

Tape three, side one:

JF: This is tape three, side one, of an interview with Mr. Myer Adler on November 10, 1982, with Josey Fisher. Mr. Adler, we were discussing the relationship that your family had with the native population in the town.

MA: They related very nice to us. They practically worshipped us.

JF: Now why did...

MA: Because I lived through my time when I was born, we, it wasn't electric. And I saw in my time electric coming through, even water pipes. And now, when we came to Siberia, we were pushed back like a couple of hundred years, not only electric. There wasn't even lamps. There wasn't even candles! It was such a backward...

JF: What did they use for light?

MA: A little bit, if they could get of a little bit fat.

JF: Fat?

MA: Suet, with a, you know, every, the Russian standard jacket for the winter, the Siberian, is with cotton inside. You know?

JF: Lined with cotton?

MA: Lined with cotton. They pulled out a piece of cotton and made a wick out of it and [chuckles]. And all of a sudden there came people, they, you know, a lot of people made a fortune if somebody had a pleated dress. They straightened out the dress and cut out half of it and they paid a fortune for it. Oh, they, for everything, for ours, it was a, they never saw it a shirt, especially the women, a bra. They gave away everything. They never saw it. Or for a, you know, the Russians, some of them, they were very well off. They were, but they never saw a luxury thing. There was...a public bath, you know, what every Saturday they heated up and when they saw, when the Russians girls saw the girls how they wear, you know, panties, you know, they went crazy about it. They never, they all wear men's clothes, the girls. And they saw something, you know, they never saw it before. They...recognized ourselves as...they knew we are more cultured than they are.

JF: So they treated you with respect?

MA: Oh, very respected. They, it's a matter of fact, if it wouldn't be for them, there wouldn't be so many survivors. They helped us with a, they were so nice. They, I have no words for them.

JF: How did they help you? What do you mean?

MA: They helped us with everything, with the work, and they, and a matter of fact the Russians, they didn't, the authority I mean. I mean, when I talk about the Russians I mean about the authority. They...didn't tell us, when we came there, they gave us a saw and ax and going out to down trees. And we didn't know how to. [laughs] We didn't know how and what. It's a matter of fact, when we, the first day, I remember, so we saw in this other tree and then the other side and around and the tree didn't...move. So we left it go and started on another one. We start sawing and nothing, we couldn't let down a tree. And

so we started a bunch of trees and nothing happened. And when we came home, they asked us, "How many trees did you let down?" [laughs]

JF: And you didn't, you hadn't cut any.

MA: Nothing. So the next day we came back, the meantime, in the nighttime it was a wind and it knocked down one tree and like a chain reaction knocked the other tree together. And a guy was there, you know, a very religious guy. He says, "Thank You, God. God opens, He gave." Now, it didn't take long. We learned...you know, in a hard way we learned how to let down trees. And later we, [unclear], we let down forty to fifty trees a day.

JF: Did the native Russian population help you learn the ways [unclear]?

MA: Yeah, but we did, in fact, we were mingled with them, you know? Later, when we got together. You see, they kept us separate. They kept us separate from them.

JF: Oh I see. I see.

MA: And oh, later, they have, later they were happy to work with us. They were happy to work with us. A matter of fact I became a brigadier for a whole Russian group, when we, I was a one, one only with the Russian bunkers. And I was there, I was in charge over that.

JF: So the Russian authorities put you in that position?

MA: Yeah, in charge over them. It was on a whole story how I got there, how they took me under them, it's a very long story. [laughs]

JF: How did the Russians feel about having you, as a Jew, [unclear].

MA: They were glad to have us and they felt sorry for us, because they, all of them were sent one way or another way, you know what I mean there. Over there, there wasn't just plain natives. They all had...

JF: They were all sent, had been sent to Siberia.

MA: Of course. They all had been sent, and...that's doesn't mean that they were criminals.

JF: So, in [unclear]...

MA: The same way how we were, so they felt sorry for us. You see, they were all...in the same war, so that's how they felt sorry for us. And it doesn't make any difference [unclear]. You know, if you came to a Russian house, he wouldn't sit down to eat without inviting you if you wouldn't join him. And he shared with you the last piece of bread. And I will tell you something else. If they sent me somewhere, and I, and the night falls, the first house, I didn't care who that is, the first house. I went to them and I felt like home. And they put you up. You know what I mean?

JF: Among these people, were there any Jewish Russians who had been supp-
...

MA: We find, we, yeah, the leaders. All the leaders were Jewish.

JF: Did you have a chance to talk to them and find out about...

MA: Oh many, oh sure, oh sure.

JF: And what did you find out about their experience?

MA: You see, the Jewish people, a lot of them, were sent, as leaders. And a lot of them joined up voluntarily because if you came voluntarily you had a priority. The...secretary of the party was a Jew. The secretary of the party is one of the biggest jobs there. And there were...

JF: Of the local party, you mean.

