HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ANATOLE GORKO

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Eileen Steinberg
Date: August 20, 1985

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AG - Anatole Gorko [interviewee]
ES - Eileen Steinberg [interviewer]
Date: August 20, 1985[1]

Tape one, side one:

ES: Please tell me where you were born and when and a little bit about your family.

AG: I was born in Lodz, Poland.

ES: In what year?

AG: June 28, 1907. I had at that time a father and mother, two sisters and a brother. We were born, educated schools, and working.

ES: What did your father do?

AG: He had a mechanic outfit, mechanical. He was specializing in the cotton industry, spinning industry. In 1925 or 6 my brother was drafted in the army, artillery. He took sick there and they gave him the wrong medication and they killed him. He didn't survive. A few months being in the service. And I was working.

ES: What were you doing?

AG: I told you before in the report I was in the spinning industry, partial into spinning and partial administration and I was the treasurer. Our way of doing business at that time in Europe was different than nowadays in the United States. So these two functions I had, and later on you will find out why I mentioned it because I was partially for a time in the spinning industry after the war and then I got involved in administration and [unclear].

ES: After you came here?

AG: Right. Of course I had to redo my way of thinking and way of doing of business.

ES: What was your life like before the war?

AG: We were not rich people but well to do. We had a nice apartment, standard in Poland, very nice apartment. I had a villa in the country.

ES: Your own or with your parents?

AG: It was with my father, combination, it was the family; it wasn't my use, it was the family. I had quite a nice salary so I put in with the family.

ES: Did your family experience any anti-Semitism before the Hitler period?

AG: In comparison to anti-Semitism which we experienced during the war, it was nothing. I was born and raised among Polish, German and Jews. As a matter of fact, I have good friends, German boys, good friends in Poland. We didn't have it to this extent, but later on I will tell you an instance what I experienced with the workers in the camp.

[1]See also a follow-up interview with Anatole (not transcribed yet, 1986) and two testimonies of his wife Alexandra Gorko 1985 and 1986.

ES: Did you or your family belong to any Jewish organizations or to a synagogue?

AG: Zionist synagogue.

ES: You were active?

AG: Active, no.

ES: But you belonged?

AG: Yeah.

ES: You said your brother served in a national army; had your father or yourself?

AG: No, later on. A few years later. I was drafted and I was for 18 months in the army, in the infantry.

ES: Tell me a little bit about your life in Poland in the early part of 1939 before the invasion.

AG: What do you mean by the early part; when the Germans came in?

ES: Before September.

AG: In what respect?

ES: What were you doing at that time?

AG: I was working in this bit outfit and I had a nice...

ES: Life was good for you?

AG: Yes.

ES: You had been married already and you had a child. You said you lived in Lodz and there were a great many Jews in Lodz at that time.

AG: Right, close to about 400,000.[2]

ES: Was there a *Kehillah*?

AG: Yes, there was a *Kehillah*.

ES: How did your family view this *Kehillah*? Did you feel it represented your best interests?

AG: They did.

ES: What happened to you and your family during the weeks following the German invasion?

AG: I wasn't home. In 1939 there was such a mishmash in the Polish, you know, administration. They lost their heads. I was in the Reserves. After my duty, 18 months, every year I went for maneuvers. When the war broke out, they didn't mobilize me because everybody got their individual call to get in, but on the radio, September 1, 1939, they told all of the reserves to go to their regiments. I left my wife, mother, two sisters, and I left a little baby, and joined. I left Lodz to look for the regiment which I never found. I came to Warsaw.

ES: What did you do after you got there?

[2]Correct figure is 223,000.

AG: We were fighting the Germans. It was three weeks artillery bombardment, air raids and so forth. How I survived, like many others I don't know, it's a miracle. And then when we surrendered the Germans took us in prison. They marched us about 25 miles south of Warsaw and there was a war prisoner camp. In reference to anti-Semitism with the Polish people, they caught on fast enough to get after the Jews. In my case a Polack went to the Germans, pointed out to me and said, "This is a Jew." That's how they acted, the Polish. And then they kept us there for a few weeks and told us to go back. They opened the gates and said, "Go." And we went home; I went back to Lodz. My wife had a nervous breakdown, my mother had a nervous breakdown. Because they didn't hear from us or anything and the news where they had bombarded Warsaw and so many killed people. Anyway I survived the war.

