

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

MAX ROISMAN

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Bernice Zoslaw
Date: April 22, 1985

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Melrose Park, PA 19027

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MR - Max Roisman [interviewee]
GR - Goldie Roisman [Max's wife]
BZ - Bernice Zoslaw [interviewer]
Date: April 22, 1985¹

Tape one, side one:

BZ: This is an interview with...

MR: With Max Roisman. I live in Rochester, New York.

BZ: You are a survivor of the Holocaust.

MR: I am a survivor of the Holocaust. I give this interview voluntarily. Maybe it could serve in the future generations. I was born July 25th, 1913, in Poland. A middle class family. My father was a manufacturer of men's clothing. I had five, four, five brothers, one died young, and four that lived till the war. [getting choked up] I don't know if I can. [pause] Two younger brothers that perished in concentration camp Majdanek. My father [probably means mother] was taken on evacuation train from Miedzyrzec, Mezerich, [phonetic], and she was killed by the train. My father, with two younger brothers, went to Majdanek. And they, this, they was killed over there. At this time I was in Majdanek. Now I'm going back to the history of the beginning of the Nazi occupation of Poland. My father was an Orthodox Jew, but not a fanatic. He was a member of the synagogue, supporting the Jewish community in all the aspects. My father was the president of the, what they call it here, the Tailor's Union. And he was pretty popular in the town where he was living. I was living in -- I was born in Warsaw. And my parents, when I was three years old, my parents took me from Warsaw and went to their hometown.

BZ: What year were you born, please?

MR: In Warsaw, Poland.

BZ: In where, what year?

MR: 1913. July 25th, 1913.

BZ: Did any of your family belong to any Zionist organizations?

MR: None of my family did belong to any Zionist or any Socialist or any Communist. We was working people, and we was living our private life. Our sympathy was more with the working class, so-called Jewish Socialist Party, the Bund.

BZ: The Bund.

MR: But we never actively participated. We supported, but we are not participated. None of my brothers, and none of my family did ever participated in any party. Now...

BZ: How would you describe your family's relationship to non-Jews? You know, the Poles, how did you get along?

¹Recorded at the 1985 American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors in Philadelphia, PA.

MR: Our business was mostly with non-Jewish. It was Gentiles. Big farms, contracts. Naturally we will f--we felt here and there that we are Jews. But, the respect for our professionalism, due to the necessity of our service, we was respected.

BZ: Would you describe the service?

MR: For an example, asking me about the service, my father did got contracts with a f--with Ksiaz Czetwertznski, the first, or, what they call it a prin--not a prince. One of the...

BZ: A nobleman?

MR: Largest, one of the largest landowners in the country. We was contracted with them for making all their winter clothes for these drivers, and the heavy-- and the heavy coats. My father was responsible for dressing up the horse riding stable, and many others. Even the young princesses was in charge. Every day when they come for a vacation from the schools, they did come for my father for some riding britches, for blouses, all kind of stuff like this. This same big landowner did own Hotel Europa, in Warsaw, one of the largest hotels. He was very famous in the Polish Senate. He was a pretty good anti-Semite, but, to us, we didn't feel it. As a matter of fact, when the war, the Second World War, started, we did got a lot of money invested in them, for which we never got paid. Due to the interruption, I saw the daughters, knowing them from 12, 13, or 14 years old, until the war when they was living in a little tiny room because their castle was taken from the Gestapo, from the S.S., and they was the owners from this all, land ownership. It's kind of hard to translate each word in English from the Polish, the way I saw it and I understood and I was raised in it. [Someone calls: Max!] Yeah? Yes. [tape off then on] We did not feel exactly on our own this anti-Semite's approach before the war. But we know about it. Now, to which question we going back now? What is the most important? [tape off then on]

BZ: Now, how did the war affect you and your family?

MR: It affected me and my family like any other Jew. Because I was born a Jew, and I think I'm gonna die a Jew. The effect, I really don't know how to describe to you. It started in 1939 when we, I was living in Warsaw. We was married. And we decided to leave Warsaw and go in the direction to the Russian border, with the intent of crossing the border. But it's just happened when we approached the town, which they divided the river Bug, which divided the border between the Russian and the Germans, we...

BZ: What was the name of that town, please?

MR: Slawatycze. This was the border, the crossing border, and the river. We got stopped over there. We couldn't make it the border. We stayed over there for, oh...

GR: About a year.

MR: For about a year. At this time I was, get acquaint--I got acquainted with another man of my profession, a tailor, and he gave me a room. And he says, "You can work with me, and we will share what we will get." He got a lot of work and he couldn't manage, especially when the Germans, the border guards over there, choosed him as their tailor. And there wasn't too many other ones which they could do the work. We never got

paid from them anything, but, if any of them brought a loaf of bread, he shared with me. And, if it was a better German, and he brought in something more, he shared with me. Naturally he's supposed to take a larger percentage of it because he did, got a family, a wife and two children.

GR: Three was children. A little baby from another couple.

MR: Yes, about three children. So, we understand this, and we did got some-- somebody else working too for us. But they got paid from us. I spent in this tow--border town for about a year, but we did got acquainted with certain Germans over there. When something was going on hot, he let us know in advance.

GR: He was, his *Groß vater* was a Jew. [tape off then on]

MR: Over there, in this period of time being in Slawatycza, on this border town, we did get acquainted, and we knew more or less which one is 100 percent murderer, and which it is a little bit less. As a matter of fact we did get acquainted over there with one, his name was Schossi [phonetic], an officer naturally. He used to come in more often, even he didn't need anything special in tailoring. He'd come in to us and sit and talk and tell a little of his life story. He was a teacher. He used to play with the little girls from this man which I was sharing the business.

BZ: Excuse me, were these S.S. or regular German soldiers?