MA: Of the local party there. And for the whole region, yeah. And a matter of fact...no, no, in that village there wasn't this. In, but the war, when we, you know, the first when they brought us over the war, there was there, that was a nice big city. But our people didn't live there. They didn't let us. We had to move on. But over there it was the secretary of the party was a Jew. And, oh, it was, him I met, and I met the guy who is in charge of the food supply. He was a Jew. Now, how did we meet this guy? I must tell you a little interesting story. When we came to get the boards, the first day we came there, so, two woman, a one young one and one older woman came to us, and they, they ask me. Yiddish, they talk Yiddish, especially the old woman talked a very good Yiddish. I cannot tell you how the old woman, how old she was, but she was a pretty old woman. And she asked me if it is anybody from the *chevra kaddisha* [Jewish burial society]. Yeah, by my mother, I told you was always in *chevra kaddisha*, and there was other women there, and other men. And she took him. And she asked him a favor, when she dies, she has shrouds ready. When she dies, to promise her to give her a Jewish burial. So, they promised her. Next day, this younger woman came, and she died. They took her and gave her a Jewish burial and her son, he didn't say who he is, what he is. Her son was there. And he said a beautiful *kaddish*, and he shed a tear. He was to the burial. A couple days later, one minute, a couple days later, the paper comes out. You know, over there, everybody digs into somebody else, you know. That secretary of the party, his mother died, and he gave her a Jewish burial.

JF: Was he criticized for that?

MA: Oh yeah.

JF: Yeah.

MA: Criticized, and he was sent away.

JF: Away where?

MA: Nobody knew. They sent him away. Nobody knew. Meantime, when we were in the this, you know, when the war started, when Hitler attacked Russia, it was very critical and we were very mistreated. And we had a guy who was in charge of us. Came a new guy. And he very mistreated us. He didn't...want to give us nothing, not even food. "Don't you know," he says, "a war goes on there!"

JF: This was in 1941.

MA: That was in 1942 already. In 1942 already. He says, "A war goes on!" And what can you do? Just suffer. Meantime, a ration guy comes, a Russian native. And he says, "Why don't you write a letter to Moscow? I'm sure Moscow wouldn't...they wouldn't be too happy to see what they do to you people. Why don't you write a letter?" And he helped

us write the letter, a complaint letter to Moscow, and he knew the address where to write. And it took about six months, and we got an answer. And they said that they sent out a man to investigate the whole thing. And it took another couple of weeks, and the man came. And you know who the man came? The same guy! [laughs] You see, they sent him away, and he became bigger! He became the head in Moscow somewhere!

JF: You mean the man whose mother had died?

MA: Yeah.

JF: He was the one who came back! Oh.

MA: He came back to investigate, and he settled that. Oh, he was so happy to see us. And he, and the things improved.

JF: Now, were you getting any kind of news while you were in Siberia? Of the war?

MA: Of course...we got the news, but we got, it came Russian paper there once in, a Russian paper came, a *Pravda* or is just a, the paper was three, four months old.

JF: Was any of the news of what was going on as far as, say, concentration camps were going on?

MA: No!!! We didn't know from nothing. Oh no, oh no.

JF: None of that information got to you.

MA: No, no, no, no, not, but, you see, you see, now, in 19-, we were taken in 1940, right? Into Siberia. In 1941 the Germans attacked Russia. And in 1942 they were near Stalingrad already I think. And by 1942 the tensions against us eased a little because they find out we're not, you see, as long as they were...in a treatment with the Germans, you know, they treated us, like the Germans wanted, you know.

JF: I see. So when the Germans invaded, you became allies.

MA: We became, that was...one of the happiest days in our life. You see, it's funny, but that's the way it was. Because we knew that Germany will not influence them any more.

JF: Did you find out about the *Einsatzgruppen*, the German units that were coming in and killing the Jews in the Russian, the front lines in the Russian areas? You didn't hear about any of that.

MA: No, no. We didn't know nothing. I'll tell you when we find out. So...in 194-, the end of 1942, they already, it formed, a Polish government formed that time, in exile, with the general underseer, the head of the government. And they eased, I think, on us, very easy. We were not any more prisoners.

JF: The Russians saw you differently at that point.

MA: Yeah, yeah. You see...

JF: Starting in 1941?

MA: No, it took a year for the, yeah, till a Polish government settled, found. And in the end of 1942, around in the end, you see, we could, if we would leave the villages to go to the main city to, where they were, you could.

JF: You could travel between cities.

MA: Yeah, not, and but that's how far you could travel, that's all. Farther you couldn't. You could go there. And so me, and a niece of my...my sister's daughter, we got out from the village on foot. It was about 180 kilometer was it. It was still winter at that time. It was still snow. It was, you know when that was, could be, in Jewish is it, when...about a month before Purim. It was...I guess in February. You see, only in the winter you can travel. In the summer you cannot travel there. Because there was no highways. There was no...that was the reason we never drive south in the woods, you know what I mean?

JF: The ice was easier to travel on than the mud.

MA: And the ice, you see, the river became the highway.

JF: I see.

MA: You can, on the river you traveled.

JF: You could walk on the river? Or you would...

MA: Trains are going on the river, what with tractors, they walk on there, she says. Tractors! That's the main highway in the winter. You see, we here, when a snow falls down, everything gets paralyzed. Over there, when the snow stops, everything gets paralyzed in summer time.

JF: Oh, oh.

