

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

SIMON AUFSCHAUER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Josey Fisher

Date: May 13, 1982

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Gratz College

Melrose Park, PA 19027

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SA - Simon Aufschauer [interviewee]

JF - Josey G. Fisher [interviewer]

Date: May 13, 1982

Tape one, side one:

JF: This is an interview with Mr. Simon Aufschauer on May 13, 1982, with Josey Fisher. Mr. Aufschauer, can you tell me where and when you were born, and a little bit about your family?

SA: Yes, I was born the 15th of February in 1915, in a town, Żółkiew...

JF: Approximately...

SA: It's about 30 kilometers from Lemberg [Lvov].

JF: And Lemberg at that time was...

SA: Galicia. There I got a mother and father and a brother, Joseph. He was three years older from me; this was our family. I was four years old when my father died.

JF: What kind of work had your father done?

SA: My father grow up in a family, and he was in the lumber business. He bought some piece of ground, where trees were, and then he got workers to cut them down. He sold wood.

JF: So he was in charge of the business?

SA: He bought a part of the business. After two years, I was four years old, when my father passed away, and we got the most family was in Lemberg, and we moved there in -- I grew up...

JF: In Lemberg.

SA: In Lemberg. I went to school.

JF: What kind of school? A public...

SA: Public school for seven years, and after my Bar Mitzvah at 13 years old -- and my Bar Mitzvah I will tell you it was not like in the United States. I remember my Bar Mitzvah. It's a funny thing, they brought to the synagogue, one bottle of schnapps and one glass. I never could understand, they didn't bring two, but this was the custom and everybody, Jewish person, stood in the line and you drink from one glass the schnapps, and a cookie, my mother made. But this was the custom, the way; it's not like the United States, we make for our sons.

JF: This was like the *Kiddush* after the service?

SA: Yes, after the Bar Mitzvah.

JF: Can I ask you before we go any further, during that earlier time, before you were Bar Mitzvahed, what was your experience like growing up in Lemberg. Were you living in a Jewish town?

SA: Jewish section. We knew the not-Jewish persons. We grew up between the Polish people and Ukrainian people.

JF: What kind of experience did you have with them in your childhood?

SA: In school where you was, they let you know that you are Jewish.

JF: The children did?

SA: The children. The children knew what their parents were talking about. Any problem, they promptly got. Was enough rain or too much rain? Everything was the Jewish fault.

JF: Did you play with the children?

SA: Yes, we did play with the children but somehow it came out they let us know that we are Jewish children. Where we grew up, let's say, when we played a game, soccer, was cases when the Jewish team was better.

JF: All of the Jewish kids were on one team?

SA: On one team, yes.

JF: By whose decision was that?

SA: Well, we belonged to Jewish organizations, and the Polish youth went to the Polish organizations, and the Ukrainians to Ukrainian. We played games and the biggest problem was when a Jewish team won a game, there was really trouble. We was very careful sometimes how we conducted the game on the field.

JF: What does that mean? You were beaten up if you won?

SA: We could, harassed. The public started to holler that we are, we don't conduct a nice game and the referee was harassed, and by the game, if they like to hurt you, they can very easily hurt you by kicking, and smack you in the wall, kicks in the foot. We knew the antisemitic way, how we conducted the game.

JF: When you say you had to conduct yourself a certain way, what do you mean by that?

SA: Watch how you are conducting the game. When you run with the ball and you see that somebody comes, and he was known that he sent to the hospital a couple Jewish boys where he kicked not in the ball, just in the foot, and you have to control the game.

JF: You had to make sure that you were not going to fight back at a certain time?

SA: No, outsmart them with the game, outsmart them with the game. A split second you could kick the ball away from him, and outsmart...

JF: What was the Jewish organization that you...

SA: Betar.¹ I belonged to Brit Trumpeldor and I was -- there was a very nice Jewish organization. It was completely under the leadership of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the organization was, and I was even by eight years old I was on *hakhshara*², to emigrate to Israel, but my mother said that she doesn't want to be alone with two children without a father, and I give in. I started...

¹ Youth organization of the Zionist Revisionist Movement.

² Preparatory training in agriculture for Jews planning to emigrate to Palestine.

JF: During that, excuse me for one minute, before you go ahead, were the teachers also antisemitic, or did they show any discrimination?

SA: They didn't show, they didn't show. Didn't show, but we will come to it. We started to see how they are anti-Jewish when the Germans came. Then we were very surprised to see that they was not.

JF: During those years in Lemberg, how was your mother supporting your family?

SA: We got a house and the house had two stores. This is from the family, and these two stores gave rent, and then my mother got [unclear] our family from the mother's side. From the father's side, was not very wealthy, but they always helped us until my brother and me started to work and make money. They supported her. And from my father's side, was pretty good off, brothers and sisters, and from my mother's side. My mother got her father and a mother, my grandparents. They lived in Busk. Was 90 kilometers from Lemberg. Being from 13 years old, from my Bar Mitzvah I started to work for a furrier, I make fur coats.

JF: Were you an apprentice to a furrier?

SA: Apprentice, yes, and I remember I make, not a contact, make a person to person deal with the boss that I will work there three years. It will be up to him when he will start to pay me and I went on after three months. He was so happy with me that he started to pay me, and I remember he paid me one dollar of American money a week. It was pretty good, yes. But, month by month we started -- my brother and me. We supplied already my mother with money for food and for a lot of things that was necessary. And this kept on until 1939.

JF: Had anybody in your family, any of the men in your family, served in the Army?

SA: In 1937, they put me to the Polish army. And...

JF: How was that decided, was the...?

SA: It was decided by Polish doctors, and they checked up every individual boy.

JF: Did the Jewish community organization have to bring them a list?

SA: Just from the City Hall.

JF: From the City Hall.