MR: S.S.

BZ: S.S.

MR: S.S. Now, later we founded out that this guy, Schossi, has Jewish inheritance. But one time, when it was really a bad situation, and he knew what it was coming, he warned me in advance to run away. I says, "Look, if I'm gonna run, and this, the town is gonna be circled around with Gestapo and S.S., how am I gonna get out?" He says, "I'll take the post here, and you will run. And when I'll shoot, I'll shoot in the air. Don't worry. Run." And I did. And I survived this time.

BZ: And you feel he had Jewish family. He had...

MR: He mention it by one occasion...

GR: Friday night.

MR: When he, the entire town, it was in danger. Because they decided to burn down this town, completely. Whoever will run away will run away, and the rest is gonna be killed. He come in and he warned me and so-called my boss, to do something. My boss says, "Where am I gonna go? I have a wife and three children. They are small children." Then he pointed for the finger on us. And we decided to leave. And, one time, in a conversation, when he did give us this warning to run away, he demanded from me and from my boss, he did say a word which it was very suspicious to me, not knowing what he is. And he remembered my hand, *tikia kaf*.²

BZ: I see.

²*Taka kaf* Hebrew: to shake hands, a solemn oath or promise, *The Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary*.

MR: That I will not tell to anybody. At this time, my suspicious was really true, that he was a, and he told me that his grandfather, laying on his dying bed, called him once, and asked him to promise that he will never kill any Jews. And he says, "And look at me. I'm an S.S. officer." I says, "Why do you doing this?" And he says, "I'm doing this because I was poor and a family. We didn't got anything to eat. I finally made it as a teacher, and they forced me to step in in the S.S. Nobody knows from where I come, and nobody knows where I am."

GR: [Unclear.]

MR: And I'll go out, and one time, when he did come in, on a Friday night, when the candles was lighted with my wife and by my boss' wife, and we feel uncomfortable. I am not a fanatic Orthodox, especially when I was younger, I was more liberated in Judaism than I am now. But when he says something, and he says, "I swear by the holy candles," our suspicious that come through with this. This is Jewish roots somewhere. And in a later day was it that he mention it, that his grandfather called him and demanded a promise that he will never kill a Jew. I would, I wouldn't swear that he didn't on certain occasions, but it was occasions that I saw him hitting Jewish people.

BZ: You saw him hitting.

MR: Here and there. I criticized him for this, and he says, "Look, if I wouldn't hit him with the gun, he would got shot from Kolby," his partner, walking on guard.

BZ: So it was better.

MR: He was walking patrol, patrolling the river.

BZ: [Unclear.]

MR: And I says, "Why did you do this to Rivkeleh?" He says, "If I wouldn't hit her, she would be dead. Because Kolby - murderer - would kill her." This is the story of Slawatycza. The way it was, we was forced to leave, and I left it. At this time when I ran away one time when he warned me, I ran away to a near towns, called Wisznice. Over there I did got a large family, cousins. Cousins and distant cousin, generations of generations. I come over there, I stay over two night. My wife gave me the signal to come back, through people. And I come back. And later when I did got a warning to leave completely because it's gonna be destroyed, we left. And we went to my father's little town. Over there we stayed around for a little while. I was forced to wear the Star of David.

BZ: Now, and what was the name of that town?

MR: Wohim [phonetic – probably means Wohyn].

BZ: Wohim.

MR: Wohim. Naturally we were all, we all were...

BZ: Could you spell it? Excuse me.

MR: W-O-H-I-M. Wohim. This is in the state of Lublin, central Poland. Now, naturally we all was forced to wear the Star of David. I was blond when I was young, and I really looked like a *shaygetz* [non-Jew]. And I be, tried to avoid as much as I can, and not wearing the stripe. Coming back to this little town I didn't got where to put my hands.

My father's big house was burned down. Nothing was left. He was living in a little tiny dirt house by a farmer, not to turn around. We stayed for a night or two and we found a little place, an old friend of my father, Gentiles. And I went over there and I stayed, but what to do? So I risked my life. I put on this typical Polish cap and I did, he's got a neighbor, I was interested in buying a sewing machine, to be able to do some work to make a little *parnose* [Yiddish: livelihood]. So, I did get organized with this guy, and he was a rea--a typi--he wa--he wasn't a typical, he *was* a Gentile. And I did dress up like a typical Gentile, and I went to Warsaw and I got connections how to get in in the ghetto, from local to over there, old friends. And I went to Warsaw. It went smooth. I hadn't hear on the train any antisemitic expressions. Nobody did ever suspect that I am a Jew. We went to Warsaw, and I get my contact to the-- how to get in. We went in, and in the ghetto, this Gentile was wearing a Star of David, and me, too. He bought a machine, I bought it, and we smuggled out, and we went home, and I start doing a little work. Making a living, half hungry, half feeded. It wasn't important any more.

BZ: You just wanted to live.

MR: That's it. And then I did got an order from the *Kultusgemeinde* [German for Jewish religious community] the Jewish, what do they call it, you know...

BZ: Council leaders?

MR: Yes, and it was set up councils, you know?

BZ: Yes.

MR: To go to this open camp, Suchowola, and to work for the Germans, because, "They need a tailor, and you're the only one that's you did not live here. We can't take this old man or this old man or this old man." So they selected me to go and I went over there and I worked for the S.S. My wife was left over in the cit--in the little town, oh, doing little things. And then we saw the time is getting closer and closer to liquidate this little town. My wife start working through contacts for the mayor from the city, and it's a substantial landowner, and it was plenty of work to do. And he was willing to take in some people. To him, he thought that he's rescuing them, but he took money for taking in some of this labor. She was over there, but it did come to a point that this couldn't exist any longer, so my wife joined me in this open camp in Suchowola. I was performing strictly work for the Gestapo, for the S.S., for the management of the landowners, for this entire setup. And my wife was set up in the, in a meeting room with other five, six women, and they was doing knitting. They brought wool, they brought nylons, they brought patterns, and the girls did it. This was going on under awful circumstances. Barracks, which it was put up I don't know for, before was some Gestapo, but they were soldiers. And in these barracks, no beds, just straw on the floor, no water, no showers, no...

