they will shoot us up. They will, the tank will, the tank will kill us.

JF: The tank will kill you.

MA: Yeah, yeah. And, you know something? It didn't matter to me. It didn't matter I lived, if they killed me or not. I don't know, something, I didn't care.

JF: What do you think, what were you thinking? What were you feeling then?

MA: I don't remember nothing. I...got blanked out.

JF: Why do you think now, as you look back, that you didn't care? Do you have any ideas?

MA: Yeah, because the chances of survival were very little anyhow. If you don't kill me now, I can some later, I be suffer a little more. That's all. You see, the whole, I didn't know if my family is still alive. You know what I mean? So, who needs to be alive? And I don't know, somehow in the last minute a guy comes, an officer. It was like, to them, was it like a show, you know? In the meantime they took pictures, you know, how they, oh, they, how they beat there, you know. If they wore a, if somebody wore a beard, they cut him off only on one half. They didn't cut off the whole beard. And they took pictures. It was like a, it was a miserable thing to watch, the beard, to be, even...I couldn't understand how they can watch it, you know. And me, they cut off the hair here a little bit, a machine they cut. I had very nice hair, wavy hair.

JF: And they cut the middle of your hair?

MA: In the middle a hair cut, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, with a...

JF: All the way back?

MA: All the way back, yeah. Like and, and they took pictures how they're doing it. And later, around, I don't know exactly what time it was, and a guy came and gave orders to...let us go. And they gave the orders that in five minutes, if they find somebody in the street, they will kill them. We have to run away. So I run. In our town, right across the street where I live, I see was full on fire. Our house was saved. I don't know how, how a couple of houses, three houses on our row, was saved. Anyhow, but I didn't know that. Because you see, the whole street is like in fire. So I run to the back street and to a neighbor there. And I went in and I came there. Nobody was there anyhow. And I sit down, because I was trying the first house to find shelter because after five minutes they will kill you. And I sit down right near the window and look out if there are Germans that don't run it. And another man comes in there. And I didn't recognize him who he is. But later, you see, we used to roll cigarettes. You know, we didn't roll. We had a machine to make cigarettes. You know, you put in the tobacco and you had a tube here, you know? And my brother-in-law used to always, with his teeth, pull out the tube so the tobacco would go in a little more. And he finds there tobacco, you know? Sees, and he makes himself a cigarette, and I see he makes it just like my brother-in-law. And I was thinking, nobody makes it the way that cigarette like only him. So I say to him, "Myer?" His name was Myer too. I say, "Myer?" He didn't recognize me and I didn't recognize him. His beard was half cut off.

JF: Oh!

MA: So, his beard cut off half, and half the hair here.

JF: Oh!

MA: I didn't, so he start fall on me and we start crying. And he says, I say, "What happened to the family?" He had six children. We stayed there and over the night.

JF: Do you know what happened to his children?

MA: Yeah, we stayed there over the night, we stayed there. And another couple of people came there. And in the morning they chased us out from there. The Germans took over the house. It was the woods across the city. We came there. It was the whole, all

the women and they went there. And we ran in the woods there. And when we were there we, that was Wednesday or Thursday was it? I don't remember. Anyhow, when we were there, a plane came by and it was a little wood, not much. It was a big field and a, a field [unclear] set in a strip of wood. That's where we were there. A plane passes by and all of a sudden drops spraying with, I don't know if it was bombs or a machine gun. But he missed us by about five, six yards.

JF: And you were with your brother-in-law at this time?

MA: My brother-in-law and my mother and his wife and six children. And they missed us by a couple of yards. Anyhow, and later we find out our house we went in back to our house. And I had to report every day to work.

JF: What kind of work?

MA: To repair the highways. That was the main work. And...

JF: You could live in your house?

MA: Yeah, we were living in the house. And that took two weeks with them.

JF: What kind of treatment did you receive?

MA: Bad.

JF: When you were working on the roads?