ES: So you were able to rejoin the family then?

AG: Yeah. And then the life, there was no work.

ES: Did you receive any help from any non-Jews during this period of time?

AG: We lived with the non-Jews. We didn't actually need any help, because we had some money and what we could buy, we bought, until they put us in the ghetto. The one time I remember, my wife told you before, the Germans came and took furniture, paintings, the dog. They came to me too. They came up and took the pictures, the paintings, and took an expensive radio; at the time there were no televisions, and I spoke a fairly good German and I was sort of arguing with him. I told him it's better to die than have such a life. So he pulled out his gun and was giving it to me saying, "Kill your people." I had a big temptation to grab the gun and kill him but I looked at my family, I knew I am not going to kill him. Killing him, I'll kill them. We couldn't at that time anticipate the atrocities and the killings and the ovens. So I didn't kill him; I was one of the sharp-shooters in the army and I could have killed him, but I didn't.

ES: Nobody could perceive what was going to happen then?

AG: No.

ES: When the ghetto was closed, your family went together; when was that, do you remember?

AG: In 1940, in the early months of 1940, January or February, yes, something like that.

ES: Had your family lived outside the ghetto and had to move inside?

AG: Yes, the ghetto was in the slums and we lived in a nice, prosperous neighbor hood.

ES: What was life like in the ghetto?

AG: You could hardly call it life, because we were squeezed in.

ES: Tell me how many people were in the same house.

AG: Six, seven people in one room.

ES: That was you, your wife and your child?

AG: And then my sister and her husband and their child and my mother.

ES: Were you able to do any kind of work, or nothing?

AG: In the beginning no, but later on because we were foolish enough to think that this wouldn't last too long—for some reason or another—so I wasn't too much concerned to get a job; later on I got a job.

ES: What did you do?

AG: I was the head cashier in the ghetto. They set up stores for food and rations and so forth. There were about 25 stores I think and they all brought the money into my office. I was the head cashier.

ES: Who ran the stores; did the Jews run the stores?

AG: Yes.

ES: And you handled the money so you were involved in the financial end. How long were you able to do that?

AG: Till the last day of August, 1944.

ES: When they liquidated. So you were able to do that the whole time you were in the ghetto.

AG: My wife was a nurse working with my present wife, Alexandra; they were friends before the war. They graduated nursing school. So we were both in the ghetto. I took sick from the dirty money and Alexandra, my present wife, came to this hospital and sort of worked on my being alive now.

ES: Looked after you. Explain why your wife then could not help you.

AG: Quarantine.

ES: Why was she quarantined?

AG: Typhoid fever.

ES: Did she have typhoid fever or was she working with patients?

AG: No, I had it. I was taken to the hospital.

ES: So you were in quarantine.

AG: I was in hospital and she was in quarantine. The whole house.

ES: O.K., so she could not come. But your present wife was a nurse and she came and looked after you. During the time that you were in the ghetto, did you have any contact at all with anyone outside the ghetto?

AG: No.

ES: Did you hear any news in any way about anything that was going on outside?

AG: Yes, we had a radio. It's a part of my wife's brother, which he was caught.

ES: We heard that on your wife's tape but I want you to tell me.

AG: We had the news and we made out, sort of meetings, and told other people what is going on.

ES: So you secretly listened to the radio. What were you hearing, BBC?

AG: BBC.

ES: And then you passed on information to other people in the ghetto and naturally you knew, if you were caught with the radio, like your wife's brother was...

AG: I didn't know it at the time what happened to my wife's brother. He was killed because you know he took so many people out of the ghetto, among others my wife's brother, that I didn't know think this was the reason but they had theirs and we had ours.

ES: Were you able to keep your radio until the ghetto was liquidated?