SA: From the City Hall, they called you, they send you a letter that you have to come on this particular date to the -- I forgot the name what they called it -- but the examination is a physical examination. I mentioned this before, I was so healthy a boy. A Jewish boy never was willingly to go to the Polish Army, but for the Jewish person it was not such an easy task. I remember my mother went with me to a doctor, to a Jewish doctor, and he said "What is the problem?" And my mother said, "Here is my son, he has to go next week to the medical committee about the military." He said, "Take off your shirt," and I took it off and he said, -- "look, I don't even want to talk about it," -- but

sometimes he gave a letter that he is in bad health, or what, but it could help. But this time, he said, "It's impossible. The doctors have to be blind." Those words he said [unclear]. The next week, before I went to this committee, I went to the Belzec rabbi, from Belzec. He was the most famous rabbi in Poland, and even the world, everybody knows the Belzec rabbi, and this was my first occasion I went there. You had to write down what you are. Most people came there, my wife is sick, my mother is sick, my father is sick, and he said a *brokhe*³, he said pray that they should get better. But he looked at me and said, he looks at my card, I wrote it down -- I have to go, I don't want to go to the Army. He looked at me and he said, "*Gey gezunderheyt. L'Chaim tzu alla dayna.*" [Go in good health to all your family]. Even he understood, there was no way out.

JF: You were still playing soccer and very athletic?

SA: Yes, I was that, yes. And when I came to those doctors, and they took me and he gave me I should be -- this was the heaviest job in the Polish military. I was in the artillery horse, artillery. Here the artillery have the tanks maybe or heavy trucks. But this was six horses to such a cannon, such artillery. You know where they shoot.

JF: The cannons. So, six horses would draw a cannon and you were on one of the horses.

SA: On one of the horses, yes. Being there, I just told myself if I'm already here, let's make the best of it. I become the most best soldier from a thousand soldiers. I got recognition, almost every month, and there was always an affair, and they were standing about, the officers and the colonel sometimes said, "How come here's a Jewish boy from Lemberg. He is outplaying all games. He knows how to shoot better than you. He rides a horse better. He never saw a horse." It was very good for my -- I think I got the biggest time, a vacation, almost every month, I got a prize to go home for two weeks. Such, I turn out a very good soldier. Being later to conquer the suffering in the concentration camps was a big help for me what I went through in the Polish army, the training.

JF: The training, the army training...

SA: Hard, yes. And this was still 1939. From '37, they took me in 1937, and when I was supposed to go home, after two years in the army, you're released, and this was, as I say, I supposed to go, and the war break out, the first of September in 1939. I was supposed to go home the 15th of September. I was in the war when the Germans attacked the Polish Army. I was not far away from my town Lemberg.

JF: During those two years, before we get to 1939, was there any discrimination that you felt as a Jew in the army?

SA: Yes, yes, yes. I remember many occasions, they start to tell you in Polish language, "Jew is going to Palestine." I remember one experience was, those Polish

³*brokhe* – Yiddish for blessing.

soldiers, they were always used to make fun of a Jewish boy, and the Jewish boy took this. He didn't have another choice. I remember once I was in a position that I was provoked to a fight. I could not back out. Many times I backed out. But this time, I just could not help it. Two soldiers, boys started to, you know, call names that the Jews are communist, and Jews -- everything is about the Jews there, and I was so irritated, the most of the time I backed out, I didn't pay attention too much, but this time I took strength and I punched one soldier in the mouth and the eyes. He started to bleed. The ambulance started to come, in the night this was -- never happened to another soldier. And when I supposed to stay for the officers and give a report what I did, they said they were very proud of me. They knew what goes on, but if I got the courage to do this now, over another case he got punished, where you cannot beat up. There were occasions that anti-Jewish feeling was day by day life.

JF: Was there any opportunity to meet with other Jewish soldiers and discuss what was going on?

SA: Yes, yes. Basically, the Jewish boys, they took to the army, was not I would say, 50% was not physically equipped. There was boy who never kicked a ball, a boy who was sitting with his mama and papa in the store helping out. He could not, you know, he could not do like an average soldier supposed to do. And there was a lot of problems. They demand from them equal, to be a good soldier. They could not bring out from them to be such an equal way to be a soldier. And, there was antisemitic -- I mean, normal, there was one way to say, if you feel I'm not a good soldier, let me go home, but this was not the case.

JF: Before the war, before your time in the army, had you been observant in terms of *kashrut*.

SA: No, this was...

JF: This was not at home...

SA: No, in the home, but in the home there was *kashrut*.

JF: That's what I mean.

SA: But in the service, there was -- it doesn't exist.

JF: There was no way that you could do anything.

SA: No, you got to eat everything, what they are eating, not kosher. This was the biggest problem for the Jewish people. How could my son go to the army, he will eat not *kashrut*.

JF: How was that for you? Was that a difficult adjustment for you?

SA: No, this was not, basically mine, I don't know if this is right way or not the right way. I can adjust very easily to any situation.

JF: I'm sure that helped.

SA: If I don't see another way, another way, I include myself in the situation and I go along.

JF: Let me ask you another question about the prewar time. Had you heard a great deal of what was going on in Germany with Hitler?

SA: Yes.

JF: And did you think that perhaps the Polish situation would get involved with them?

SA: We heard Adolf Hitler's speeches, and we saw in the radio, we had the newspapers. We saw, but the human mind, doesn't matter how intelligent he is, could not believe those things-- to liquidate a nation -- could not believe. After now, what happened in the Second World War, anything is believable, if somebody will say about a certain thing. But this was the first experience what history remembers, that if a man comes to power, and he officially says and he wrote it in *Mein Kampf*, in the book, that he will eliminate the Jewish people, the most of us said he's just crazy, he doesn't know what he's talking. It is impossible to do this. You cannot but he prepared himself to do, and he did a pretty good job.

JF: Did you think that he would invade Poland?

SA: Yes, being a soldier, we knew the equipment that we got, and the modern equipment what they got, there was no question that he would conquer, maybe in a longer time, I didn't believe, let's say, there was 17 days, 18 days, I was, we were out, a prisoner already in the German hands, being a Polish soldier.

JF: But you did suspect that they would invade Poland?

SA: Yes, we went with horses, and they went with tanks. He got airplanes and he got the equipment, and this is main thing in the wartime.

JF: Was your brother also in the service?

SA: No, my brother was not so physical, like I am, he was three years older than me. He was not.

JF: He was still in Lemberg with your mother at the time?

SA: He was with my mother, yes. In 1939, we knew already about three months before. I was supposed to go home, and we were starting already between us, that there will be no home for us, the war will break out. And 15 days before I was supposed to go home from the service, the Germans attacked Poland, and I, we were maybe 100 kilometers from town and I was captured from [by] the Germans after 12 or 13 days in the war.