MA: Oh, awful...you know, they were...they didn't give us nothing. They didn't pay you, no, didn't give us nothing. Once a guy came and gave us dry...crackers, you know, it was a big cracker, a dried cracker. You couldn't bite in it. And he holds a gun and they watch, and in two minutes you have to finish, chew up the cracker. We were, everyone he gets a cracker. In two minutes, if not, we're all killed. And I tried, and a couple of guys broke their teeth on it. And he was laughing and later he just walked away. He didn't do nothing. He just walked away. You know what I mean? Things like this they did, yeah.

JF: They would torment you.

MA: Yeah, yeah.

JF: What happened with the shop? Was the, the little market that your mother had, was there anything left that was not confiscated from her store?

MA: No, it was nothing left.

JF: They took it.

MA: They took it. Of course they took away everything and we just...we were thankful we can stay there. And later that was, you know, they came around a couple days before *Rosh Hashanah*, a couple of days...before *Rosh Hashanah* was it. And on *Succos* they got, you see, like I said before, the town was, used to be on the border, of the Russian border in, before 1918. Now, when Hitler and Stalin made an agreement, that Stalin will take that part of Pole what used to be in Russia before the 1918. So, in the other side of the river, the Russians did supposed to arrive. You know what I mean? So the Germans chased us over to the other side.

JF: So they chased you from your town.

MA: To the...

JF: To the other side of the river...

MA: That's right.

JF: Where you would be under Russian occupation. Because you were what, about five miles, you said, from the...

MA: About five miles, yeah.

JF: From the Russian line. Why did they push you back over the Russian side?

MA: Because they did want to get rid of the Jews. Very simple. So that was the easiest way. Let the Russian have it.

JF: O.K. So this was after two weeks?

MA: After two weeks, yeah.

JF: After two weeks.

MA: And they...

JF: Where did you go?

MA: One minute. They gave us 24 hours. But the Polacks didn't give us any time. Soon as the order came out, they just chased us out, because everybody did want to get a hold on your property. So the Polacks chased us out right away. They want to take the furniture, that is. And we, in the same day we crossed the river and to a little town called Ulanow.

JF: How is that spelled?

MA: Ulanow. Ulanow. [tape off then on] -A-N-O-W.

JF: And what was the name of the river that you...

MA: San. San.

JF: O.K. And what happened when you reached this town? Were you...

MA: When I reached the town there was no authority there at all. The Polish government wasn't, and so we opened our, formed our own militia.

JF: How?

MA: To keep order, that's all, not to get slaughtered by the Polacks. You see, the militia was against the Polacks, not against the [laughs]...

JF: This was a Jewish militia.

MA: A Jewish militia, yeah.

JF: A Jewish militia. Did you have any arms?

MA: No. No, just with clubs, just...and we were wait-...

JF: Was there much, I'm sorry, for a minute, was there much of a Jewish population already in this town?

MA: In this town was, oh, it was from a couple towns they chased them out there.

JF: I see.

MA: From a couple, you see, we were close to the border. Some of them a little bit farther even they...

JF: They pushed.

MA: They pushed them out.

JF: So, what was the, what do you think the Jewish population of this town became, when everyone was pushed there?

MA: Well, every Jew was very helpful. A matter of fact, what they got, they shared with us. Because, a little town, and all of a sudden it finds four times population. You know what I mean? So, every Jew, every native there, you know what I mean, took in, a guy took us in and gave us room. You know what I mean? And so the, the Jews anyway, they were, it's a funny thing. To be a Jew is a big advantage. Because anywhere you came, there were Jews, and the Jews is always, *gemillah chesed*. You know what *gemillah chesed* means?

JF: Tell me.

MA: *Gemillah chesed*. That's mean to do it a favor a person, or *tsedukah*. That's the Jewish weapon, you know? I remember when...every time when a pogrom started, you know, before the Polish authority could come to stop it, there were already from the Joint, from New York with money, to distribute money for the people, you know what I mean? They, that's one thing what, that's one of the...advantages to being a Jew. You're not alone. And we got a big help from them. And later, it took a couple days, the Russians came in. Oh, we gave them a welcome! [laughs]

JF: What do you mean?