MA: And when they, once the snow falls and everything gets frozen, everything becomes alive again. The horses, in the summer time they let them loose because they have no use for them. They get, and once the snow falls down they came back by themselves because they cannot find food in the woods. So...we got on our way and we came to Bodaybo. And I got a job, I right away find a job as a stevedore there. And later...and the niece became, and we got a little room there. And anyhow, you see, again, you could do it. You know, here, you cannot do all things like this. Because if you came in a terrible, where you go. Over there, to any Jew, you walk in there, they put you up and they... Now let me tell you something. I had a brother-in-law what he was in Korea. And he was in the Korean War. I mean, one was in the Korean War anyhow. But he was sent from the Washington an advisor to the Korean government for two years. He set up the...federal reserve system there. He's on economics. He works for the government. And he was there two years. And while he was there I married his sister, you know. And I got married here. And when he came back, he has two more brothers and two sisters. And he decided he wants to stay with me. I was happy. Yeah, I didn't, I wasn't so furnished, the house wasn't so big here. I didn't have such, I didn't live here at that time. It was a smaller house. So...I didn't have a house...a room for him. So we took the double mattress, you know, took off and put this in the living room on the floor, and they slept on the mattress. So, we were sitting and talking, and he says, "You will wonder why I want to stay with you and not with my brothers and my sisters," he says. "They are American-born," he says, "they didn't got through what we," he says. "I got through in Korea," he says. "I can't imagine what you got through,"

he says. "To you it doesn't mean nothing I took the mattress." To him it would be I hadn't got a separate room for you, you know what I mean?" So that's the Russian people. As long as they had a piece of floor, you didn't have to know him. You, I mean, if he was a *goy* or a *yid* or a this, they put you up anywhere. So that's the reason I didn't, whether I came the first house, I walked in and they treated me like a guest, you know?

JF: Let me ask you a question, before we get to your move here, which was in late 1942. Were you able to practice any of your religious tradition?

MA: No. No, you was not allowed. Nothing whatsoever. A matter of fact, a couple of people got, you see, over there it was a jail too. Put you in jail. Especially it was a rabbi there. The rabbi from Lanset, oh, he got, they tortured him practically. And later they sent him away. I don't know where, we don't know where he wind up even.

JF: They tortured him for trying to practice Judaism in, while he was in Russia?

MA: Yeah, yeah, they, for some reason they find out he was a rabbi too. Yeah. And they caught him *davening* [praying]. Yeah, no, you wasn't allowed. And now...

JF: So you couldn't even do it in secret?

MA: In secret, yeah. In secret. You could do it in secret, of course. If it's secret, if nobody knows. In secret you can do everything in Russia. You see, when you do something wrong, when you get caught doing something wrong, they don't say you did something wrong. They say, "He got caught."

JF: Were you able to get a *minyan* [group of 10 men necessary to conduct public prayers] together or...

MA: No!

JF: [unclear] do it alone.

MA: No, no. Maybe, well, it's very, later we got a *minyan*. I get to it. You see, when we were sent back from Russia, from Siberia, and we go near Stalingrad.

JF: But at the time, let's wait for that. At the time when you were...

MA: No, you couldn't get a *minyan*.

JF: In these villages.

MA: No, no.

JF: You just, whatever you could do privately alone.

MA: Yeah, we got a *minyan* now and then we got, if somebody had *yartzeit*, we did it. A couple of people stayed watch outside. And we got a *minyan*. Oh yeah, we got, we got together a *minyan* every time now and then. But...

JF: Was there any way of teaching the young children about their religion?

MA: At home you could do it. I guess you could do it and...you didn't have the time for it. You're all day at work. You came home. You were knocked out like a, this.

JF: What about regular schooling? Were the children permitted to go to public school?

MA: Yeah, yeah, it was a regular school. Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was a school, yeah.

JF: And they learned Russian, I suppose?

MA: Russian. Right away Russian.

JF: Secular subjects?

MA: Yeah, yeah. I remember my, a cousin of my, he went to school. He came home. He says, "Well, I find out when...Stalin was born. I don't know when he will die, but I know when he was born." [laughs]

JF: All right, so now we have you in Boday-, Bodaybo.

MA: Now I came back to Bodaybo.

JF: And...

MA: And later my parents came. And I worked as a stevedore there. And I'm sure God forgives me. I was a *gonef* [Yiddish for thief]. You know, to work as a stevedore was, it was like, the most, the richest guy there. You know, I could take 50 pounds, 50 kilo. What I'm talking pounds? Kilo. You know, in the pants. One thing I'm gonna tell you something. When I started to work as a stevedore there, we lived in a small, a small little, it was a room and a little foyer here. And you know, it's a way nobody ever locks the door. It was nothing what to steal there [laughs].

JF: Right.

MA: But, they didn't, nobody bothered you. You go away and nobody to take your, the, our *yiddim* wouldn't do it, and the Russians, they were very, no, not like here. Not like, you know. So, we had there, and my mother was very religious. And we had, from a...burlap sack, you know, she opened up the burlap sack and she bleached it in the sun and made it for a table cloth Saturday to have a tablecloth, you know.

JF: What kind of sack was this?

MA: A burlap, burlap. You don't know what burlap is?

JF: Oh, burlap! Burlap!

MA: Burlap.

JF: O.K., a burlap sack, right, O.K.

MA: Yeah, yeah, it just is brown.

JF: Yes.

MA: She, you know how to bleach in the sun if you want to bleach.