BZ: No facilities.

MR: No facilities for living. And nothing to eat, too, and no pay. I used to get once a day a little soup.

BZ: Soup.

MR: From the so-called service kitchen. Not from the Ges--from the S.S. kitchen, but from the services.

BZ: The slave labor.

MR: Yes, from the slave labor, no, there was working, working over there. You know, working people, a lot of was working in the palace. So I did get a little soup, too. And for all of them, for the rest of them, there was a kitchen, and our girls used to cook. What? Potato with water. That's all. And this was the food what they gave us. We took a few sack of potatoes, sometimes cabbage, from the, from over there, from the magazines, or storage rooms, which they gave the Gestapo. And this was the feeding. When the Warsaw Ghetto start getting liquidated, this was in the beginning of May, and the uprising was partially over, they start liquidating this open camp, too. And this was on May 3rd, 1943. They brought the trucks and they loaded us, all of us, on the trucks, and took us to Majdanek. In Majdanek was was...

GR: [Unclear.]

MR: In Majdanek, we was about three months. Not fully three months maybe. And in one time I figure, I founded out that the transports are going, to Auschwitz. Not exactly Auschwitz. We didn't know. Transports. I says, "It couldn't be any worse than this. So let's go in the transports." I did got a chance to let my wife know that I am going, and she signed up to go. I was with my brother-in-law, my wife's brother. And he signed up, and we all went to Auschwitz.

BZ: You didn't have any idea what went on there.

MR: We didn't know where we're going, but this was Auschwitz. In Auschwitz we was shortly, I don't know, about eight or ten hours. We were showered, hair cut, and dressed in these new uniforms.

GR: And the number.

MR: And numbered, and transported to the other side of the city, so called Buna.³ BunaWerka. This is a, an industry which it could be only built with slaves, or with slaver work. It is under the protection of International Farben Industry, I. G. International Farben Industry. It's like a DuPont system in the United States. I was working over there on certain *Kommandos* here and there, a real slaverer work. And I was never actually so threatened on a inspection. I was always on the husky side. Beside this, in the evenings, I did got good connections with the clothes chambers, and they gave me from over there old pants and old coats, and I would make caps. So here and there I used to get a little soup, a piece of bread, and I managed. I was never threatened on a inspection, to look skinny or like to be threatened with the life. From this, could it be Mengele or not Mengele. I was pretty good. Oh, I was 110 pounds.

BZ: Yeah, but you weren't as starved as the other prisoners.

MR: Yes, but, to compare with the 70 pounders, with the 60 pounders, and 90 pounders, I was still 110, maybe more than 110. This was until January 17th, 1945. It's the

³I.G.. Farben set up the Buna camp; buna is synthetic rubber. Dictionary of the Holocaust, p.45.

day of the evacuation. They furnished us with the German name, called a *Rucksack*, a bag, a...

BZ: Oh, yeah.

MR: Shoulder bag.

BZ: A back pack.

MR: Yeah, a shoulder pack? And whatever we, they told us to take it, we took it, and by the, we walk out, they gave us a bread and a half, which meant a kilo and a half of bread. Living for so many years in hunger, this kilo and a half could last me ten minutes.

BZ: [chuckles]

MR: Even the bread was half wood and half flour. Yes, melted wood for flour, and mixed it with flour. But they, I could eat this bread in 10 minutes, but we saved it. And we was going, and on the march we saw left and right, you know, disappearing. Just disappearing. Couldn't go on any longer. Laying on the sides left and right.

BZ: What did the Germans do with them when they laid down like that?

MR: I don't want to go into this. Heh, naturally a lot of, a lot of, a lot of shooting we hear.

BZ: [Unclear.]

MR: Anyway, this was on the end of the columns. I don't know how long the column was, because it was 12,000. By the end of the columns, you know, there was a group of Ges--S.S., traveling on trucks and finishing off.

BZ: They weren't walking.

MR: No. But, it's an important episode happened to me in this march. I was walking with a, in the whole march, starting from Ausch--from Buna, with a close friend of mine, which he kn--I knew him from before the war. And I was working with him in this camp in Suchawola, and then in Majdanek I was together with him. And, we was together in Buna. In this march, it's worth mentioning. One of the guards gave me his bag, his shoulder bag, to carry, because it was too heavy for him. He never saw the bag back.

BZ: [chuckles]

MR: I grabbed it. After this long a march we landed in, oh, what is it called? Gleiwitz. Gleiwitz is a distance from Buna...

BZ: Excuse me, was this a Nazi guard or like a *Kapo*?

MR: A Nazi guard!

BZ: It was a Nazi guard.

MR: Oh sure! Going on the side, walking, in a back of us.

BZ: What did that bag contain? It had food in it?

MR: All kinds of it.

BZ: [chuckles] Oh, all right.

MR: I'll come to it.

BZ: Yes.

MR: So finally when we landed after two days and nights of marching, this...

GR: [Unclear.].

MR: What I am talking. It's important.

GR: Yes, everything is...

MR: Go take a walk.

GR: [chuckles]

MR: Take a walk!

GR: [Unclear.]

MR: Anyway, when we landed in Gleiwitz, and they put us in barracks to stay over night and the following day we have to be loaded on trains, and go to Germany. Me and my friends, we unpacked this...