MA: We were so pleased to be with them, because we were afraid, you see, now, there is a law in town. We don't have to be afraid. You see, you were afraid of the Germans and of them both, and of the Polacks. And here, especially it was a Jewish Colonel. He was in charge of the, he couldn't speak Jewish, but...

JF: But he was a Jewish Colonel who was in charge of the Russian Army...

MA: Yeah.

JF: Who came in.

MA: Yeah, and...

JF: So what was their treatment of you like?

MA: But, their what?

JF: What was their treatment of you?

MA: What do you mean?

JF: The Russian Army.

MA: Oh, they were, you mean as an army? Well they, I didn't evaluate the quality of the army, but...

JF: No, the...

MA: But I saw a friend, you know. I saw a relief came in there.

JF: Were they treating you all right?

MA: Oh sure. Oh, yeah, it was terrific. They...distribute food and oh, it was no comparison. It was like...a *ganeden*. [Garden of Eden] It didn't last long. They make a mistake. That's mean, the...German soldiers what they told us that the Russians will come to the San, they make a mistake. Russia, you see, it was a [unclear] line, what they call a



[unclear] line. You see, Poland was divided three times. And that was, the line's supposed to be, you see, now on the third time when they divided Russia took till the San. But on the second time, they were much farther. So that's means the Russian Army will have to go back.

JF: In other words, the territory was not actually Russia's?

MA: No, no, will be German, they decided.

JF: Because they went by the second division.

MA: By the second division. That's right. So...

JF: How long were you there, then, before this was decided?

MA: A week or so.

JF: I see.

MA: That's how long, a couple days. I don't remember exactly. But anyhow, it was, oh no, it was only a couple days, because the first day of *Succos* they came in, we moved over, and that's was *Shemini Atzeres* night we find out and we, and, that's mean tomorrow they will run away. Tomorrow they start moving.

JF: The Russians would start moving back.

MA: Yeah. So, me, and my brother-in-law, and my brother-in-law's son, he was at that time about 15 years old. So we decided the young man, the men to, we start walking. I don't know how we figured out, he left the whole family. I don't know how. But that's the way it happened. And we start walking and we came about 300 kilometers. 300 kilometers, that's will be about 250 miles or something like it. We arrived, that was Tuesday, and we arrived on a Saturday, on a Friday night we arrived in a little town it's called Holozyce.

JF: How do you spell that?

MA: Holozyce.

JF: H-O-L-...

MA: I think...in English will it be better to, Holo- [tape ends]

*Tape two, side two:*

JF: This is tape two, side two, of an interview with Mr. Myer Adler, on November 10, 1982. The spelling of that town, then, is H-O-L-O-S-Z-Y-C-E. Now, who was with you when you went to this town?

MA: Me, and my brother-in-law, and his son.

JF: And you left your mother and...

MA: Yeah, Mother and his whole family, yeah, yeah.

JF: His whole family.

MA: And we went there. And when we went there, when we did go during that, during the whole day it was like a pilgrimage. People were going, the whole highway was...

JF: What was the idea of going there and leaving the women and the children in the other town?

MA: I guess everybody has their own experience, because the first thing the Germans did when they came in, is they tortured the men. So we were thinking, you know, it will repeat again. So the women and the children, they didn't do nothing.

JF: But you felt that they would, the women and the children would be safe.

MA: Safe, yeah, more safe than we are.

JF: I see.

MA: But...

JF: Now this town was within the Russian territory, then, Holozyce.

MA: Yeah, yeah, this was supposed to be...

JF: This was behind the Russian lines.

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. That's really, it just...crossing the...line to Russia. And, but later the officer, the Russian officer, my sister went to the Russian officer and she told them that her husband and I left and so he gave him a horse and buggy, he gave my family, to go to.

JF: So there were still some Russians there in the town.

MA: Oh yeah, we got...a head start. I got a head start.

JF: And they gave the rest of your family a horse and buggy in order to follow you.

MA: That's right. And when they...left, they left, actually the Russian Army left with them. That's mean they were the last ones to go out...