AG: No, just for a short while and they were after the people who had the radio.

ES: They confiscated it. How would you describe the *Judenrat* in the ghetto?

AG: Actually they called it the Jewish King. Now this guy had I don't know how to describe him. He sort of thought that he is real, you know, owner of our lives the way he did—like a king, like a dictator. No one dared to criticize him. And he did what the Germans told him plus his own crazy ideas.

ES: Was there a lot of favoritism played?

AG: Only about 98-1/2%.

ES: Were the people who came into the ghetto from outside treated differently by the people who lived there previously?

AG: Yes, now as I told you they created the ghettos from the slums of the big city. [Lodz] was a big city of a million, three hundred thousand, so we were I don't know how to tell you this here. It was sort of a divided Jewish population between the slum people and the people who were a little better off.

ES: Socially.

AG: Socially. It wasn't our fault and it wasn't their fault that they were poor. It wasn't our fault that we were a little bit better off then them, but it was two different kinds of Jews. When we came into the ghetto they were happy, sort of, in the beginning. See you came to us, you ignored us. They had a chip on their shoulders like the colored people over here. They thought that we were against them, which we were not, and they took sort of a revenge that we came to their level. And then it smoothed out as time went on.

ES: Were you aware of any kind of underground in the ghetto?

AG: No.

ES: How did you yourself feel about any possible resistance? Did you think any was possible?

AG: Not in the ghetto. Our city was incorporated into the German Reich, and as such we were surrounded with Germans and Polish. We didn't have any connection, even the name of the Lodz was changed to Litzmannstadt, a German name. So we were sur round ed by Germans, Polacks and we couldn't think of any resistance. Not in the ghetto.

ES: To what extent did the Poles help the Nazis persecute the Jews while you were in the ghettos?

AG: It would be our guess only because we didn't have any contact with them. They were probably glad that this is what happened to the Jews.

ES: But you didn't have any contact with the Poles?

AG: Not at all.

ES: Were you aware of any Poles who helped hide Jews?

AG: No, not in our city.

ES: Or any who smuggled in food or goods or help?

AG: I don't know. There was one man who did go to Warsaw ghetto; I forget his name.

ES: There was a man from a Warsaw ghetto who came, a Polish man?

AG: He was a Jew; he worked for the Germans and the Jews. He was a double agent.

ES: What happened to you when the ghetto was liquidated?

AG: We were taken to the trains.

ES: Were you together at this time with the rest of your family?

AG: With the rest of my family, and they put us in cattle cars and I don't know, I was sick at the time when we left the ghetto so a lot of things are not clear in my memory.

ES: Typhoid or was this another sickness?

AG: Some other sickness; there was no doctor, no help. I had to suffer, only high fever. And loss of memory. But what I remember, they put us in the cattle car and how long we were on our way to Auschwitz, not less than three or four days, and the conditions, undescribable. We couldn't even sit or lie down; we had to stand up, it was that crowded. They opened once at night, the door, until they emptied the buckets and they closed the door again. They gave us a little bit water and that's all and then we landed in Auschwitz.

ES: Can you tell me what happened after you got there?

AG: We marched out, we left the cattle cars and we had some belongings. They told us to put it away and they took it away, and they marched us away from the train and there was a selection and Mengele was there, the woman with the children, and older women one side, and men, all the men the same side and younger people. At that time I was young. And for self-preservation told me to tell them that I am a mechanic, they put me on the other side. Right away on the left side and they marched us towards the barracks.

ES: That was the last time you saw your mother?

AG: No, my mother was in different time, my wife and my sister.

ES: And your child?

AG: And my child and my sister. She was with the younger daughter.

ES: So your mother didn't die right then? She did?

AG: Yes. They took her a few days before, three days later, as soon as she arrived in Auschwitz with my sister and she had two children.

ES: So in other words the whole rest of your family after they arrived in Auschwitz, that would be the end.

AG: Except the men.

ES: Except for yourself. So you and your brother-in-law were together in the beginning. Tell me what happened after.