BZ: [chuckles]

MR: This Rucksack, and I found a treasure over there. It was *Schnapps*. It was *kuchen* [cake]. It was salami. It was bread. And we did got a ball!

BZ: [chuckles]

MR: At night, late in the night, we hear walking in, around, and calling for this Rucksack. I never walk up to tell him something, and he never saw it. From Gleiwitz, when they loaded us on the trains, it was open carriages. It was January, it was cold, snowing. The only food was the snow from the sky. One time they stopped the train, and they start throwing loaves of bread. Whoever was healthy and could stand up and catch, he did it. And some of this bread hit people that they died. In the faces. It was one early morning, about six o'clock. We was traveling in Czechoslovakia with this train. And the people was going, walking to work. It was an underpassage, or an overpass, a bridge. And the people start, and this train was standing. There wasn't a green light to get in in the station or pass in the station. And these people, I don't know how they know, they start throwing down their breakfasts, and their lunches, everything on the train.

BZ: My God. Before this, these were Czech people. Before this, were there people other than Czechs that threw you bread on the trains?

MR: No we hadn't, no, this was the Germans. In certain stations...

BZ: The German people were throwing it?

MR: No, they brought in trucks.

BZ: Yes.

MR: And they throw bread.

BZ: Oh, they were supposed to feed you.

MR: But we was trav-...

BZ: It wasn't out of charity.

MR: We was traveling ten days.

BZ: I see.

MR: Imagine. So a few, two or three times they throw bread on it. Some of them got it, some of them not, but we shared.

BZ: I see.

MR: If it, on one of these wagons it come, let's say 20 breads, we shared. Now, when, finally when we arrived in, what is it, I forgot, Heinkel Werke, Oranienburg? Eh, Oranienburg. This was a place where it was actually manufactured the German Luftwaffe, the *Wulf*? The *Messerschmitt*. I was assigned to work in a brick factory. Every morning they took us about 30 kilometers. And over there I was carrying on my shoulders 20 bricks, straight from the oven, out to a place where we stacked up these bricks. And going around and around the same thing, all day long. One day that was about 11 o'clock. I heard calling my number. And I says to a guy walking behind me, I said, "Now that's the end. Where did he come to my number? How did he get my number, and what do they want it? And don't say nothing that's me." This was going on until noon. Lunch time. They put up the, this food, you know, and we all approach to take it. And I took my portion and I sit down, turning my back to this guy--he's walking around and looking for numbers. And I turned around. And finally they approached me and yelling the number. I saw I can't go on any longer. I says, "That's me." So one guy approached me from the Gestapo naturally. And he says, "Why don't you respond when we are calling?" I says, "I didn't pay any attention of anybody. I have my work to do, and I am doing my work properly." I says, "I was going." "Didn't you hear?" I says, "No. I haven't heard because my head is not what somebody's talking." Finally they took me, and they was talking to me very gently. I didn't know what happened here. And they asked the supervisor from this brick factory, "Is here a shower facilities?" He say, "Yes." They took me in this shower facilities, and they showered me, and they shaved me, and they brought in perfect clothes. It was really a miracle, the way I looked and what they made of me. And I didn't know what's going on. And finally they gave me some food, other food. Not this. And they took me in a limousine.

BZ: Limousine?

MR: Gestapo on both sides, S.S., naturally, on both sides. And there was a truck with about 20 behind this limousine. Sitting over there in the limousine I asked, "Gentlemen, I really don't understand. I don't understand too much at all. But what's going on?" He says, "The *Kommandant* sent for you." I says, "Does he knows me? Do I know him?" And he told me his name, and he, they told me, that's one of my friends works in the office over there. "The *Kommandant* asked him if in this transport it come any tailors. And he says, 'Yes, as a matter of fact there's one guy here. He was sleeping in an upper bed with me in Auschwitz.' And he gave them your name. And the *Kommandant* sent for you." I come in over there and he greeted me very friendly. He was a murderer.

Tape one, side two:

MR: This *Kommandant* was well-known to everybody that he didn't eat a breakfast before he killed a few of the prisoners. It was not just Jewish prisoners. It was Poles. It was Russians. It was Ukrainians. It was a lot of prisoners in this camp, in this Heinkel--so-called Heinkel Werke we was working. He gave me the orders, what I...

BZ: Excuse me. That name you just said, that Haynkel, is that the kind of job it was that, what you just said?

MR: The Heinkel Werke?

BZ: Yeah.

MR: Heinkel Werke is a airplane manufacturer.

BZ: Oh, could you spell it?

MR: It is a manufacturer of airplanes. Heinkel Werke.

BZ: Heinkel Werke.

MR: Well known to everybody in the world. The *Messerschmitt* and the *Wulfes*.

BZ: Oh yeah that I, yes, that I got. So where, the...

MR: The *Focke-Wulfes* and the *Messerschmitte*.

BZ: Yeah.

MR: This is the place they were manufactured over there.

BZ: It was called Heinkel Werke.

MR: Heinkel Werke.

BZ: Yeah.

MR: And my or--the camp was called Sachsenhausen.

BZ: Oh, that was Sachsenhausen!