JF: You were actually in combat?

SA: In combat with the Germans.

JF: And you were captured as a prisoner of war by the Germans.

SA ...of war by the Germans. When I saw that the Germans took out, they give a *befehl*, [order]. *Befehl* means they announced all Jewish soldiers should step out.

JF: This was after you were captured.

SA: I was captured. I didn't. What do I have to lose? They took all Jewish who stepped out-- there was a couple more with me who didn't-- and they took them all together on a truck, and they took them to Lublin and nobody heard from them ever.

JF: Where were you captured?

SA: This was not far from Lublin, this was 100 kilometers from my town, Lemberg. When I saw this happen, the next day, I run away from camp. It was not a camp. There was no field.

JF: You were just being guarded?

SA: I was guarded, yes, and they asked somebody from the kitchen to bring water, in buckets, and I went. One time I brought the water and I saw there was a river and after the river is woods, and I said to myself, the next time I go for water, I will be out. I went...

JF: Was that difficult for you to break away from...

SA: You got to risk. I took the buckets with me, they should not see, and I went...

JF: This was alone.

SA: Alone, yes. I went and I came to a farmer, and I said, "Look, if you need buckets, you can keep them. I got a little bit of money, Polish money, and I will appreciate it if you-- if I give you my suit, the uniform, and give me anything, and I want from you, should give me a basket with tools that I work in the fields. This was the exchange. A very pleasant farmer.

JF: This was a Polish...

SA: Polish farmer. And I told him I go to Lemberg and he said for me the directions, I knew. I didn't take exactly, I took the railroad track. I went with the tracks straight from [unclear], and I saw Germans, and they didn't bother me. "He's a farm boy." And I came home. I came home, the Russians were there-- tankers.

JF: How long had the Russians been there?

SA: Before I came, there were about three or four days. And the fourth day I came home and the Russian tankers were there. And the start of another problem. Basically, my experience of being in a Zionist youth organization, I was not kosher for them, for the Russian. They didn't like to give a job to somebody who was a nationalistic in Betar, and you have to use a lot of connections, you should doubt. In being a furrier, they needed it, and I got a job.

JF: What kind of connecting did you have to use?

SA: Somebody what you have to know, somebody who was before the war a communist in the organization. He was the main leader, the main connection that you could have.

JF: A Polish communist, from the town.

SA: There was a couple Jewish communists. There was, yes, and let's say you come to Philadelphia. You want to find a job. You have a friend who knows a

Democratic leader. You go to him and somehow you have a job. I started to work for a company who worked fur coats. I made out and I was very satisfied, and my brother worked in an office, then. He was more educated than me, he went to more school. I went to seven years in public school. He went to night school to become a bookkeeper. He got an office job and I was in the fur industry. But life was not a happy life. But Jewish people think, they compare what was by Hitler, a little bit, and what they hear already. They said, "Maybe this way is better," but this was just an illusion. The Russian was antisemitic, anti-Jewish.

JF: In what way?

SA: *Ivrit* [Hebrew] always that your way is not good, and we have our problems. In my experience, when we are in a capitalistic regime, they call us communist. When we live in a communistic regime, they call us capitalistic. And this is the biggest problem. Who knows who invented this, but this is our problem.

JF: So you were all of a sudden a capitalist...

SA: A capitalist, and this is the way. For every little thing, the punishment is, right away, without a trial, months and months in jail. I knew so many boys who went to jail for nothing, just to go out in the market, to take a jacket or a suit, to exchange with a farmer for a little bit of butter, this was a capitalist.

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

JF: This is tape one, side two of an interview with Mr. Simon Aufschauer, on May 13, 1982, with Josey Fisher. You were telling me about the Russian treatment of the Jews.

SA: [unclear] We were close to the border, what the Germans pulled back and the Russian took. This was, I remember, the border was Rava Ruska, rather close. The German was on their side Poland, and Russia was, they took Galicia until Rava Ruska. In being with the Russians two years, but we knew that the German and the Russian, even Molotov from the Russian side, and Ribbentrop from the German side, there was Prime Ministers from the countries. They hugged each other and they kissed each other, but we know this would come to a fight. June, June 21, 1941...

JF: Before we get to that point, what about your citizenship, during those years?

SA: Each citizen got a Russian citizen...

JF: ...you became a Russian...

SA: ...become a Russian citizen.

JF: Was that difficult for you to accept?

SA: You had to accept it, I mean, when you look to go away from the Russian, you had just one place to go, to the Germans.

JF: Did any of the people in your town refuse Russian citizenship?

SA: They went to Krakow, to Warsaw. There was no mass killing from the Germans, from 1939 to 1941. There was killing by accidents, not the Germans. The mass killings, these started in 1941, December, November, then started in 1942. There was already no way out. Every Jew was captured from the Germans was a dead man. All Jews who was not in capture from the Germans was condemned from the Germans to death. There was no...

JF: Did you have adequate information from the rest of Europe? Did you feel in Lemberg during those two years, about what was going on?

SA: We knew that the Germans take, let's say, from a town in Poland, that he was conquered the territory. They took together the doctors, Jewish lawyers, engineers, architects, they took and put them in jail, and they told to the Jewish population, "If you would supply us with so many kilos gold and so many brilliants [diamonds], and thousands and thousands in the money value, we will leave out those you represented." When the Jewish population was naive to give those Germans-- that was the escrow, they got a name for it, I forgot, contributions-- they kill anyway. Their tactic, the German, was first, to finish off the intellectual Jews. Was afraid. They got all tactics, in a lot of towns they killed first the poor people. But they figured from the rich they could squeeze out something, finances, all kind of money.

JF: You were hearing about this in Lemberg during that time?

SA: Yes. We shook our heads, that something is hard to believe, but we understood that Jewish people had a rough time, and [unclear] sadists...

JF: What was the situation of the Jewish community in Lemberg, under the Russian occupation? Did they permit any of their activities?

SA: No, the synagogue was just attended by older people.

JF: What would happen if the other people attended?

SA: If he was on a job, they let him go. They look for something, say he didn't do a good job. There was they didn't approve of no religious conducting ceremonies, they didn't.