JF: Yes.

MA: You soak it in water and you hang it out in the sun. And she made a table cloth because Saturday, we didn't have what to eat, but a tablecloth has to be.

JF: O.K.

MA: So, listen to it. So I worked in the shift, in the afternoon shift. I went to work around 12:00. No, around 4:00 was it. 4:00 and you worked till 12:00 at night. And while I went to work—that was on a Saturday night—while I went to work, I came there. That's was the second day work. I know the first day the Russian lady, I was between Russian ladies. I was one, they looked on me funny. And they didn't know at that time a flour being loaded. You know, they looked at me funny. Why, I didn't know what it is. The second day, that was a Friday night. Now Saturday night I went to work. And they start talking to

me. They find out who I am. You see, they didn't see so many people hardly. Now, they were afraid from the beginning maybe I am a spy, you know? Later they find out I'm...

JF: I see.

MA: So they all took stole flour, you know? Took flour. And they were equipped with this, with the clothes too, there.

JF: What, like pockets in their pants or...

MA: No, no, no. Double pants.

JF: Double pants, O.K.

MA: Double pants. And the besides in the pockets too. You know, any way you took it. So I was like this, I went like this, you know. And they look on me and they were thinking, so, in order to be safe, so I have to steal too. Because if I don't steal, they...

JF: Ah, then they'll be to...

MA: So they practically forced me. You see, he practically, one guy, they took the belt here and tied it up here so that flour wouldn't run down, you know?

JF: Right.

MA: And [unclear]. And the other guy poured on here, full with [laughing].

JF: With flour. So your shirt, your top was full of flour.

MA: Yeah, yeah. I had a jacket too.

JF: Yeah.

MA: And I went home, and on the way home, and oh, this one [laughing] it's like a bandage with... Anyhow, when I came home, and, Mother didn't wait for me because at 12:00 you came home. The door was open. I came in by myself. And I saw what to do with the flour, how to take it off. I didn't want to waste. Once I have it, I didn't want to waste like this. So I took this table cloth what she made, you know. It was folded, it was right there. It was Saturday night right after, when the *Shabbos* ends she folded this and put it aside. So I took this and put this on the floor. And I kneeled down, you know what I mean, and I...[laughs] took the flour out. [laughs]

JF: And emptied your shirt onto the sack.

MA: Onto the sack, and I...

JF: Tied it.

MA: Tied it up and put it on the table and I went to sleep. And Mother got up, at least she said *Tilim* [psalms] every day. She gets up, she sees something white on the floor and she looks, and she looks at the flour. And she knew right away that I stole it. She didn't wait till I got up. But she started beating me, "I don't want my son a *ganef!* [thief] And I don't care!" She says, "There is no excuse for *ganevis* [robberies]." And she, you know, and what can you do. You don't want get a beating, so you run out. I wouldn't hit her back. And keep on staying and being a punching bag? So I run out and, without shoes I run out. And I wanted, you know, that was Sunday morning was it, and Sunday morning is usually, about every Sunday is a bazaar, the black market day. So I went on the bazaar and I walked around and walked around. And at 4:00 I had to go to work. It was already around 9:00 in

the morning. I was thinking, "I have to get some sleep!" So, I go near the house. I didn't dare walk in. As I come near, as my...sister's boy, the youngest boy, he was at that time, I don't know, about five, six years old. And he sees me, and he runs! He said, "*Oy! Mi esst un mi esst...* [We are eating and we are eating...]" You know, they made, how do you call it...they mix it with water just like *matzas*, you know. And, only we didn't have an oven, on the stove, just that. "*Oy!*" He says, "it's so good *kemach* [flour]." And when I came in, Mother start crying. She says, "I hoped God will watch over you." And from that time, I, every time I had a chance, I stole. And I made our own rule, I made, just to use it for food. Never, never for any luxury.

JF: So you would, would you sell some of what you got?

MA: Yeah.

JF: You would sell it.

MA: Sell, and buy a pair shoes. Sell and buy a shirt or something. Oh, oh sure, I brought so much home that it was impossible to finish eating! [laughs] And that was a fortune over there. Whatever I want, sometimes rice, sometimes sugar, some, anything. It's a funny thing. You know, once they gave us clothes, they gave us. So once I bring home a pair, a *valenkis*. [phonetic] You know, *valenkis* is high boots but not from leather. It's like pressed wool what they wear there in Siberia.

JF: Pressed wool.

MA: Yeah, pressed wool. When I came home, I had it, you know, on my shoulders that... So, the boy, you know, who met me, so he says to me, "Did you work, did you unload today *valenkis*?" He was thinking I was [laughs].

JF: Oh!

MA: They knew everything what I unload, I...

JF: You bring home, huh?

MA: I...oh, sometimes butter, sometimes soap. Soap was a biggest profit.

JF: Was there any control on the part of the authorities of the black market?

MA: Yeah. Well...

JF: On the black market?

MA: No, the black market, you see, the black market keep them alive.

JF: That was a way of life.

MA: That's a way of life. They couldn't con-, if they control it, the whole thing would, with the whole country would be a disaster. You see, that's the one way, even the big shot, he sold his things there. You know what I mean?

JF: Even the big shop?

MA: The big shot. You know what I mean? Like a...