JF: I see.

MA: Of town. And later that's was around Tuesday or Wednesday I find out, somebody told me that, "Your mother arrived." Oh, I was so glad! And we were together again. And we were staying there, again, every Jewish family had, it was like, every Jewish family who lived there, you know what I mean, took in as many as they could. That's doesn't mean as many as they have spare rooms. As many, as, if they have a spare little floor. And of course, the synagogues were all packed with people. That's the first thing

what you do. You go to the synagogue. I told this many times when I came here and I see these plush carpets in the synagogues. I say, "It's such a bad timing. If our synagogues would have plush carpeting, would be..."

JF: Ohhh...

MA: "Would be so easier!"

JF: It would have been more comfortable to sleep on!

MA: Comfortable!

JF: Yes. So you were taken in by a family again, in Holoszyce?

MA: We were taken in, not, I was in the...I find actually a boyfriend, I find who was with me in Krakow, and he was looking for me and he took me to his home. And my mother and the whole family, there was, from our town was a family what their brother, his brother lived here. And he find out and he knew my family, and he took in the mother and the, well, we were split up a little, but it was still, still it was, we were together. I knew where they are, at least, and...

JF: Was the Russian government in control of this town?

MA: Yeah, yeah, the Russian government was in control. And later we moved, we find out, we, in Greidek, Grodek—in Yiddish is it Greidek it's called—we find a nice little apartment there and that was...

JF: This was another town?

MA: Another town, not far from L'vov. And...

JF: How do you spell that?

MA: Grodek is G-R-O-D-E-K.

JF: And that's where you finally settled.

MA: We finally settled down there, yeah. And that's was, you know, when that's was in November, I think, October or November.

JF: Of 1939.

MA: 1939. We were in Grodek.

JF: Were you able to find a room or a family that took you in there?

MA: A family, well, a family gave us a room, yeah, a family. They had a nice little house. The children were married, and they gave us a kitchen and a room, you know? And my sister's youngest child was at that time eight months old, nine months old. But she start talking, she talked everything! [laughs] Like a grown-up! She started talking when she was eight, nine months old. And she was so little, so skinny. And the...owner of the house, the lady what gave us the house, they lived, it was like two houses connected, you know? She took in this little girl, Musha, [phonetic] and she kept her in her house, because she didn't, she was only her and her husband. So she kept her with her. So, later she says, you know, she knew, as little as she was, she knew that we are out from the house, we're chasing out, you know. So she says, "At home we had all the good things," she says. "But a *balebosta* we didn't have there." [laughs] Well, she was so happy with this, because the

lady did for her so much. She says, "We had everything good there, but a landlord we didn't have."

JF: Aw. Now, were you able to work when you were living there?

MA: No, I, I don't know. I didn't look for a job. I blackmarketed. All what I had to do is to stay in line and get something. Later I sold it on the black market because to work, you couldn't get, first of all I didn't, I couldn't get a job either. I couldn't.

JF: With your background?

MA: No, because I wasn't...

JF: You weren't...

MA: I wasn't from there.

JF: So when you say you blackmarketed, what do you mean by that? What did you do? You were...

MA: Right away, when the Russians came around, it became a black market. You couldn't get things. You, everything got on the black market. You see, they controlled, you have to sell things to so-and-so much the price. But they didn't, it's hard to explain. You see, in Russia, even now is a black market. During all the years in Siberia, always was a black market. When I got paid in Siberia, when I got paid, it didn't mean a thing. The money what I got for a whole month I could buy one loaf of bread on the black market. You see, but...the benefits what they gave me, what they paid like a couple pounds of sugar during the month, that...was more than they paid. Sometimes I didn't go and pick up the money even! [laughs]

JF: So this is how you existed during your time...

MA: At that...

JF: In Grodek.

MA: That's right. And later, in 1940 came out that everyone, they gave us a choice, in Donbass. Donbass, that's a coal region, coal mine region, to emigrate to, to go to Donbass. Everybody has to register and go. And...

JF: Wait, the choice was in Grodek whether or not you would go to...