MR: Sachsenhausen. Our camp, Oranienburg, by the Berlin, this is a division of Sachsenhausen. From us to Sachsenhausen, that was 22 kilometers. But this Oranienburg, so-called, is affiliated. Everything was brought from over there, for the use of the camp. He set me up in the tailor shop, this Major Heydrich, and he gave me orders. I didn't have the right to sew on one button to anybody without his permission. The same day he brought me in several uniforms, already cut, and I says, "What happened to these uniforms? Why didn't the tailor finish them?" He told me that the tailor is old and he can't do it anymore. So he brought me in about three uniforms, with all the trimmings. Everything was there, just to have them fitted, and maded to his selves. I start working, and I told him, "That's a lot of work, and I need some help." He says, "Find tailors and arrange them here. I'll leave it to you." And I did it. I did arrange some of them. And we did the work properly. I didn't finish with one, he's up with more and more. And if this was not enough, he start bringing me in his wife, with fabrics, and patterns, and designs, to make coats for his wife, for his relatives. I did as much as I could. He was fair with me. As much as a murderer he was, but to push me in a package of cigarettes that nobody can see it, he did it. The food was terrific. He furnished me with S.S. food. Whatever the Gestapo, the S.S. eat it, that was

sent to me. We was only four tailors, and a *Kapo*, from the clothing warehouse. It was five. And he sent twenty liters of rice with goulash, or noodles with goulash, good for the same what a Gestapo was eating. Now, we eat what we could, and what we wanted, and the rest, I was giving away. Sometimes I have to steal this, because the guys didn't let. "I'll have for later." And I said, "No, we got ours." And I did got old friends from Auschwitz, and I really did want to see them a little bit, you know, on more skin on them. And I gave them away. Now, this was not enough. A *Kapo* went sick, and I took over the entire clothing.

BZ: You were in charge.

MR: And I was in charge of everything. Then he...

BZ: What was the *Kapo*? A Pole?

MR: A *Kapo* is a, no, it was a German, a polit-...

BZ: It was a German.

MR: Yeah, a political prisoner, a nice, beautiful man. But he did got tuberculosis. Because he was in prisons before. He was a Communist. But really a good man.

BZ: He wasn't cruel at all.

MR: He was really good. He did got an open heart to talk with us, and to explain us everything. Now when I took over command, over this warehouse, where it was everything, then it started. I wouldn't be ashamed to tell you that I was a thief. The windows from the warehouse was, you know, locked up. What, what, how...

BZ: Barricaded?

MR: Barricaded.

BZ: Yes.

MR: With iron bars. But I did got my guys, all from Auschwitz, and I gave them signals, and they knew when they come to the window, they got a pair of shoes, they got a pair of boots, they got a pair of pants. I dressed them up like going to a wedding!

BZ: [chuckles]

MR: After a little while I saw it's getting short everything. So I play dumb when he comes in for inspection. I says, "I don't know. Emil left it this way and--" Finally, I did got a hunger for better food. So, I start getting acquainted with these German civilians, supervisors from the shop here and there. And I asked them for butter. I asked them for salami. And I asked them for, for vodka. I did need it for Emil, for this *Kapo*. And they demanded something from me. They demanded machine needles, which they couldn't get it nowhere. So there was, that was in the millions over there. It wasn't theirs, it was ours. So, I start stealing needles. I give away the needles. One guy asked me for a machine. I stole I had from a machine and give it to him. He brought me live fish. And I gave it to Emil, to the *Kapo*. Now, cigarettes, I accumulated so many cigarettes that I was feeding all the guys, whoever comes to the window, a package of cigarettes. It was fun. I could say it was fun, until I reached a point that I got to say, April 6th. That was a, an air alarm. I closed the shop, and I ran to a shelter.

BZ: An air, oh, an air alarm.

MR: Air alarm.

BZ: That was in 1945?

MR: 1945, April 12th.

BZ: April 12th.

MR: Correction.

BZ: [Unclear.]

MR: April 8th, correction. And on this alarm, there was no, only one way, the nearest shelter, underground shelter. And I closed the door, not on, not with a lock on, not with a key, but to let, I was responsible to get all of them out. Emil wasn't anymore over there. So, I got all of them, the helpers out, and we ran to this underground shelter. And on my way to the shelter I got a bullet. The bullet was a, it's, it was from an American airplane, from a Spitfire. It was from maybe an F-16 or a maybe F-15 at this time. And the bullet was poisoned. But, the bullet went in and out, missing I don't know a hundredth of a millimeter maybe from the bone. After...

BZ: Where did it go? What part of you, the bullet? In your leg? In your thigh?

MR: On my right leg.

BZ: On my.

MR: On the upper thigh. When the alarm was over, this Commander asked for wounded or dead. They gave him the number. They didn't know me. So they gave him the number. And he in a desperate voice, "This is the of tailor!" And he asked him, "Where is he?" And he told him that I am in the so-called hospital. He ran over there and he saw me, you know. He called together a, the doctors. There was one Polish doctor, one French, and one German. And he says to do everything is possible. The German doctor said they have to amputate. And as far I remember, I was not under any influence of...

BZ: Drugs or...

MR: Of drugs or anything, and he says, "If you cut off his leg, I'll cut off your head!" Now, there was no antibiotics. There was nothing. So they cut it open, and they cleaned it out. And he was standing behind me, holding my head. And he says, "I'll show you how to do tailoring!" - you know, when they was sewing up my wound. Finally, this, I was left in the hospital. Little by little I start feeling better, but one of a sudden they start evacuating the camp. And I was living in the hospital. At the same time they start evacuating the hospital, to Sachsenhausen.

BZ: Gas chambers.

MR: To the gas chambers. One of the guys which he was going with the trucks around and around, says to me, "Max, watch out. Hide, wherever you can." I says, "Where am I gonna hide? Look at my condition with the leg. I can't." He says, "I'll get you crutches." And he got me crutches. And the whole hospital personnel was evacuated. There was nobody there. He says, "We are taking the worst ones, but tomorrow could be your day too." So during the night, what I did, is I tore a few sheets and make bandages. And with this, I climbed up in the early morning. I climbed up. He showed me. This guy knew.