JF: Oh, the big shot.

MA: Yeah, the big shot. You see, he made the money there too, because that's how he could get rid of the, you see, he got an access to...certain things. So how does he cash them in? So he had his agent what he sold them, and they sold it to him. And if he

closed down then...the black, the whole country, anywhere you go in there was a black market in Russia. But anyway, anyway, and that's usually near the railroad station.

JF: So this bazaar that was on Sunday was-

Tape three, side two:

JF: This is tape three, side one [two], of an interview with Mr. Myer Adler on November 10, 1982. We were saying that the Sunday bazaar, the black market bazaar, was open. There was no supervision? There was no [unclear] who would break up...

MA: People brought up things and they traded and they bought. They did, you know, in Bodaybo where I lived, that was the headquarters of the gold mines, the main, of this, of the gold mines. Because, and the others, and we were on this side of the Vitim and on the other side on the mountains, there were gold mines. And how can you control a guy? If you caught him stealing a piece of gold in the mine, he got punished. He got, I don't know, ten years, or how much. It was very dangerous. The same thing like if they caught us stealing a piece of food where we worked. But in the same time there was a store. It called a gold redemption store. Was in this store you could get everything for gold. If you, they didn't take money. No ration there. Everything had a price in gold.

JF: So they would arrest someone who was...

MA: Hold on a second.

JF: Yeah.

MA: If I would work in the gold mine, right, and I stole gold there, I stole a piece of, I came across, you know, when I dig the gold up, find a piece of gold and I take it with me?

JF: Yeah. Yeah?

MA: You know what I mean? And I take it with me. If they catch me, they put me in jail. And if I run, and if I touch the knob of the gold redemption store, they cannot touch me nothing. I, you see, we thought...

JF: So if you can get away with it...

MA: Yeah. If you came to the store, to the redemption store, they don't ask you where you got it, from where you did. Because as long as you turn it over, [chuckles]...

JF: So the issue was if you could get away with it.

MA: That's right.

JF: And they ended up getting it back anyway.

MA: That's right. That's right. The same thing is with the bazaar. They didn't care. On the bazaar you could buy, you could buy everything.

JF: Could they have caught you stealing the flour or sugar or whatever, as you were doing it, and arrested you?

MA: That's right. That's right.

JF: You were in danger, then, while you were actually taking it.

MA: That's right. You see, and if they came in my house and they find the flour or the sugar, I bought it on the bazaar.

JF: Then you were safe already, if you got it home.
MA: If you got it home, I could be safe, yeah. Because if I...
JF: But what about while...
MA: Said, if I don't admit [chuckles]...
JF: But what about walking from the warehouse or whatever to your home? If they caught you...
MA: Oh, oh.
JF: Then you were...
MA: Well, they usually, they didn't do it. No, no, I don't know. I, a matter of fact, I...came once home, I went once home from work, and the guy who was in charge on our base and he went from a meeting somewhere in the night time and he stopped and he talked to me, "What did you do today?" He says, "What did you unload today?" I say, "Was soap unloaded." So, he says to me, "You know," he says, "my house didn't see a piece of soap I don't know how long." The way he said it, you know, I...so I took the half and I gave it to him.
JF: You took it out of your shirt?
MA: Yeah. And I gave him a piece of soap.
JF: How long did...
MA: And... one minute, we're not finished.
JF: Yes?
MA: So, in a couple days, his wife was...came there to...receive the husband. And I didn't know her. I didn't know who she is. She didn't know who I am. She says, "Where is Mishkah?" They called me Mishkah at that time. "Where is Mishkah?" Ah, where Mishkah is. And I say, "I am Mishkah." You see, she grabs me and she kisses me and she says, "Thank you for the soap."
[laughs]
JF: How long did you live doing this in...
MA: In Siberia?
JF: In Siberia, yeah.
MA: In Siberia? Well, all together, in Russia, six years, since I was taken to...Siberia. That's mean, because in 1944 they...shipped us away from Siberia. They shipped us near Stalingrad after the liberation of Stalingrad.
JF: Why did they ship you away from Siberia at that point?
MA: First of all, they were, their reason, I don't know what to tell you. I can only guess. They didn't give us a reason. Over there, they don't give you a reason why they do it. [laughing]
JF: They just do, right.

MA: They just do it. I can't, the Polish government maybe asked them to do it, to take us out, from Siberia.¹ And second, you know, near Stalingrad was, it's called Engelstown, Engels, like Marx, Engels? Engelstown. It was a whole territory there, and this territory was a, it's called a German territory. It lived nothing but Germans there. And they put up a model of a territory. They, very beautiful was there. And they managed it very nicely. And then when the, Hitler surrounded Stalingrad, the Germans let down paratroopers to this Engelstown. This Engelstown wasn't just a town. It was about 15, 20 cities there. You know, and villages. It was a territory. That's was on the, between Saratov and Stalingrad. And the Russians came in the morning and they saw that they let down paratroopers. And they were hiding them, these Germans, they were hiding them. They didn't getting out. So next day they shipped them all out. And on the way, when we came here, we crossed their path. You know, their, we were parked. Our transport on this side and their transport on this side. And they told us they are from Engelstown. See, so they took us there, and then they took on our place.

JF: Oh, they shipped them to Siberia?