MA: No. They gave you a list of the cities in this Donbass region.

JF: Oh, I see. I see.

MA: So you could go in there and you could pick your city, but only in Donbass.

JF: I see.

MA: In Donbass is the coal region, the coal mine region.

JF: So you were there for a year before you had to move on again.

MA: Almost a year.

JF: Almost a year.

MA: Almost a year.

JF: And which, what town did you pick?

MA: I didn't go.

JF: You didn't go. What happened?

MA: I didn't...want to go to Donbass, to Russia. I was thinking, if I go there, I never come back. So, in the summer, around June, they started catching every, every young man they saw on the streets they caught and they checked him if he didn't have, if he wasn't born in this, if he didn't have there no documents. You see, if he was from the other side, what they call it, the *Bezhnetses*, that's mean, how do you call it in...English would it be? Like a foreigner what came so you...

JF: An immigrant.

MA: An immigrant, yeah. Every immigrant they took them, they arrested them, and sent them, sent him to Donbass. So, we were hiding. We were, took to the woods. I took to the woods.

JF: You took to the woods along with anybody else in the family?

MA: No, because the rest wasn't, because, and my brother-in-law, they wouldn't do it, because he is married. He has children.

JF: I see. So the rest of your family was not put in the position of having to make this move.

MA: No. That's right. But I was in danger. I couldn't, you see, they came checked on the houses and in the city I couldn't walk around there freely, so I was hiding.

JF: Did they want you to become a Russian citizen?

MA: A Russian, see right away you became a Russian citizen. They gave you a Russian passport and...

JF: You had no choice about that?

MA: No.

JF: That was automatic?

MA: That's automatic. You cannot...no, if you go, you became a Russian citizen.

JF: O.K.

MA: If they give you a Russian passport then you go.

JF: If you went to Donbass.

MA: That's right.

JF: O.K. And you were resisting...

MA: I resisting. It's in a lot of other young people resisted, and we were hiding in the woods and...

JF: Now who were you hiding in the woods with? Was there a partisan group?

MA: Yeah, partisans. No, we, I wouldn't call it a partisan group because a partisan group fights. You know what I mean.

JF: O.K.

MA: We didn't have nobody to fight. All what we have to do is to hide, not to be caught.

JF: O.K. All right.

MA: You know, we didn't do any damage to nobody. You know what I mean?

JF: O.K., right.

MA: A partisan is a fighting group.

JF: Unaggressive, yours, yeah.

MA: Yeah. We were just to, you know, be safe, just to hide not to get caught and not to be sent to Donbass.

JF: How many of you were there?

MA: We were a group of, oh, there were a couple, there were other, yeah, our group was about eight, nine people. It varies, you know, if some of them get back and we connected with other groups.

JF: Mainly young men were involved?

MA: Mainly young men. Young and single.

JF: The married men were not involved in this.

MA: Involved, no.

JF: O.K.

MA: So, on a Fri-, yeah, and my sister's daughter, she was at that time about 11 years old, ten or eleven years old. You see a child like this, they didn't look. She was the go-between. She knew where we are.

JF: I see. Did she help you get food?

MA: Sometimes they helped us out something there. We mostly lived from the, we were fishing. [chuckles]

JF: And where would you sleep? Did you...

MA: It was in June months. That was no news to sleep on an open...

JF: You just slept in the open.

MA: In the open, that's all. That was no news. No, I mean, yeah, I was used to it, since the war started.

JF: Were you being sought after, though? Was being in the open in the woods dangerous, in terms of being found?

MA: Yeah, if, well we have to have lookouts, you know. In the woods, if you're in the woods you can hear every sound, you know. So anyhow, around Friday, on a Friday night, my sister's little girl would come, came, and she contacted us, and she said, "They loaded the whole town on boxcars, to, you know, ship them out, and we don't know where."

JF: So your family was on those boxcars? Except for her?

MA: She was too. She was, she sneaked away from the boxcar. She sneaked away and she told me this. So I was thinking if they take Mother and I don't know even where. I went and I voluntarily, you know, I gave myself up.