JF: Could there be any religious ceremonies done in private, for instance?

SA: Yes, oh private houses, yes, it was done. In my house was 10-20 Jews got together, they got the Torah and they prayed. Nobody knew, no one advertised, but officially just older people went.

JF: People who could not be fired from their jobs, in other words?

SA: This went on until 1941. June 21st, I remember like today, is a very hard point in my life. We got by mail, or someone brought it, that I am enlisted to the Russian Army, and my brother. The next day, June 22, the Russian Army was attacked from the German Army, but there still was the fighting on the border, 100 kilometers from us. We went, my brother and me, we went to this place where we were supposed to come to a school in a yard, and my mother stood by herself, home. Then, marching on the way to the Russian border, was in the night, and my brother and me was talking that we did a silly thing, that we both went. To make the conversation, we made the decision that I should return back to my home. I took off the Russian uniform-- we were dressed up in Russian uniforms and took us to Russia-- I took off the Russian uniform and came home. I got already a rifle, and I give a Ukrainian farmer the rifle and the uniform and the shoes, and he let me come home without shoes-- it was summertime-- and I went through woods, and when I came home, and my brother went to the Russian border. Then, I, by myself, and a lot of people said that I was really crazy to do such a thing, but my idea was to take my mother back to Russia, but you could do this.

JF: Take your mother to Russia?

SA: The Russian government, how much I dislike it, somehow in the wartime, they opened the borders and they said anybody who wants to come should come. They were looking for workers. They got a reason why, they are not so good. When I came, it took me a long time to come home, the Germans was already and there was no way out. I was stuck. If I had come two days before, there was a possibility, but, there I was too late to continue to come home. It was impossible to run away. Then the hell start.

JF: So you could not get to your mother then?

SA: Yes, I can.

JF: You got to Lemberg.

SA: I got to Lemberg, I got to my mother, but there could not be a way to go away with [from] the Germans-- took over such a blitz overnight. They went hundreds of kilometers. It was something unbelievable. There was no possibility for me to come and I was stuck in this home. How life is funny. My brother didn't make it. He died.

JF: He died as a soldier?

SA: Yes.

JF: In combat? In the Russian army?

SA: No, no, no.

JF: Do you know how?

SA: The German army and their Ukrainian helpers of the Jewish Ukrainian people conquered about 20 kilometers before the Russian border and they killed them off, all. The entire-- the most was Jewish youth which the Russian took into their border, but they didn't make it. The German conquered them, you know....

JF: Encircled them?

SA: Encircled them, and they killed them all off. There were some friends who escaped this, and in Israel, there is somebody who saw it. He run away, he run to Russia and lived through the war. He is in Israel.

JF: Did you find this out shortly after it happened, or did you find out till later.

SA: I find out about two months later.

JF: Okay.

SA: Then the German asked every Jewish who is capable to work should work. They organized a special *Judenrat*-- *Judenrat* means⁴-- and these were the leaders from the Jewish population. And I went to work from there, to-- I remember they needed roads for their tanks. We should take apart from the Jewish cemetery the monuments.

JF: The stones...

SA: The stones, yes, and we make roads for the tanks there, the [unclear] was not strong enough.

JF: These were the Jewish cemeteries?

AS: Jewish cemeteries, yes.

JF: What about the non-Jewish cemeteries.

SA: The non-Jewish, we went and we fix. We cut up the grass, we make the sequence [cross paths], beautiful should be nice, but the Jewish cemeteries, the stones they took away. And I was in and out-- one famous concentration camp was Janowska in Lemberg. It was impossible to run away.

JF: But you were put into a special concentration camp in Lemberg, at this time?

AS: Yes, yes. And end from 1941, let's say, December.

⁴*Judenrat* – a council required by the Germans to represent the Jewish community in dealings with the Nazi authorities. Wikipedia.

JF: How do you spell the name of that camp?

SA: J-A-N-O-W-S-K-I from there, I run...

JF: Was this the camp in which you were doing this the work of building the roads?

SA: No, this camp you have to do all kind of work, anything. They sent out columns, 20-30 people, to clean up the street, any kind, the worst jobs what the town got we have to do.

JF: You were then separated from your mother at this point, in December 1941?

SA: Yes, I came back again. In 1942, I came back to the ghetto.

JF: All right, you were at this camp...

SA: I was lucky that the ghetto was where we lived, where they made the ghetto, was much better for us. I got word to come.

JF: You were in this camp then from December of 1941 until when?

SA: After three months I run away. They didn't know full names, they just know numbers. The name was nothing for the Germans.

JF: Did the *Judenrat* pick you to go to the camp?

SA: No, no, the Germans come and they grabbed, let's say I would say at the time 2,000 people, Jews. They select about 200 and the rest they took to the yard, to a field, not far away from, outside of the town, and the Ukrainian boys with shovels digged a big hole, and when the hole was finished, they brought the Jews there, they killed them off, and after all bodies was in the hole, the Ukrainian filled in the ground back, and this was the end.

JF: This was when?

SA: '42, it starts.

JF: What you're describing to me now happened in....

SA: '42...

JF: ...in 1942. In what month of 1942?

SA: Let's say, it was April, '42.

JF: And this was done by the Germans...

SA: SS.

JF: The SS shot the Jews?

SA: Yes, the Jews, yes, yes.

JF: Was the only roundup of this kind?

SA: Oh, there was many.

JF: But of this kind.

SA: This was the first, the shocking,

JF: ...the first one.

SA: ...at that time people didn't believe that this could happen.

JF: The Germans themselves rounded up the 2,000 Jews...

SA: Yes, yes. Then...

JF: Wait, can I just ask you? Did you talk to someone who witnessed this shooting?

SA: No, we knew that they took them, and nobody came back.

JF: How did you hear about the Ukrainian involvement?

SA: There were witnesses, Polish witnesses, Ukrainian witnesses, of every 10,000 there was one good Pole or Ukrainian and they said-- there was talk that all Jews are getting killed. We saw-- they told them to undress first. We saw the shoes and the suits come back to the concentration camp.

JF: The Germans brought this back?

AS: The Germans brought them back, I mean how can you pick out a different way.

JF: At the time you were not in the camp? You had run away?

SA: I run away.

JF: Your mother was still...