MA: To Siberia, yeah.

JF: And you lived in Engelstown?

MA: Yeah. And later we lived in...the Engels territory it is called. And I lived in a town it's called, well, you know, I forgot already how it's called. It, you know, bad things you're trying to forget.

JF: Mmm hmm. So, well you lived in a village in this territory.

MA: In a village there, yeah, and we worked agriculture. It was a...*sovkhos*. You know what a *sovkhos* is? You know what a *kolkhoz* is.

JF: Describe it to me.

MA: A *kolkhoz* is a collective farm.

JF: Right.

MA: The *sovkhos* is a government-owned farm.

JF: O.K.

MA: And the people get paid to work in the farm. That was a *sovkhos*.

JF: So you were paid then.

MA: Yeah, if you call that paid.

JF: And how long did you live in this area, then?

MA: We lived there till '46. We came back in '46, in March, '46 we came. They sent us back.

JF: You were sent back to?

MA: To Poland.

¹Stalin had already broken relations with the Polish Government-in-Exile and was by 1943 planning a Communist regime in Poland.

JF: Now, during those two years, was there any difference that you can describe in your experience? Your living experience?

MA: Of course it was a lot of difference. You see, that first of all, we want confidence with them, you know. We were good workers, most of us. I was a *stakhanovite*. Do you know what a *stakhanovite* is? If you work on 400%, you're a *stakhanovite*. Like, they say, every work has... Now Stakhanov was a guy by the name Stakhanov, and he worked in the coal mine. And the coal mine was, you had to give up so many tons, a guy has to dig up so many tons a day. So many tons, that's a normal day's work. That's where you get paid so much. He dug up four times as much as the...which is called 400%. That's was the highest what he did. And every good worker who works on 400% in any kind of work, it's called a *stakhanovite*. Now I was a stevedore, and the stevedore, we had to give up so many tons a day from the ship. You know what I mean? And I usually worked, my brigade worked on 400%, which we used a little, a little, you know, how do you call it, you know, let me explain you. Like, if you had give up on a person five ton a day, right? We were a brigade from 20 people. We have to give up 100 ton a day, right?

JF: Yeah?

MA: 100 ton a day. That's if the ship is straight to walk and no steps and no, and the distance is only ten feet, you know what I mean? And I always put it like if the ship was here, you know what I mean, if we came up from the ship here and we have to, here was, the scale was here, you know what I mean? So I always put up here a piece of junk here. So we had to go around. But you didn't have to go around but it was written out you have to go around. And always manage to put a step, so from this five ton they came a one ton to a person.

JF: I see. So some would be lost along the way?

MA: No, no, no, I mean, because the distance is longer, so you don't have to carry five tons.

JF: I see.

MA: The distance is longer and you have steps. So, we always had something, you know. Being a bookkeeper, you know.

JF: I see.

MA: You know, help me with this thing, writing up this thing, always help me. And we got, our brigade was very, we got more food than any other because we [laughs].

JF: O.K. So that in other words you weren't expected to carry as much if it was a longer distance.

MA: That's right.

JF: I see.

MA: And how can you do it? You see, if there's a longer, how can you? It's measured according to the distance and according to the, if you have to walk steps, is it.

JF: I see. So even though it was there originally, you couldn't be expected to carry all of that onto the boat.

MA: That's right.

JF: O.K.

MA: So that's how we did it. And where were we?

JF: You were talking about any of the differences or new experiences that you had.

MA: Yeah.

JF: In Siberia.

MA: You know, when we came near Stalingrad, so we came with a reputation that we are the best kind of workers. You know? And when I came there, the authority had already my records. And so they gave us a room. The room was nothing but empty. Empty except a stove was there.

JF: Now you were still with your family at this point?

MA: Yeah. My mother was still alive and the whole family was there. You see, being a stevedore helped the family survive, the food what I stole. That helped a lot.

JF: Right.

MA: So when we came, and when we came there, it wasn't, you know, I didn't mind sleeping on the floor, but Mother, I didn't want her to no sleep on the floor. I did want to, I took good care of Mother. I'll tell you why, because she suffered a lot since Father died. And she suffered with us a lot, to give us. She did want to give us the best, and to raise a family and to she didn't have any help except from with my brother from America helped her. But anyhow, I did want badly a bed there, because you see, I was still used to the winter from Siberia, which the winters here wasn't much easier anyhow! [laughs]

JF: Now...

MA: So, I went to the guy to give me a bed. He said, "What will I give you? Where will I give you? I, if I don't have, how can I give you?" I say, "Give me a couple pieces wood. I'll make it myself a bed. He says, "Are you a carpenter?" I say, "No, I'm not a carpenter, but a bed I can put together." So he came. He brought a crow bar, you know? And a saw, and an ax, and nails. And he came with me. And he looked around. And he, "Where you came? From somewhere to a house to no?" And he steal a couple [laughs] pieces wood.

JF: Oh, from houses!

MA: [unclear; laughing] He stole a couple pieces wood, and he sat down and he watched me make the bed. When I finished the bed, he says, "You're a carpenter. You will work as a carpenter!" [laughing]

JF: So this was right after you got to this area?

MA: Yeah. So I worked as a carpenter!

JF: Making furniture, or building buildings? Or what did they ask you to do?