JF: To the boxcar.

MA: To the boxcar. And that's how they shipped us to Siberia.

JF: What about the other men who were with you in the forest? Did any of them also go back?

MA: Some of them did, some of them didn't. The ones who did, I heard from them later. And they who didn't, I never heard of them.

JF: You mean the ones who stayed in the forest were never heard from again. How long were you actually in the forest before the, this deportation took place?

MA: About a week or so.

JF: About a week.

MA: Probably, because I don't know, I didn't keep, you know, one thing about my life, I never kept a diary. [chuckles]

JF: Yeah. So you're talking about the winter now, of 1940?

MA: No, no, it's still summer. It's still, they took...

JF: This is the summer.

MA: It's summer. They took us to Siberia in summer. We arrived, to Siberia we arrived just in time for the winter.

JF: In the summer of 1940?

MA: 1940, yeah.

JF: And can you tell me about that trip on the boxcar?

MA: Yeah. We were 35 people. It's usually a boxcar what they transport, you see, in 1939 in the war, they still used horses a lot of. They usually transported eight horses in this, in a boxcar like this. There was a...door in the middle, you see. And here was staying four horses, and here four horses.

JF: And 35 people were in there?

MA: And we were, here it was was made shelves, like a shelf here was made. People were underneath and on top. Underneath and on top. And both sides were like shelves made and with 35 people we were packed like sardines. And the first couple days they didn't open the boxcar even.

JF: Did they give you any food?

MA: Not in the first couple days. Till we reached the Russian soil. They were afraid. We were still on the Polish soil, you know. Plus the first couple days we were staying and we moved slowly and you see in every town they maneuvered them, put in another couple boxcars, another couple. Because they formed a big transport. I don't know how many cars there were there, 30 or 40 cars.

JF: These were primarily Jews that they were transporting?

MA: There were some *goyim*, some...

JF: Poles?

MA: Some Poles too, yeah. Yeah, yeah, there were some Poles.

JF: Did you have any...

MA: Not much. Not, very little.

JF: Did you have any idea where you were going?

MA: No. No, they didn't tell us. [laughs] And, again, the first stop when they opened was Kiev.

JF: When they were well inside Russia.

MA: Inside Russia, yeah. Stopped at Kiev. We had little windows we could open. And the Jews in Kiev find out that they're carrying Jews. The whole town was there. They throw on us food. And they were kicked by the soldiers, you know? And with, this.

JF: They were beaten with clubs?

MA: Yeah. But they, with a...

JF: Were you able to get any of the food?

MA: Yeah, oh yeah. You know what it mean, that's a Jew?

JF: Mmm.

MA: I'm sorry. I cannot tell. I [begins to weep; tape off then on]

JF: How long were you on this boxcar?

MA: We were six weeks. No, no, no, no. In the boxcars where we were three weeks. Six weeks took the whole trip. We arrived in three weeks later we arrived in Irkutsk.

JF: How do you spell that?

MA: Irkutsk. I-R-K-U-C-K. [Irkutsk]

JF: Now, when you say that you were three weeks on the train but the whole trip was six weeks, does that mean you stopped and stayed in certain places for a while along the way?

MA: No, no, no, no, no. Later...we took a boat. And after the boat we took trucks. And after the trucks we took another boat.

JF: About how many people do you think were in this group?

MA: It's 2,500. You see, we went, we came to Irkutsk. From Irkutsk we got on the river Angara.

JF: Angara?

MA: Angara.

JF: A-N-G-A-R-A.

MA: Yeah. Yeah, I can show you on the map this. Angara. Now, the Angara, yeah. Now here goes a river called Lena.

JF: Lena?

MA: Lena River, yeah, Lena.

JF: L-E-N-...

MA: Le-, L-E-N-A.

JF: L-E-N-A.

MA: Yeah. The Lena River flows into the north Russian, you know, near Alaska. That's [unclear]. Now, we got on on the Angara in Irkutsk. And we went till Krasnoyarsk.

JF: This was on a boat. You went on the...