SA: Was still in the ghetto.

JF: You were not in the town then at the time that this happened?

SA: I was in the ghetto.

JF: You were in the ghetto.

SA: Yes, I went out there. In 1942, let's say, it was called November, was a-- we call it an *Aktion*. The German took-- in the morning I went to work from the *Judenrat*. The *Judenrat* sent out columns of Jews to certain kind of work, and I remember they sent me to-- it was the gentile cemetery to fix up there. There was 100 Jewish boys. When we came home in the evening, in the town, was an *Aktion*. They took together all Jews, and my mother was in between them.

JF: This was the same...

SA: November 1942.

JF: This was the same kind of mass shooting?

SA: They took him already, they got already a mass pogrom in Belzec. They took them to trains and they took my mother to Belzec. This was 60 kilometers from us.

JF: How many Jews did they take?

SA: They took away, let's say, I would say 2,000.

JF: What do you know about the Belzec pogrom, or the...

SA: The Belzec place there, they just led them from the trains, in wagons, and they got prepared graves, they shot them, and they covered them. In 19...

JF: Again, this was told to you by people, Poles or Ukrainians?

SA: Yes, this happened, yes. Like I mentioned, of every maybe 10,000, there was one good one. But, they got feeling or sympathy, but not too many. We cannot give them credit.

JF: At the time that this happened, you had been living in the ghetto with your mother?

SA: The night before I was sitting here together and then, the next day, I came home, was-- my mother was not there now, and they said that the train went to Belzec. They were so organized that nobody knew exactly why the train went to a certain stop, and then the Germans took them away, the train to Belzec and then they brought it back. This was, there was proof.

JF: Who organized the trains in your town?

SA: The Germans. I think it was the Germans.

JF: Germans. What part did the *Judenrat* play in helping or not helping the situation?

SA: There's all kind of opinion to talk about it.

JF: What is your feeling about it?

SA: Not such a nice one, but some people say good things. There's all kind, you cannot judge nobody. If they took somebody, they make him in charge, this person. You know we all have animal instinct in ourselves. We polish it out and everything is good, but when there is a crucial time, and the German SS man came and took somebody and he said, "You in charge," and this and this, this person start to think maybe if I will take his orders and maybe I will do what he wants, maybe my family will be safe. But this was the wrong idea. They never lived through it. Nobody is alive who was thinking like this. But this is a complete different subject, let's not talk about it. I have an old saying, "When you don't have nothing good to say, good you don't have to say, bad things you don't want to say, don't say nothing." In 1943, I was already in a concentration camp, again they caught me.

JF: Before we get to that, what was it like in the ghetto in Lemberg? What were living conditions?

SA: Your, the human mind cannot even understand.

JF: Was it an enclosed area?

SA: Sure, the police was the German and Polish and Jewish. The police was guarding, you could not get in, you could not get out. You just could get out if you went, if the police, the German police took you somewhere...

JF: For work...

SA: To do a job, yes. But I mentioned before to you, in about December, 1942, I didn't have where to run, I didn't have where to go. I was, it was very bad at that time, it was wintertime. In the summertime, you could run away and could live in a cemetery. You got always a cemetery in Poland was a tree with apples, a tree with pears, a tree with plums, and a little bit of water somewhere. You could manage. I was for a couple of weeks in a cemetery.

JF: When was this?

SA: It was summertime in 1942. I run away from the concentration camp, I stopped in a cemetery, there was a Polish name, such a beautiful mausoleum. Beautiful building, there was even a beautiful bench inside. I could sleep, that was summertime. In wintertime, I got a friend I knew, I thought he was a good friend, and he's Ukrainian, his name was Pasternak.

JF: You're now talking about 1942.

SA: Yes. I came to him, he should help me at least for the winter; the spring will come, I go. He said everything in the book, everything, he loves me, he wants I should live, too, he give me a good supper, the every things were beautiful. The third night, two nights I slept there, the third night there came about six SS men and he was with them, and he said who I am, and he told me exactly who I should be, that Pasternak, and he got a prize for it, and then my real hell started. I was very healthy still. They sent me to again to Janowski, where I run away, but luckily nobody knew about my previous running away. There I was until 1943. They took me to Krakow, Krakow.

JF: In 1943...

SA: ...1943, it was in July, August, and then I was there in Plaszow.

JF: Can you spell it?

SA: P-L-A-S-Z-O-W, Krakow, was about 6,000 Jews in this concentration camp. Very hard labor, we worked. From there in 1944, we went, they sent me to Gross Rosen, to Germany, in a concentration camp. G-R-O-S-S R-O-S-E-N. Then from there, they sent me to a town, Reichenbach, Langenbielau, a German town and there I worked where there was a factory for tools to make planes. That's why I never wondered why we lost the war, I was a very bad toolmaker. I didn't know about making those tools. I was there nine months until the Russian army liberated us, there.

JF: Can you tell me some of the details about the concentration camps that you were in? Can you tell me how you were...

AS: Minute by minute hell. One second to the other was not equal, not even. You just was doomed, no food, hard labor.

JF: What kind of work were you doing?

SA: The last time in the factory?

JF: Say, in Krakow...

SA: In Krakow, they took us to a column, about 100 people and we made-- we put tracks for a railroad, should go through from one town to the other. Hard labor. Every day, we marched from Krakow, from the concentration camp, to the place where we worked, about 8 kilometers. They, maybe every second day, we carried one body, sometimes two bodies, and when a body died, they shot somebody, they killed somebody, or you died from weakness. We weren't allowed to bury him on the spot. The SS guard told us, "No. I took 100 people, I have to bring back 100 people." He had to report how many he brings back. He could say, "One died?" No, we carried them back

off our weak backs. The body. Then we when brought them in the yard where the SS let us in, they counted, and then he told us to throw them in the pit. There was a special pit.

JF: Was the pit for burning the bodies or burying the bodies?

SA: Throwing in the bodies. My worse experience in the concentration camp was, I was in Krakow, it's good to mention. We started to see already that Stalingrad started to get rough for the Germans and he was willing to mark, you know, clean up those marks what they did. We was forced to take out those dead bodies what we buried...

JF: In Krakow.