AG: What happened was, I don't know how to describe it. The films they show you here with different sceneries and stuff like this, we couldn't comprehend, we couldn't understand what is going on. We were driven into the barracks. They gave us some pots and this will be for your soup. No spoon, nothing. They gave us a half a loaf of bread for two days and you know, in the mornings the *Appell*, at 4:00, what you call it in English, counting. They kept us here. I remember when I got to the showers, it was different; the showers into the female portion were with gas. Our showers were water, thank God. I was so thirsty that I run to a spigot. I wanted to have a few sips of water. I was almost killed because they didn't allow you to do anything. And then they cleaned us and shaved us and we had the showers. Into the barracks and then they gave us numbers, 58392 I have.

ES: Were you tattooed?

AG: No, because we were men. Like my wife told later they didn't have the time, they needed us for other things. So in the labor camp which I was sent later, they kept the number. After about three, four weeks in Auschwitz, then again how we survived, how I survived, I don't know. I don't remember anything. I had a cousin of my first wife and he was with me and he stepped aside and I never saw him again.

ES: When did you find out about the crematory? As soon as you got there, were you told right away?

AG: The *Kapos*, the Jewish prisoners, pointed out the smoke. "These are your families, these are your fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers," and what have you.

ES: Did you have any idea before they told you that?

AG: No, we didn't have any idea. If we would think of it we wouldn't believe it. Am I correct, we wouldn't believe it?

ES: Did you work, do you remember doing any kind of work in Auschwitz?

AG: In Auschwitz, no. They didn't need us. Just in and out, counted you and spend the time until they were ready with the transport to the labor camp.

ES: You said you were in Auschwitz for about a month.

AG: About a month: three, four weeks.

ES: They selected you for a...

AG: I was selected already for this particular camp and it was in Sudeten Deutschland, southern Germany, Friedland.

ES: You got there by train again?

AG: Train, cattle cars. I think it lasted a week until we got there. The same conditions, ghetto, Auschwitz, the same conditions.

ES: What did they have you do in the work camp?

AG: No, this labor camp was meant for the V-2 bombs; it was effective to V-2 missiles. They selected us for the particular kind of work, to manufacture the V-2, the missiles, and they were, all of them except me, mechanics. And I came there, to the factory, and they gave us tools, scissors, shears, a hammer, a piece of aluminum sheet and they told us to produce something in order to prove that we are mechanics.

ES: A test.

AG: A test. Of course, everybody else could perform with the tools except me, and the head man of the factory came to me; he was a nice man, he wasn't the type to kill, a German, he said, "You know, you didn't produce anything. You didn't prove that you were a mechanic. If you want prove that you are, you won't make anything with the tools, I'll have to send you back to Auschwitz," and I make this.

ES: A container, for not being a mechanic, you were able to produce this little container.

AG: I had shears, sheet metal and hammer and a pipe.

ES: Absolutely amazing.

Tape one, side two:

ES: What did the man in charge say when he saw this amazing little box?

AG: When I had this finished, I had the nerve to go to him and told him, "I have something that I produced something, but you have to give me your word that you will give it back to me," which he did. He said, "I don't believe it, you are a mechanic."

ES: What were some of the other things the other men made?

AG: Minor things, they only proved they could handle the tools. And then we were taught how to operate the machinery. Now I had a special cause, because of this here. And because of the knowledge of the German language. I had two weeks—for 14 nights, I had this special engineer teaching me how to operate the machinery, and then I got three trained mechanics as my helpers.

ES: What was your job then?

AG: Rockets. We did not assemble them but we shape them, we build them from the machines and there were so many different operations and hundreds of screws and they told us that every screws is 1/4 mm [?] thick. You have to make the hole, drill the hole half the size of this screw, in order, you know, to keep it. Tools, complicated tools, and it took me two weeks to pick it up, and then they put us into operation of the missiles, the V-2 bombs which we didn't know officially what they are.

ES: You were building something but you didn't know at that time what it was?