MA: [laughs] As a carpenter over there to do is, so, in the stable if something is broken to fix, and to open maybe a window doesn't, to fix it, that's all. And if you needed

wood, if you needed nails, they give you a crowbar, go ahead. [laughs] So sometimes whole days we were going around and just pulling nails from the other.

JF: From buildings?

MA: From the [unclear]. We were hunting for nails! The, the chimney, ours was something wrong with the chimney. It was, the smoke came out, so I did come to him to give me bricks. He said, "Go, take bricks." O.K., I took bricks. So I say I needed a day off to fix my chimney. So, "O.K., you have a day off." He was so nice to me and I say, "Can you give me somebody to help me too?" And so I finish it in a day. If not, maybe takes longer. He says, "I will help you." He came and helped me. And then he helped me fix the chimney. He says, "You will build chimneys from now on." [laughs] Listen to it! So, I build the chimneys. Not only chimneys, only anybody who needed to fix, you know, stuff. So I had a guy who worked with me. So it was already cold, the winter, right? And I builded a chimney in the office. And not in this office. In the office from the, where the tractors there, the shop from the tractors are. Because this was a agriculture, a farm actually. So I had to build a new chimney there. So I told him to give me wood. Wood was very scarce. That was not Siberia. You see, here was no wood at all. To give me wood, to warm up the water and to mix that cement, because with the cold water it just got frozen and so he says, "What else would you want? You must be kidding!" he says to me. I talked to him and he says, "You are here to build a chimney and build it," he says. "And that's all what I know." And I talked it over with the guy with me. He says, "Let's build him a chimney." So we didn't use even mortar. We used snow and water. And it got frozen right away, you know? It got frozen right away. We built a, it was so, it was a pleasure. It got frozen right away. And we builded this. So all what we needed him to assign us that we built it so we will get paid for it.

JF: What happened during the thaw?

MA: One second. So we, he signed us. In the meantime, they made a fire there, and my partner says to me, "Let's go out quick from there." We go out and stay and watch and see that no smoke goes out from there. And we're watching the smoke. We see it thick settles a little bit and later the whole thing falls down! [laughs] So, they called me in. So I told them the story. They gave me wood. They warmed me water! [laughs] You see, here was, the life was, it was like from hell to heaven to get. It wasn't exactly heaven, but...

JF: Comparatively.

MA: Comparison. Oh, and not only this. You see, you worked in a, you didn't work in the, you worked in the in a farm, it was food. It was enough to eat except the winters were awful.

JF: What, was the housing better also?

MA: Oh, the housing was much better. In Siberia was, you know, in Siberia the housing wasn't even insulated. And you know how we had to do? We had to cover the houses with snow all in the beginning. But you had to do it with the first snow when it comes out. Because the first snow was a little wet, and it got frozen, it was a insulation.

And if you waited, you had to evacuate it, the shack. Because later when the snow falls down, the wind blew it away, it was crisp, you know, and they didn't...

JF:

Drier.

MA: Yeah, and over there again we had winters awful winds. The winds, if a wind started, a wind could take, could last about five, six day a week sometimes and you couldn't go out from the house. So I'll never forget, it was there, it was the war going on at that time, you know what I mean? And all the men were away, the Russian men. A matter of fact, they mobilized me to the war too. And they hid me. They sent me away.

JF: Who did? Who hid you?

MA: That guy who was in charge over, in the, as a stevedore.

JF: Hid you?

MA: He knew that I am called to the army. So over there, in Siber-, this was in Siberia. So, you see, all what they can do is during two months they can do it during two months, because after, when the water gets frozen, they, everything gets. Only in the two months they. So, he sent me away somewhere else and he says he is away on a mission. And after the water got frozen, I came back.

JF: I see.

MA: He says, "I wouldn't want to lose you."

JF: Now you had said to me before when we were talking about the difficulty in having any religious observance, that there was a change once you got...

MA: Yeah, yeah.

JF: Outside of Stalingrad.

MA: Now when we lived outside of Stalingrad, my mother died there. And that was already after the war. The war broke up in March, and she died in July.

JF: She died in July of 1945?

MA: 1945. So, I sat *shiva* and they gave me off the eight days, the seven days that I sat *shiva*, and I didn't shave. I didn't shave, and so the *upablysher* [phonetic] what they call it, he is the head of the whole thing, he says, "Why you don't shave?" I say, "I cannot get razor blades." So he brought me a package razor blades. So I told him, "Thank you, but I will not shave," and I told him the whole true. He says, "I appreciate you telling me the true," he says. He didn't do nothing. And I told him it's a religious purpose and he didn't say nothing. Later, so I organized a *minyán* to *daven* in our house. Every day they came before we went to work. We had a *minyán*, and they knew about it. And I didn't care.

JF: Did they say anything to you?

MA: No.

JF: What do you think the difference was?

MA: One minute. And on *Rosh Hashanah*, on the first day *Rosh Hashanah*, nobody went to work. So they saw something. So they sent right away to the headquarters. That's was in Kasnamaz, [phonetic] the next town was the headquarters, like the county

seat, you know? And they notified them, they telephoned him that so and so, nobody went to work. And they came the whole brass came over, you know? And they find out that they *davened* in my place. So they came over and of course a couple of guys were staying guard. I was staying in front. I, and everybody was *talesim*. And we see them coming and we didn't say. Everybody was quiet. You could drop a pin. And all of a sudden, my brother-in-law, how he got the idea, I don't know. They didn't say nothing. They were watching what's going on so quiet. And he takes a *shofar* [ram's horn] and blows the *shofar*. They all, not they walk away but they run away.