MA: On the boat, till Krasnoyarsk.

JF: K-R-A-S-N-O-Y-A-R-S-K.

MA: Yeah. That was the city Krasnoyarsk here. In Krasnoyarsk we got off, and they took us with trucks. Not buses. Trucks. [chuckles]

JF: Right?



MA: To a city on the Lena River. It's called Zajarsk.

JF: Z-A-J-A-R-S-K.

MA: That kind, Zajarsk.

JF: Which was on the Lena River.

MA: On the Lena River.

JF: And then you took another boat?

MA: Yeah. And took another boat on the Lena River, note, and later, here, it comes out a river it's called Vitim, W-I-T-I-M. And we turned around to the Vitim and we went to a city it's called Bodaybo.

JF: B-O-D-Y-...

MA: B-O-...

JF: B-O-?

MA: B-O-, yeah. Bodaybo. This city is a...is the capital of the gold region there.

JF: Now on this trip, did the Russians begin to give you any kind of regular food or water?

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. On the way they fed us, yeah.

JF: They fed you?

MA: Yeah, once we came on the Russian territory.

JF: Their treatment toward you changed.

MA: Yeah, every day they gave us a couple loaves of bread and a couple buckets of soup.

JF: Of soup.

MA: Yeah.

JF: And they'd let you out of the train for a little while during the day or no?

MA: They opened up the train to do the, you know something, on the trains there were men and women and girls and boys and there was no latrine on the train. You know, I mean...

JF: No latrine.

MA: Yeah. Now, when they let us out, everybody had to do something. It didn't matter a boy or a girl was there. One next to the other, it didn't mean nothing. You lost your whole... The girls, once we got taken on this train and no girl had a period till...way, till a couple years later, you know, till the war was over practically. Some of them were...thinking, you know, the younger kids knew right away something's wrong [unclear] a change in life is so easy. [laughs] And you wasn't any more a man and you wasn't a woman. You was a, you became an "it" right away.

JF: On that train trip.

MA: Yeah. You became converted to an animal.

JF: Were the Russians rough with you on the train or were they...

MA: In the beginning, yeah.

JF: In the beginning meaning when you were still in Polish territory.

MA: In Polish territory, yeah. Oh, they were very rough.  
JF: And what happened when you hit Russian territory, they changed?  
MA: Mmm?  
JF: They were different once you hit Russian...  
MA: Yeah, they changed, you know, the Russians changed too.  
JF: Oh, the people changed, themselves.  
MA: I mean...  
JF: There were different guards.  
MA: The, that's right.  
JF: I see.  
MA: You see, the guards changed too. And they, this, oh yeah, you know, we were...escorted all the time with the, they hold you with a...  
JF: A gun?  
MA: This knife, was a bayonet, you know, like would be a [laughs] who knows what kind of dangerous people we are!  
JF: So, this Bodaybo, this...  
MA: Bodaybo, yeah.  
JF: Was the town, that was your final destination in Siberia?  
MA: Not quite, but that was the final trip, yeah. And from there, and there, they again gave us a list of villages. One is 40 kilometer, one is 60, one is 80, and you can get together groups to be with.  
JF: You could decide which village you were going to go to?  
MA: Yeah, to sign up.  
JF: So all of the people, these 2500 people that you're describing on this trip, were people who had, did not take on Russian citizenship.  
MA: That's right.  
JF: And this was the reason for the deportation.  
MA: That's right. If I would have, you see, if you took Russian citizenship, so you had to leave right away anyhow to Donbass. They didn't leave you there. You had to leave anyhow, right away. So, we didn't take. Now later when we came there, they, you had to decide where to go. And people right start organizing the groups, you know.  
JF: Families could stay together that way.  
MA: Hmm?  
JF: Families could stay together?  
MA: Families could stay together. And you didn't know from one way where is better, where is worse. You didn't know. So I went, I asked Mother, "Mother, what should I do?" She says, "What can you do? If you sign up somewhere, you pick out this, how about if it will not be good there? So you will blame yourself. So let's wait what will be so at least I will not blame myself what happens."