AG: We found out later, we guessed, we heard about the V-2 bombs, still being in the ghetto, when they got them over to England, so we knew of their existence but we didn't know at that time that we are building them, but rumors came from the Germans and we found out that these are the V-2 bombs. Now I started to work and then came the idea to me it's time to do something. We didn't have any arms, we didn't have resistance, we didn't have any possibility to be against the Germans, let me do it my way. They had their figures and I had my figures. I told you about the size of the screws and the holes. I didn't tell you about the length of the screws, and many other things, which I made larger holes for the screw, figuring that they won't last, they wouldn't hold the power. I shortened the screws to a half. If they would be any kind of magicians, they could not find out, which they didn't; later on I'll tell you how, what kind of a job, once you put the screw into the hole, they couldn't figure out if it was a bigger hole or a smaller hole.

ES: So there really wasn't any way to check up on what you were doing.

AG: No. And now if you know what a *chutzpah*—a *Yiddishe chutzpah* is, I wasn't satisfied with doing it myself—and I was in good terms with the Germans. We had a number, half and half of German mechanics.

ES: Prisoners, you are talking about.

AG: No, German mechanics. We were working alongside each other in the factory there. I was doing the same thing they did, and they did the same thing that I did. So having this *chutzpah*, I wanted more, and I wanted Germans to do the same sabotage,

and I was in good terms with them, knowing the German language well enough. And I asked him, "How are you doing this here, don't you have any cramps in your palms and your hands?" He said, "Yes." "Don't tell the next guy, don't tell the next guy, don't tell anybody. I'm going to give you an easier way of doing it." And I told him to do the way I did, bigger holes was easier to screw in with this screwdriver.

ES: So you got them to sabotage without knowing.

AG: I went through psychology. They don't think. They didn't think and I had nerve enough to tell them, "Don't tell the next guy because you know it's only for you, because I like you." And I went to the next guy and I told him myself and I had the whole crew doing the same thing.

ES: That was your way to fight back.

AG: Fight back, yes. And I was waiting. I did not tell even my brother-in-law because I didn't want, I know I'll get shot, I'll get killed if they ever find out and he was working on the same line. And I [was] waiting for the results. I know it so happens, they will find out, because once the bombs won't come to England, I forget how they have to blow up on the launching pad in German, in Europe, not in Great Britain. About two months I continued and my good friends, the Germans, continued to sabotage, and all of a sudden we had a commission—about 12 German mechanics—came and started to investigate and I knew, when they came in, that I did it. I did it. And they were looking and they found a few faults. In the meantime, the Russians came closer to the part of Germany; this labor camp where this factory was, and they took all of the German mechanics out of this factory and sent them deeper into Germany, farther away from the front—and they kept us in there; whatever we produced, we produced. When this committee was checking, they found little things, not major things, but little things. As I told you before, they couldn't possibly check out whether the holes were the proper sizes or improper size, and they started to give me back to repair and each time they gave me something back I repaired, they got louder and fresher and I figured now I have to try something. I started to holler back at them. I said, "How can you prove this, that I did it? How about all the mechanics you sent away from here?" And I hollered at them back and they took it. And they laid off of me, didn't bring me anything. I said, "I can repair anything you want me to, but don't blame me that I did it." But the result—and the talk—gave me so much pleasure, that I didn't care if they shot me or not.

ES: In the meantime you were responsible for a lot of the rockets not exploding the way they wanted.

AG: They exploded on the German soil. We have here an acquaintance, a Polish Jew, who was in the Belgium University when the war started; when they occupied Belgium he ran away to France, and you know who DeGaulle is, and he enlisted into DeGaulle's army, and when they cleared the French territory from the French troops, they were sent to Great Britain, England. In some conversation, we were talking about the V-2

bombs and I told him this story. He said, "Wait a minute. There was a lull, the V-2 bombs stopped coming into Great Britain," and [we] figured out the time.

ES: And it was the time you were sabotaging.

AG: Sabotaging—they had other sources too, but not as many as we had.

ES: It just shows that one person can make the difference.