JF: Where did he get a *shofar*?

MA: He made it by himself. He made it from a ram's horn. Yeah, he made it by himself, the *shofar*. And he is a very handy, he was a very handy man, awful handy. And when everybody goes away, they send me, they called me. And you see, the war was over already, so they got a little softer. And I don't know, the exact reason I cannot tell you. I cannot, I couldn't read their mind. But you know, my mother always said, "If you give something, you can demand something. If you don't give nothing, you cannot even buy nothing for nothing. If you're a good worker." And I always, I was trying to follow her otherwise. And I was a good worker always. When they needed me, I never let them down. You know what I mean? And I let the whole brigade, you know? And they called me, what it is. And I told to them, "Listen, nothing what you can do. This is a kind of a holiday. And [unclear] tomorrow is another day. And later will be *Yom Kippur* again." So he says, "I'm going to send over tomorrow Shulka. [phonetic]" Shulka was his secretary. "I'm going to send over Shulka and she will make a note. Who is not there, I'm gonna take them off." [chuckles] And that's what he did! So I notified them. I say, "Whoever will not be *davening* will have to go to work." They all came. [laughing]

JF: Oh! You were able to bury your mother in a Jewish manner?

MA: A Jewish burial, yeah. She was, we had another woman die before. And she got a Jewish burial. And Mother, Mother had her shroud, she made it during the year. She collected sheets and she made herself shrouds. Because she even didn't, you know, when we lived in Bodaybo that first year, came spring, it was the awfulest time. People died like flies.

JF: With the warm weather?

MA: When the warm weather started, yeah. The conditions where they lived, you know, the conditions were very. You know, we were lucky it was nine months cold. It would be longer cold we would, and nobody would be able to live there.

JF: I see. There was more disease that spread in the warmer...?

MA: Diseases was so, people died, you know, we could be, we went out in the morning to dig a grave so they told us there is ten people dead. So we dig a grave for now twenty. And when it comes to, you know, close up the graves, they didn't fit any. People died like flies. And I was so lucky that my family, none of them till, in the end, the mother. What can you do?

JF: She died of old age? Of...illness?

MA: I, you could, 61 years? You call that old age?

JF: Mmm.

MA: But she looked a girl. [moving] Excuse me. [tape off then on]

JF: Now from the time of your mother's death, which was right after the end of the war, you said that there was not as much concern over religious observance on the part of the authorities. Were there any other changes after the war was over, as far as your treatment was concerned?

MA: Well, the life became easier a little, and the situation when the war was over, and the economy was... You see, the economy had a, we were not in business, but this economy were bad, our time was, our situation was, we didn't have so good. And if the economy was better, they treated us better. That's like in a household, if you make a nice living, you give a child a bigger allowance and you buy better food. And the same thing was there. And we could notice it. And...

JF: So there was more around.

MA: More around. We had, and so, usually we didn't have a day off. We had to work Sundays even. Now we got a day off and like I told you, at *Rosh Hashanah* we took off. It wasn't such a big crime. They let us go. You know what I mean? They, with the time, if their situation improves, ours improved.

JF: Were you getting any more news, after the war was over, about what had happened?

MA: Oh sure. Oh yeah. A matter of fact, when the war was over, not only when the war was over, when they start to advance, when the Red Army started to advance, we were looking forward to the, get the paper, the *Pravda*. We knew already the Russian language. We could already read Russian, you know, and we mastered the Russian language real good. We learned this very quick, the Russian language. I guess we were between the Russians and that's how you learn a language and it is a Slavish language also which was similar. And we learned this very quick and you know, Ilya Ehrenburg, he always was a good writer. But as long as he had to write what they tell him to write, he couldn't bring out his talent so much. Now he went with the Red Army, and he start sending home articles. Practically in every *Pravda* was an article from Ilya Ehrenburg.

JF: So Ehrenburg's work was not as censored then, after the war?

MA: No, no, they didn't tell him what to write. He just wrote what he saw. And that's what he saw was, we...start to love Stalin what he kept us away from there, what he took us away. You know what I mean? And we find out, you know, I still had hope—not only me, other people—that we left behind relatives that we will see them. We were thinking they are better off than we are. We were thinking in the beginning. But it didn't work out that way. They were in a situation when we, when I start reading Ilya Ehrenburg's articles, I was thinking, "I

will better keep my mouth shut. Who am I to complain?" I was in a heaven comparing what they was.

JF: So Ehrenburg's articles started appearing when the Red Army really started advancing into western Europe?

MA: That's right, western Europe, that's right.

JF: Which was about what year, then?

MA: I guess in 1944.

JF: '44?

MA: Something like that. I don't remember exactly. It must be on the records on the history what time he, I don't remember exactly. I was too busy with myself to keep diaries.

JF: But that was the first news that you had, his articles?

MA: The first news, yeah. His articles was the first news what we had. And we find out about *Babi Yar* at that time. That-