JF: You mean, she wanted you to put the decision in the hands of the authorities, or...

MA: No, to the destiny.

JF: The destiny.

MA: That's right. In Yiddish, is *héys 'n, der goy-r'l*. Destiny, whatever happens, let's hope for the best. And you know, people start and all of them, in meantime here, they fed us good there, when we were staying there. So...

JF: Where did you stay?

MA: In a...stable, an empty stable was there, a couple of stables. I don't know.

JF: Did you meet...

MA: It was still warm. It wasn't cold yet.

JF: Did you meet any of the native Russian population on your trip?

MA: We met them, but we, they weren't allowed to no associate with us. Oh no, they weren't allowed to associate with us. And we didn't know Russian language at all either.

JF: So where did you end up, and how?

MA: So, later, everybody went, every day was left a transport with people and every day was less people and less people. And later it was a small group left, about...around 150, 160 families was left. So they, what, we didn't say where to go. So they took us on a place. It's called Sinuga.

JF: How is that spelled?

MA: Sinuga.

JF: S-I-N-...

MA: Sinuga.

JF: S-I-N-U-G-A.

MA: Yeah, Sinuga. And this was the capital of all those villages. And...

JF: What does that mean? Was it a fairly large town, then?

MA: It was a village. It wasn't a town.

JF: It was still a village.

MA: A village. Now all that, all the villages there is...on the bank of the river, you know. You travel yourself from one to the other one. Now this was...just in the middle, you see. Like here is the river. This was in the middle. And all other villages were here or here, here or here, here or here.

JF: So it was the capital because it was centrally located, not because...

MA: Centrally located. And over there was the main bakery and over there was the main office. And you know, that was the main, that was the best place and later we find out it was that.

JF: Oh. Now this was on the...Vitim River?

MA: Witim River, yeah. Now, there was something else. The main work there was to lumberjack, to cut woods. This, the village was here. And the thing was surrounded with mountains. This was mountains. And it's called the the Tundras, the mountains.

JF: The Tundras.

MA: Yeah. And on the top of the mountains was barracks where the workers stayed there and cut the wood. So all the young people had to go to the mountain. So, my mother and my brother-in-law—and they left too, because he had children—they gave him work there. And I had to go on top of the mountain. And I was 15 kilometer from the village.

JF: I see. So you weren't actually living in the village with the rest of your family there.

MA: No, I was...on top of the mountain. And over there it was only a barrack, just a barrack, that's all. We went every day to work and...

JF: What kind of housing did your family get in the village?

MA: It was a barrack. You see?

JF: In the village itself.

MA: Yeah. It was a couple, or, plenty barracks like this, you know?

JF: Uh huh.

MA: And the barrack has here, [drawing] here was a little hallway in the barrack. You see?

JF: Mmm hmm.

MA: Now, and here was like, like closets.

JF: So there was like a central hallway with...

MA: Yeah.

JF: Small...

MA: Closets.

JF: Closets off of the main corridor.

MA: Yeah. One minute. And here, here, here. O.K.

JF: And this is where your mother.

MA: Yeah, all the way, all the way, one minute. And that was how they, that's was a kitchen here.

JF: With one kitchen in a corner.

MA: One kitchen in the corner, yeah. And here lived, depends about some of them five, some of them six, some of them were eighteen. Well, so it was two kitchens in the middle, you know. And they just squeezed in nine, ten people in...

JF: In each of these closets.

MA: In each closet.

JF: Were there, there were beds in these closets?

MA: No, shelves.

JF: Shelves.

MA: And we were very lucky. I told you I came from a lucky family. We were ten people in our family, so we were by ourselves. And can you imagine in a small little thing you put together a couple families? Sometimes three families even. It was murder.

JF: So, the rest of your family, except for you, stayed in this barrack.

MA: Yeah, stayed in this barrack, and I went there. And I could, every other Saturday I could come home. Saturday after I finished work I had to walk [laughs].

JF: Right.

MA: Yeah.

JF: Now what...was the experience that your family had in this village with the native...