He showed me a way how to get up on the attic, in this barrack. And I got up over there in the attic. And over there I was hiding for two days. There was nobody in the camp, and it was quiet, so I got down. When I got down, I saw there's quite a few left. Not only me that was left, because they didn't got a time to evacuate, and they ran away. And in the afternoon, a entire column of, I don't know what kind of sort of weapon, it was Army, Navy, or whatever it was, or it was, it was not any S.S. An army moving back, -- camp in this camp for over night. It was, and later it was a mixture. Because I saw S.S., too, between them.

BZ: This was in Sachsenhausen?

MR: In Sach--in Oranienburg, by Berlin.

BZ: Yeah.

MR: And after not sleeping all night, just listening what's going on. It's going. It's going. What it was going on, but, I wasn't anymore on the attic. I was on a bed. I hear them talking. That was in a little kind of room. There was about eight of them, S.S., that's one is telling the other one--and I was close to this place--he says to him, "We have to run because the Russian are came close. Let's run away." And, it didn't take too long, and all of them was dressed and on their motorcycles and on Jeeps and cars, and they start running away. And this larger column, Army, right after them. It was 7 o'clock, 7:30, there was nobody, no there, except the civilian defense. And a really Civilian Defense, I didn't know it, I find it out later, they are about 20 or 30 healthy guys did run away when it was the evacuation, and they did hide in the underground shelters, and in the woods. Because the entire factory, the entire industry, was in the woods. They did hide. And then, all of a sudden, when it start getting quiet, they come out, and there was Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, and a pretty good Jewish guys too. And with us getting organized. Now, the main question was water, water for the people, here in the hospital. We selected a committee, and we start organizing. Now, we found what is, by the main. kitchen, we found a barrel on wheels. Now, they want to go out from the gate for water, the civil guar--the Civil Defense doesn't let them. So they went the larger column, they cut their hats off, and they took the rifles from them, you know, put on rifles, and went for water. And we, they brought water and they start helping whatever they could. They brought a field kitchen to the hospital, and they was over there, naturally the committee established this, rice for the people, you know, the, with the, what do you call it, diarrhea. Rice, and tea. Just a half a cup of tea. It was pretty good organized, and we waited about two days. And, the Russians approached the camp. And then they set up a temporary camp from so-called, the KGB, you know. And start asking questions and this and this. I was interviewed, too. I told them what it was and what I saw, and that's all. And I told them that I need help, because I have a wounded leg. They gave me some chocolate. They gave me some candy. And they brought a doctor. The doctor says, "It's pretty good, but you're not ready for the road. You have to stay here." So I stayed for a few days, and then they look me up again. They gave us pretty good food. Besides this, we didn't need the food there. We brought all the food

from the main kitchen, from the main, you know, reserves. But they did keep it for the S.S. and for the camp. They brought it here, bread enough, butter enough, sugar, everything. And finally we did organize a march for home, for east. I went with them, naturally on crutches. They took by a farmer some horses, the big ones, and they loaded me on the wagon, and we was traveling. We traveled to a certain point. Nights we did stay and stay over night in farmers' houses, in German houses which they ran away, you know, from the on-coming Russians. Finally I reached the border, no, we reached our, yes, we reached the border, and over there we did get there loaded on trains. Who, we broke up, whoever and wherever we could, we was traveling east. I reached a destination where I did got once, when I was separated from my wife. I told her, "Should anybody from us survive, this is the place that you can ask. Should I survive, I will ask for you here. Should you survive, you come here and ask." And I was going in this direction. I arrived over there. The distance from the train, when I landed over there, to this farmer's house, was a kilometer and a half. It's exactly one mile. It took me three hours, on the crutches, and I reached the house. Naturally the people...

BZ: Were the people at home? At home?

MR: I stay in this hallway. I stay in this hallway, you know, like a farmhouse. She opened the door, and she says, "I'm sorry. We are so poor. We don't have nothing to give away." I call her, I didn't call her by the name right away. This is the farmer where I was living with my wife before...

BZ: Before.

MR: They took us to the camps.

BZ: Yes.

MR: Anyway, I...

BZ: You didn't have anything to eat then?

MR: I talked to her and I asked her, "How is, Eddie?" The son. "How is Olga?" And, "How is Judy?" And she asked me, "How do you know the names of my children?" And she says, "Olga is not alive anymore. She died on typhus. And, the rest of the children, this is married, this is in the service, so and so." And she did not recognize at all. And I was living with them together. Finally, I told them who I am. And she says, "It's unbelievable." She called her husband. He was a real angel, a man.

BZ: An angel.

MR: He didn't got, if you hear, if you hear sometimes, gallbladder, he didn't got a gall. [chuckles] Heh! Which it is good, a real nice man. There, they rescued me a few times.

BZ: They did, he rescued you?

MR: They hide us.

BZ: Oh, he hid you.

MR: They hide. They did. I have to admit. I wouldn't say that's, that they didn't want something for this, but we didn't got it.

BZ: Yeah. So as long as you didn't have it, he did it anyway.

MR: Yes, they did it. Sometimes in under pressure. Due to their financial situations, financial conditions, she was always, you know, aggravated, not having anything to give.

GR: Very poor people.

MR: Very poor people.

GR: Just one or two potatoes she gives, gave us to eat.

MR: So finally they took me in. They took me in.

BZ: So she boiled the potatoes? She would give you, she would share that with you.

MR: Yeah. She took me in, and he gave me a cigarette. And then she warmed water, and you know, and like on a real farm there's wooden tub, where she washed the laundry. They warmed the water and they washed me. They put me to bed, and they called a doctor. He saw the condition. The doctor recognized me right away, because he knows us before the war. And he says, "You have infected. You need attention." I says, "Doctor, I don't have any money. When I'll get on my feet, I'll reward you." He says, "I don't want anything." And he treated me, and after a few days, I was on my feet. When the infection start, you know, disappearing, I walked out on crutches and look around and see people. One morning I walked out. This wasn't in the morning. It was about ten, eleven o'clock. I was really, completely out of order. I couldn't eat nothing. This woman didn't have enough to buy a pound of bread. She went to the bakery and brought the rolls for me, and I couldn't eat them. Finally when I reached a day that I ate a half a roll, and I took two sip of milk, because I was 98 pounds, she was running around and telling every neighbor that I ate. And one...