SA: Yes, and burn them. Thousands and thousands. I would say, I by myself, I was in a group, that we burned bodies out day by day and night by night. I would say 10,000. When we took a body out by the legs, there never was a full body, it was rotten already, the meat-- if you pulled out an arm, you could not pull the whole body. You schlep out the body...

JF: This was...

SA: ...in Krakow.

JF: Before 1944 then?

SA: Yes, yes 1943. Yes in 1943.

JF: How were the bodies burned?

SA: We put out wood and gasoline on bodies and this was day in, day and night, and there was this burning and burning, until the spot was taken out. He was willing to make that when the Russian would come there will be no...

JF: What would be done with the ashes?

SA: Just on the fields. I think the farmers, they knew already what goes on and was happy. Ashes were good fertilizer, I think, I believe so. And when liberation came, May 8, 1945, I was lucky to meet a partner in life, my wife, and we got married, three months, August 12, 1945, and this is a good luck for myself. We understand each other and we raised two children, that we have lots of *naches*. Believe me...

[Tape one, side two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

JF: This is tape two, side one of an interview with Mr. Simon Aufschauer, on May 13, 1982, with Josey Fisher. Can you tell me exactly in as much detail as you can, what your living conditions were like in the camps in Krakow and Gross Rosen? What the barracks were like, what your rations were like?

SA: The living in a concentration camp-- each concentration camp is a different way of living there-- if you can call it living.

JF: Perhaps you can describe it to me.

SA: I remember, in the Gross Rosen, was an awful experience. They let us in the night, after work, we building barracks for newcomers.

JF: That was your primary labor in Gross Rosen, to build the new barracks?

SA: Most of us never got an idea what carpenting means. You never got an idea about this labor, but we build it. When we came back-- about, about food, you're talking. Food was one pint of soup. Even, I think pigs would never eat those meals. But you was just used to it, to this kind of treatment, you ate the soup. In the night, when we went already to sleep, there was one big hole and there was around 350 men and boys, we were still young, and we just fit in, one and the other, like sardines, there was no room.

JF: Were these barracks, where these bunk beds I mean?

SA: There was no beds, was just the floor. In previous was beds. All concentration camps was not beds, was such bunks.

JF: In other words Krakow there were bunks, but...

SA: Bunks...

JF: But in Gross Rosen?

SA: In Gross Rosen, they didn't let us in in such rooms. They let us sleep on the floor. There was maybe room for about 150, but they fit in 300-350.

JF: Was this a finished floor, or a...

SA: It was a finished floor, yes, but what was then? The German guard started to dance on us with their boots. He was running and he was dancing and he was jumping, and you could not even move, even if you was hurt, you could not even move. This is something that is-- you cannot say, in German, this is something that is not explained, such treatments.

JF: Did this happen more than once? This kind of...

SA: No, [unclear].

JF: What would happen, would they have been drinking before this? Or was this just...

SA: They [unclear], he got all kind of tricks. They all got tricks. For instance, in Lemberg, or Janowska, the around the field where we were working and we went home one place to the other, surrounding was the beautiful buildings. Those officers, those SS lived in those buildings. You saw already that one or two men went in the

backyard and they dropped dead. From the windows, they got parties with girls, and they took their rifles, and they were making tricks that he can shoot this person. Nobody knew even how that happened. Later they find out, and we never went through that field.

JF: These were Germans who were shooting each other?

SA: Germans are shooting, no, on us.

JF: They would shoot you from the fields, in the fields?

SA: They used such tricks. In Gross Rosen, I can tell, I was-- they took me once I should push in bodies for a crematorium. There was an oven once and like a baker pushed in bread, with shovels, so they took in bodies and shoveled and burned, and...

JF: Were there any kind of gas chambers?

SA: Crematoriums.

JF: Only crematoriums in Gross Rosen?

SA: Yes, gas chambers, I didn't see. There was no gas, just crematoriums. Was an oven with the train and they pushed in the bodies, and slow motion, the bodies...

JF: Were these people, had these people been executed or were these people just died from illness?

SA: They brought a lot, they beat them, they killed them, and it was...

JF: How long did you work in that capacity in Gross Rosen?

SA: Not too long, let's say, it was three weeks. From there, when, these supplied, Gross Rosen was a concentration camp, but they supplied workers to manufacturers, and when the manufacturer order a certain day from Gross Rosen 500 men, they supplied them the next day, and I was sent to a factory where we went day by day for nine months. I was working in a German factory, the owner's name was Lehman [phonetic]. He came every day, not in uniform, he was in a civil suit.

JF: Was this in Reichenbach, this was...

SA: This was close, one town to the other. Reichenbach Langenbielau. This was close like...

JF: So you were in Gross Rosen for how long?

SA: Three weeks, this was close like everything is about small distance from Breslau, a big city, [unclear].

JF: After you left Krakow, you had been there for what, about a year?

SA: More like a year.

JF: More than a year?

SA: Yes, and from Krakow they *schlepped* us in all kinds of trucks, by SS guard, they took us to Gross Rosen, but Gross Rosen, was just a concentration camp, till you was there. Till a manufacturer ordered new workers. He was supplier from workers to all kinds of concentration camp, Mauthausen and everywhere.

JF: So the experience that you had at the crematoria was during that intermittent time before you were sent to work in the Lehman factory?

SA: Lehman factory, yes.

JF: Now, were there men and women in the camps that were in?
SA: Separately.
JF: Separately.
SA: Separately. Men was on one side, separate, with fences, I think.
JF: Do you have any idea how many people were in these camps when you were there?
SA: Basically, we know that, let's say, in Krakow, I would say, there was 12,000, always.
JF: Total.
SA: They always came and went. People died, they were shot, there was a circle. Every day, every second day, come a group [unclear] group.
JF: So there were 12,000 both men and women.
SA: Basically, yes in Krakow and then Gross Rosen, was...
JF: In Krakow, and then Gross Rosen, was...
SA: Maybe 15,000, yes.
JF: What about Janowska?
SA: This was a *Vergiftungsleiter* [Poisoning leader] were just brought and they was killed. A very small percentage of Jews went out from there. This was just bringing and killing and bringing and killing, bringing and killing.
JF: You were not working when you were in Janowska, you were working?
SA: Yes, I worked I was lucky in Janowska, I was lucky that my profession was a furrier. We saw that German army was cold in the wintertime. Their topcoats was very thin. We got an idea that, all Jewish people, the fur coats they should bring, under death penalty. We used to take off the sleeves and make them underwear...
JF: Like a lining.
SA: Like a lining for the soldiers, this saved me a li-, that I could easier, the reason certain officers came and gave us bread, we should take a good coat and give him, he should send to his wife. In the rough time comes conniving things. We gave them, and they gave us bread and sausage sometimes.
JF: So this probably saved you then, in Janowska.
SA: Saved, the reason is that I'm alive, I had certain thing that saved me. But those who didn't have this little *mazel* [luck] I don't know what to call, didn't survive. Six million people didn't survive.
JF: You say that *mazel* as you describe it in the first camp, was your skill as a furrier.
SA: Oh, yes.
JF: What about in the other camps? What do you think it was?
SA: Labor, hard labor.
JF: You were strong enough to handle it?