AG: And this was my pleasure, and then I could get killed twice: one, if they moved, if the Russians moved closer they had to dissolve the factory there, they would find out and kill me for the sake of killing. And among other things, one time I had a visitor working in another part of the factory, and I had a cut on my finger. He asked me what this is—a German, the owner of the factory. I said, "I cut it." "How did you cut it?" I told him how. I said, "This is not important, this will heal." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "This will heal, but what's inside here, won't heal!" He reached for his revolver and moved his hand down and didn't get his revolver and asked me, "Are you a German Jew?" I said, "No." "You speak a good German language." I told him more. I said, "I had enough time—being five years in your jail and your camps—to learn the language." But I gave it to him and I didn't believe, and you wouldn't believe it too probably, that the same German who used to come there for inspections, used to come to me, and talk to me, and told me among other things, "It won't last long, not much longer; the war is coming to an end."

ES: How long did you work like this in the factory?

AG: From September, 1944 until we were liberated in May 9, 1945, a month until April.

ES: You worked in the same factory, working on those rockets all that time up until the very end, in other words?

AG: Right.

ES: Tell me about how you were liberated.

AG: The Russians came closer and closer and then the Germans disappeared—and the Russians came in this little town and told us to get out of the camp. They didn't care if we had anywhere to go, or what we have to eat, nothing. We had to clean the camp and they put in the German prisoners. They were Russians fighting alongside with the Germans and they caught them and they put them in the same camp. And we had to go around in the little town. Of course, the Germans were not bad, they were angels. They didn't know what was going on there. So we walked in a house. There was a family so we walked in and stayed there. Not only did they cook and wash our clothes, they even offered their daughter.

ES: So they actually took you in and a lot of former prisoners they took in and helped?

AG: They didn't help us, we helped ourselves; they kept us there.

ES: Did they really know what was going on at that particular time?

AG: They did and if they tell you, "No," like a number of people tell you the Holocaust was a hoax, they knew. We were marching from the beginning of the day until the end of the day, day in and day out to the factory. How couldn't they not know?

ES: How long did you stay with this family?

AG: About two weeks and then I organized a group of the same Lodzer guys. We went to a woman's camp about twenty-five miles from our camp, and I found two of my employees from the ghetto, and we are still in touch with them. They are in Israel and two are here.

ES: What did you do once you found each other?

AG: When we found each other we wanted to go back to Lodz. So we saw a German riding a horse with a wagon and we told him to get the hell off the horse and wagon, and we took the wagon and we drove the poor horse to Czechoslovakia. And in Czechoslovakia, they didn't let us in with the horse; we went on the train. It took us a few weeks until we got home.

ES: What did you find when you got back to Lodz?

AG: Nothing. I went one time to my apartment and there was a Polish officer with his family living there.

ES: This is where you lived with your wife and your mother before you went to the ghetto.

AG: Right and the only thing that I found was a head of a cane, a silver head, solid silver from my father's cane. This is what I took. We have it, and nothing else. I never went back there.

ES: Where did you go then, what did you decide to do?

AG: I was there for a while and I worked for, in the beginning I didn't work. I was the sort of, not the *Kehillah*, but the committee of the survivors, and I put up listings of us, and whoever came there, it was the center of the survivors in my hometown, Lodz. So we found a few people there, and we had a not exactly an apartment, something like an apartment. It's hard to describe.

ES: It was better than a camp though.

AG: No question about this. Then I had to start looking for a job and some money for a living, and I got the job, in my line in the spinning mills. I was there until this lady came, my [present] wife, and I found her waiting for the bus and then we decided it's enough.

ES: She was without her husband who she knew was dead.

AG: I had a big job. First of all they wanted me to play not-a-Jew. I said, "No. I've paid too much, being a Jew, and I'm going to stay a Jew. If you need me for this job it's O.K. If not, I won't play any other."

ES: Who asked you to pretend you were not a Jew?

AG: Personnel.

ES: What nationality, German?

AG: Polish.

ES: People from the government asked you?