BZ: And the other Poles knew that they were taking care of you?

MR: Yes, all the neighbors around, sure.

GR: Yeah, and they killed a lot of Jews [unclear] over there.

BZ: And they...

MR: And there...

BZ: Did those same neigh--yeah, well...

GR: After the war.

BZ: After the war. I know they killed a lot of the Jews.

GR: Yes.

BZ: But her particular neighbors were...

GR: [Unclear.]

MR: No, not these people, not these people.

BZ: Not these people.

GR: Not they, only these...

BZ: They were decent.

MR: Anyway, I walked out one day and I'm greeting this neighbor, their neighbors, you know. But they know me, because I grew up here. "Hello! Hello!" And finally I saw a Jeep arriving. And I approached this Jeep, and I saw a girl which we was in the same camp with her in Suchowola. And my wife met her in Germany.

GR: We was working.

MR: They was march, and she asked me, "Is Goldie home?" I says, "What are you talking? Is Goldie alive?" She says, "I walked with her two weeks ago! In this and this place!"

GR: We walked to another [unclear].

MR: And she says, "I lost her!" I says, "No, I don't know nothing about her. You were the first, you're telling me!" She says, "Don't stay here!" I says, "What happened?" And she told me a story that a, how many people it was killed here in a house a few weeks ago. I didn't know. Nobody told me. These people where I was staying, they didn't want to tell me, to scare me. But, this guy, the owner, he was on guard 24 hours of the day when I was over there, listening, if something--it doesn't come for me. And they was after me one time. And he told them, "What do you want from him?" That's what he told them, "What do you want from him? He is wounded. He is sick. He will not live here. What do you want from him?" So finally they let him, it was, a matter of fact, a cousin of theirs was active in this AK⁴ so-called.

BZ: Oh, yeah, the AK.

MR: Yeah.

BZ: Yeah.

MR: The AK.

BZ: That's, that's what it was.

MR: So one of their cousins was active in this.

BZ: They were always killing Jews there.

MR: And he was talking about getting me. And I remember him being a customer of my father.

BZ: Is that right. But he still...

MR: But, what are you gonna do? That's the way it is.

BZ: But you were a Jew and that's what they were doing.

MR: So he...

BZ: They were hunting Jews.

MR: He told them to bug off. And, the morning when I talked to this girl, she says, "Whatever you got, take it and let's go. Come!" And I took it. She told me the story and I took it. I don't know what is there when I arrived.

GR: And he didn't know if she's alive for sure.

MR: So, finally, when I went over there to this town, it was 26 kilometers, and, or maybe 40 kilometers. And I later took a walk, with the crutches, and we met this woman,

⁴Armia Krajowa – underground military organization in occupied Poland.

what my wife told you in her story. And I asked her, "How is she dressed?" And then I back up. I says, "I am asking you how she is dressed, how I know what she has got on now? I only know when she left me, what she has got on." But, what are you gonna do?

GR: [Unclear.]

MR: I can't walk. So there was standing a guy over there, a so-called policeman, a Jewish policeman, and I says, "Yidel, help me." He says, "What? You want help?" He took one of, with a horse and buggy that was standing, you know, for a, getting rides here and there. Like here is taxis. Taxi drivers. Over there, there wasn't taxi drivers.

GR: Horse, yeah.

MR: Horse and buggy. And he called him, and he says, "Go on." And we left for the station. And when I come to the station, he run in fast. Now, he didn't know my wife, but another one, what my wife told you, this guy Moishe, he grew up together. He--they knew each other like [pause; recorder noise] (It's going.) And, he jumped in and he met my wife. And he told her that I am, that I am here. She says, "Where is he?" And, finally, finally, I made it to the stairs, and I walked in. And this was one end of the beginning, from freedom. We settled later, we lived for quite a while in...

GR: Six months.

MR: My wife's hometown. We lived for a little while. Some of them come back from Russia, some from here, from camps. We did get a little settled, and then we decided to go west.

GR: I cook all of them. Tell it.

MR: What?

GR: We had one table, and I cooked for there...

MR: Oh, this is not important.

GR: About 23 people. We [unclear].

MR: Anyway, we decided to go west. And we went to this town...

GR: Dzierzoniów.

MR: Dzierzoniów. Or...

GR: Reichenbach.

MR: Reichenbach, near Breslau, in the German occupied territory. We lived over there a few years, and then we decided to go further.

BZ: At the refugee camps there?

MR: No, no.

BZ: No, you just lived...

MR: No, I was a [unclear].

BZ: Lived private.

MR: Got a shop.

GR: No.

BZ: Yes, a [unclear].

MR: Got a store. I was working.

BZ: Oh! Well that's what I...

MR: My ol-...

BZ: Wanted to know.

MR: My older son was born over there.

GR: [Unclear.]

MR: And I did got a shop with, I employed people. And, finally we decided it's time to leave this, this sweet Poland, and go somewhere else. And we went to Israel. In Israel, was very hard for me. They don't need tailors over there. I was working on building industries, and here and there. I didn't make it. Finally, a friend of mine left for Canada, a close friend. And he promised to send me a certificate. He did. And when he sent me the certificate, I packed it up and went, to Canada, through Italy. And in Italy, there was an antisemitic council, and I got stucked over there with nothing in the pocket. Not to live and not to die, nothing. Finally we reached out to old friends, and wherever we could, for help. My wife's, a cousin from Germany helped us a little, and we made a move, to go through, cross the border, to Austria. And we did it. And we stopped in in a camp, in a refugee camp, and stayed over there until, what was it...