SA: I was strong enough, but anything, sometime they ask, and I went, any kind.

JF: Whatever they asked you to do you were able to handle?

SA: Anything, yes. Dig, gardening, you can mention anything, but the hardest was to dig out bodies. This is in my mind it comes to me, with perspiring, nights, sometimes every morning.

JF: That was in Krakow?

SA: This was in Krakow.

JF: This was in Krakow. During the time that you were in these camps, was there any attempt on any prisoner's part to escape the camps, and if so, what happened?

SA: There was, there was.

JF: Did any get away?

SA: Of 20 who escaped, one got away, and 19 was shot.

JF: This was in which camp?

SA: Everywhere. It was in Lemberg, any who escaped was caught. From the beginning, when I escaped, was easier. The guard was not so-- you could -- there was single cases.

JF: Where you think people might have gotten away?

SA: Very little.

JF: Very few.

SA: Very few he got away, then they caught him again, but a different person already, but he didn't live through. There was sickness. There was diphtheria. People got itch, each person was with insects.

JF: Lice?

SA: Lice, I mean myself, when I took the hand [unclear]. I put it on the floor you could hear those mites, you know.

JF: Was there any kind of medical treatment available to you at all?

SA: Not at all. Not at all. As a matter of fact, there was a Red Cross Room. Anybody who went there, they took together by bus five, six people or 10 people, those dummies who went there, we was no dummies. We knew what happened, we was willing to finish with their life. They took them together in the [unclear] Red Cross Room, and they took them away by SS and they start to learn how to run. You know, you take a sick person with fever and he start to run, and the last one was shot. Let's say, they got 20 boys. He tells them to run. Each who was the last one was shot, and they shot the last one, there was going to be another last one, until they shot all people, this was the medicine. There's something-- you know, so many years, they come sometimes to mind. I wake up in the morning and perspire, and there come so many episodes, so many things, back that is really, really, that you ask yourself how could one human being do to another. There is no answer. Even the biggest historians, who are experts, cannot understand.

JF: During the time that you were in these camps, was there any opportunity for the people to be fortified by some kind of religious experience or period of prayer?

SA: That's a funny thing. You know, a European Jew is so close to Jewish religion, let's say, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, and each Jew was figuring that Yom Kippur, if he will eat, he will drop dead. Right away. This was his tradition, in his blood, in his system, this was a belief. Nobody tried different. Everybody was fasting on Yom Kippur and they come and good times when Hitler had brought it. We didn't have calendars. And they said, "Next Tuesday, for instance is *Kol Nidre*." There are certain people, I was not included, but certain people started to fast Monday night but we talked about this Yom Kippur *Kol Nidre*.

JF: How did you find out?

SA: Was talking so, we didn't know exactly, but a week later we start a rumor; Yom Kippur was not on Monday night, next Wednesday, and we fast next Wednesday. We just tried to obey the religion, we didn't know how, we didn't know exactly by calendar. But somehow, when we worked in the factory, where we were all, we were working, sometimes we got a contract with a clerk or a Ukrainian or with a German or with a French worker. There was occupied from the German. They didn't have such a treatment like the Jews. But he came and he said, "You know, your holiday, Yom Kippur is, I think, next Monday," and we took his word. He didn't know, he make a mistake. There was Jewish religious boys who fasted for Yom Kippur two or three times a year. He was willing to make sure, maybe it's right. Such devoted the religious people.

JF: Were there also other times of prayer during the year?

SA: You could see that a Jewish boy, and I hear that the Jewish girls, stood by the windows and prayed to themselves. I never saw two or three people should pray together, no. Just each individual of his way. I would say, there was, how should I say, in a mild way, a dislike about why should we pray, if I bring it out right. Was disgusted. Maybe this is all just a play, maybe we should not pray. If this is real, a God's world, how could happen those things?

JF: Were there any children in any of the camps that you were in?

SA: Children I never saw. The children was automatically right away taken away, with any kind of trick. The German said we will go in a different place where they was taken brutally away from the mothers and somewhere, battered, killed. There was no -- I was lucky. I was in the 20, 22-23. Those who were 30, 40 years old could not survive. Those who were 10, 12 could not survive. If you was 12, you looked like 16, maybe, but this was this hell to live through. You got to be in record condition, a little bit of luck they should not shoot you, and at the age from 17 to 25. A different age, no chance.

JF: Most of the men that you were with were your age?

SA: The most who was selected was this age. When somebody was older, he was maybe a little crippled in the leg or arm, he was right away picked up, and their experience was very very good. He was preparing...

JF: You talk about this selection in your town. Were there also selections within the camps?

SA: Once in-- yes, not too often. You have to stay in your room where there was 40 people. You stood. You took off your shirt in assessment camp. He says he is married, but I don't believe it. He checked you, he was very very bones, and didn't have meat on you, he told you to step out and they they shot you.

JF: They just shot you, that was the way...

AS: Yes. He looked just a little at me. For this you would have to be a medic or doctor, but do you know one thing? If a person is very very weak, he cannot produce and cannot work. There have no use for him.

JF: Which camp was this?

SA: All camps, all camps, from time to time. There was a selection, we call it. They didn't call it a selection. They said they were looking for some other work, the people they wanted to see how they are physically.

JF: Ones they took out were the ones they were going to shoot.