GR: 19--till January 13th...

MR: Until January 12th, 13th.

GR: 13th.

MR: 194--'5-...

GR: Six.

MR: Fifty-six. Being in Germany, I bought, in Austria. I bought a sewing machine, and I was working for myself. And I was also working for the USEC, United States [unclear] Center. And I got paid from them. It was connected with the U.S. Embassy. And I could have maybe gone to the United States earlier, but due it to shortage in, for a qualified tailor for them, I was teaching in the ORT.

BZ: In the ORT school?

MR: Yes. I didn't get paid from them, but I did get paid from the USEC, United [unclear] Center. And finally, I insisted on my boss, from the Embassy, "Let me go." He says, "As soon you'll give me a reliable man, I'll let you go." And I gave him a man, a Hungarian, and I got my visa. And I come to the United, I was in New York for a while, and then I landed in Rochester, New York.

GR: January 19th...

MR: January 19 or 20 we arrived in Rochester, New York.

GR: And January 13, 1956 we arrived [unclear].

MR: We arrived in Rochester and then in Rochester I worked for a man for a short while and then I opened a clothing store. And I got a tailor shop, too. A little help, employment, and thanks God...

GR: Now we're retired.

MR: I edu-...

GR: I was working in the house.
MR: I educated my children. One is an architect, the other one is a lawyer.
GR: [Unclear] educate the kids to...
BZ: Wonderful!
GR: [Unclear.]
MR: And I am an old man!
GR: [Unclear.]
MR: With a lot of disease, but happy! [laughs]
GR: We have two nice kids.
MR: Thank you.
BZ: Oh, thank you! Thank you!
MR: This was a *megilleh* [long story].
GR: [Unclear.]
MR: What?
GR: [Unclear.]

MR: Now, you--[tape off, then on] After the conclusion of my interview with the volunteer worker, I remind me about something. When they evacuated our camp in Suchowola, in the state of Lublin, before they evacuated, they cleaned us out of every penny, of every valuables, of everything.

GR: Of everything.

MR: One of the guys, his name was Leyzer Shteiner [phonetic], a tall, six-foot-five man, he forgot to pull out from the pocket, two-and-a-half dollar. Because when they was, everybody was emptying them, there, the pockets, to a basket, he mistakenly, not intentionally, mistakenly left in the pocket two-and-a-half dollar, and he got shot in the front of us. His name was Leyzer, I just mentioned the name.

GR: Reingoldshtein?

MR: La--yeah...

GR: Leyzer Shtein.

MR: Leyzer Shtein. He was shot, and the shooter was Rudolph Schultz was his name. He should have a good indication, because one of our friends ran away in the woods, and he shot off an arm of his. This guy that he shot his arm off lives in Toronto.

GR: He lives in a very good life.

MR: He lives in Toronto.

GR: We see him often [unclear].

MR: He ran away a day before they evacuated us. He knew something. And he with, him with...

GR: They kill them in the woods...

MR: Him with...

GR: They took away his shoes...

MR: Him with two guys.

GR: [Unclear] where he was going.
MR: He shot him. He pulled off his boots, and ran away.
GR: And he took it away the gun from him.
MR: You should see the stature of, a little guy like this. [laughs]
BZ: Is that right?
MR: He shot him in the arm.
GR: He's a very good guy.
BZ: He shot, and he lost his arm?
MR: He lost his arm. He took off his boots.
BZ: He took off his boots?
MR: And he told him, "This is for everybody. This is for Leyzer. This is for this."
BZ: Oh, that's fantastic! I wish [unclear].
MR: He's a character.
GR: Thank you very much.
BZ: All right, and thank you.
MR: I wish I would have this. I want to memorize [unclear].
BZ: Yeah, well, it's on the tape now, right?
MR: Yes.
BZ: Yes.
GR: We will get this too, yes?
BZ: Oh, yeah, you will get it.
GR: And we will give to our sons. We told them...
BZ: Yes.
GR: From time to time, but it was real hard to talk. When we was in Israel for the get-together between the Holocaust survivors, we was going to that.
MR: I collapsed in Israel.
BZ: Pardon?
MR: I collapsed in Israel.
BZ: Oh, you collapsed in Israel.
GR: Yeah, he...
MR: I was on a place, and I saw pictures and vrooommmph.
GR: When I come back, I start to tell my younger son. And, to the older son, I used to talk. I was stronger maybe. To him, I can't talk too much. I denied it.
BZ: Well, it's a wonderful...
MR: Well, I talk to them occasionally.
BZ: And so, thank God, you're here and...
MR: But...
BZ: You've raised a magnificent family.
MR: What is here? What is here, on the top?
BZ: Yes, that you can send. You have to put your name here too.

GR: He was laying and crying on the couch and I talked to him, how was it. He was crying.

BZ: Oh my.

GR: He went for this time to Florida to come to make the second bar. Was two bars - New York State's and Florida.

MR: Florida.

GR: It's a very good place. It's very good.

MR: Oh, he's got a good practice. In other words...

GR: We're very happy for him.

MR: April twenty--22nd.

BZ: Oh!

GR: He's a very nice boy.

MR: [Unclear] the 22nd.

BZ: You raised a magnificent family and you sh--*zei gezunt* [you should be well].

GR: Yes!

BZ: It's marvelous that you're here and that you've done such...

MR: You know, when I come back...

GR: [Unclear.]

MR: When I come back from Israel, this is nothing, in Israel...

GR: In Israel.

MR: And I talked to the Pioneer Women...

GR: And in the *shul* they called him.

MR: And I made a tape. I was going with him to school one time. He was a-
[Tape ran out, Ed.]