SA: You never saw them. I mean, they didn't fly to heaven. Nobody flew to the moon, there was not time, like now. When they take somebody away at that time, he didn't return, there was...

JF: During this time you were working in the forced labor, and working in the factory, was there any help, any kind of sympathy given to you by the Poles?

SA: I am sorry to say, no. As matter of fact, I saw after the war, a Polack with a wife, three or four months after the war, in Krakow. I came there to look, I still think that maybe my brother was by mistaken and, as a matter of fact, he was dead. But I figured maybe if he saw me, knew me. The first thing is, "You still alive?" In their language. No sympathy, how you lived through...

JF: These were people you had known.

SA: "How grateful I am, I'm glad that I see you," No, "Are you alive?" There was built hatred from the Polish population, from the Ukrainian population. Sometimes I think they were more vicious to the Jews than the Germans population. I am not talking of the SS. The SS was schooled especially to kill. They was killers, for them it was nothing. But my experience is that I was afraid more from the Polish and the Ukrainians in the workshop, like from a German.

JF: Were the Poles also involved in any of these mass executions or were only the Ukrainians involved?

SA: Where I lived was more Ukrainian than Polish. I don't believe-- maybe they was shooting, too, there was a Ukrainian police, but the most shooting, the Germans did the most.

JF: The Ukrainians helped with the burial?

SA: The burial, they helped, they didn't help nothing good, just bad.

JF: Were the Poles also involved in that, or it was just the Germans and the Ukrainians?

SA: The Poles, there was no *Tzadikim* [holy men, righteous men]. I mean, maybe there was some good ones, I didn't see, I didn't see.

JF: The various people who helped you along the way, when you had run away and you were switching clothes, did any of these people know that you were Jewish?

SA: I tell them before I left, I speak their languages, but before I left I tell them...

JF: That you were Jewish...

AS: I am Jewish.

JF: What was their reaction?

SA: I didn't want to say when I was there sleeping. I figured a lot of Jews was killed. They chopped off their heads. Even in good time.

JF: Who was this, the Poles now, are you talking about, or Ukrainians?

SA: Both. More vicious, the Ukrainian was. But I was, I got a helping hand from a Polack farmer and from a Ukrainian farmer, but by leaving, I said I live in Lemberg, I am Jewish. I give you the address, in case you are there, you will be more like welcome to come to our home, and the doors will be open.

JF: What was their reaction to this? Positive?

SA: Eh, it was all right. But I didn't know what will happen to the farmer, I didn't know this. I figured I went to...

JF: What will be.

SA: I come to a normal life. You can never visualize what will be.

JF: You said that after you were liberated, which was from the factory near Reichenbach, you met your wife there.

AS: A week or two later.

JF: In Reichenbach?

SA: Yes. A tragic story, too. I was with her brother in the concentration camp. He passed away six years ago from a heart attack. I was with him almost a year together, in one room.

JF: In Reichenbach?

SA: In Reichenbach, we lived very good. Let's say, we were out together nine months exactly. And we slept not far away in bed, and we somehow in that misery life, you have call it, you get attached to somebody, something, you're looking for companions, and then the liberation came. We both were out together, [unclear] and we said, "Let's go." Because of it-- we was afraid by ourselves to go single to sleep somewhere, we went with him and other boys went. And when she find out, my wife, that her brother-- somebody told her, she was in Czechoslovakia, in Prague, and somebody told her that her brother lives in this concentration camp, and he is alive, she went to look

for him, and she came, and we got, from the first moment we saw each other, we started to feel something. We had the same way of thinking, and we liked most things together, and call it falling in love, or what. There was, I think we both are lucky that we met. We are grateful to God, and we try our best.

JF: You worked for a while in Europe before you came to the United States?

SA: Yes, yes, in Germany.

JF: In Germany. What kind of work were you doing?

SA: The fur work, that wasn't new to me.

JF: You were able to get a job for...

SA: In a German with a furrier, I went to a furrier and, I said, "Look this is what I am getting now in a DP camp." You know the Joint used to send some food, but I was not satisfied with it, not happy with it. I knew the profession. "If you look for a worker, I am a worker."

JF: You were living in a DP camp in Germany?

SA: Was a small...

JF: Was a small camp and the name of it?

SA: Weiden in der Oberfalz. Not far away was a furrier and I went there and I knew the profession through and through, and thank God, right now in the United States, this profession is very good to me. I work for Becker and Becker.

JF: You were able to become a furrier when you came to the United States?

SA: Right away, no problem.

JF: Was your wife also able to work when she came here? Or was she with the children?

SA: With the children. Thank God, the profession treats me good and I can afford, I mean, it's not such a, very rich, but we can manage.

JF: Your apprenticeship paid off?

SA: This fur business was a lucky way to learn the trade when I was 13 years old. Always in the worst time, paid me off.

JF: And it helped you so much in the camp.

SA: In the camps, and yes, I came to the U.S., and it was a matter -- I hope there is no unemployment, but there is today ten million, five million, two million, somehow there are -- the street always needs somebody who is a mechanic, and I find lately I work now for a company, Becker and Becker, that I am very satisfied. They are more satisfied with me.

JF: I'm so glad.

SA: I bring home the money to buy anything to eat, and we can afford thank God to give to charity, Israel, and I am active very much in the Jewish New Americans here. I am proud of it. We come together every, always every get-together that we have in the organization, always started with what was and finishing. There is always talk. We don't go on vacation, let's say. We go for years we used to go, now we don't go, there's

too much food in the Catskill Mountains. We went to the Pines, and a funny thing, there was like a get-together from a concentration camp inmates from New York, from Maryland, from Washington. We come together to have a good time, to have our vacation, a week. What was the problem? We sit down in the corner and we talk from the concentration camp and this concentration camp. This is a new life, new everything. It reminds you this person, that person. Coming to Israel, we are twice in Israel, every night we are sitting with friends, and talk what was. It's painful, let's just, I don't know. We know how to start it but we don't know how to finish.

JF: Is there anything else that you want to add to what you've told me?

SA: Just the Jewish people everywhere have to just watch, really, really I don't know how, like in Russia Menachem Begin said many many times; "Never again the Holocaust." How we should do this, I don't know.

JF: Thank you very much Mr. Aufschauer.

[Tape two side, one ended. Interview ended.]