AG: It was a government job because of the Communist system, no private jobs. So they put me on two weeks' probation and when I started to work, I lost myself. Things familiar to me for so many years, I didn't do it. And apparently I did a good job. Two days later they came to me and told me to give my birthplace and credentials and so forth and I was accepted. Two months later they called me into Personnel and almost accused me of sabotaging. Why? Because I proved that I knew more than I told them when they examined me for the job and I proved myself better, more knowledgeable for the job. What did I have in my mind? I told them I didn't have anything on my mind. I didn't want to work if I wouldn't need the money what you pay me. I wouldn't even go looking for a job because I was lost and I explained to them, I had a family, and I am all by myself. How do they expect me psychologically to perform proper? Now I grew in my job and grew in my job.

ES: You were working in a spinning factory?

AG: No, I was the head of all the spinning factory. I was in charge of spinning in the whole country.

ES: A very responsible job for a young man.

AG: In fact, I got a year jail from the Russians because they were connected with the Polish industry, and a silver medal from the Poles because I proved to them what they accused me of doing the wrong thing I had the right to do from the economy point. Americans sent us some raw cotton and you could produce only from this cotton a certain number. And we made some flannels for the Russians, and it didn't carry the weight, the strength. So they accused, they send back an accusation of the one who is responsible for it, to give me a jail sentence and I got a year in jail. I went to the Polish minister head and I explained to him. I had the right to do it, because from this—you check with all of your universities if I had the right to use this here as for this and this number of material—I had to use this here because we were short on cotton. We got a gift. I didn't do it for my own benefits so they gave me a silver star. I didn't deserve the silver star. I didn't go to the jail. I collected my wife, got married and left the Polish government.

ES: After you and your wife got married, what did you do?

AG: We went on vacation and then I never went back to work after vacation. We decided to leave Poland and got together with a friend of ours from before the war. As a mater of fact I gave him a job there in another part of our industry and he got in contact with the *Haganah* and they smuggled us out from Poland over the border into Czechoslovakia.

ES: What happened after you got into Czechoslovakia?

AG: We were marching, walking or whatever way to the Osar, and in Osar we were in Vienna for a while. She took sick and we stayed there for a couple of weeks until she got better and we were trying to get to the American zone. Germany was divided in Russian, French, American and English zones. Thinking of getting papers from my wife's

aunt, we were trying to get to an American zone, in this case through Germany, Munich, and in there we got in touch with my wife's aunt, who had already been making the arrangements.

ES: Who had already been making the arrangements to speak for her, but didn't know about you.

AG: She didn't know about me. We told her that she got a guy from Poland. Anyway, she had to redo the papers and they were sent to Munich. In order to get to Munich, Germany and to work on our trip to United States, we had to smuggle ourselves out from Poland. Now before I didn't want to run away from Poland, because they were accusing Jews of doing the wrong thing and run away. So I told my superior which was a Polish man, a nice man, and I told him, "Listen, we want to leave Poland. I'm not afraid to tell you this here because I'm not running away. I didn't do anything wrong that I have to run away, and I don't want to leave an impression that I run away for some reason. We want to go and leave Poland." He said, "Don't we treat you nice? You grow to an extent that not too many people grow." I said, "I have no complaints about you, I have no complaints about my surrounding, but I have another complaint. There is a paragraph 28 which tells you, and tells me too, that you leave the Jews from their positions as soon as the Polish who pick up the knowledge and be able to replace the Jew, so I'm going to be ahead of you." He said, "You're right. You did the right thing. But send me a resignation from the board," which I did. I sent him in an official resignation resigning from the job so he was covered and I was.

ES: It made it look like you were not running away. So how long did you have to wait for before papers came through so you could...

AG: We were altogether two years in Munich.

ES: What did you do to earn money while you were there?

AG: I worked for the Joint Distribution Committee.

ES: And your wife was a nurse?

AG: My wife was working in a pharmacy.

ES: You told me you didn't want to work in a German hospital. And then the papers came through.

AG: We had two papers, we had a paper for Brazil and we had a paper for the...

ES: Tell me on the tape how you got a paper for Brazil.

AG: The paper from Brazil, my former boss from Poland from before the war, found out and I don't know how. He ran away to England, from England to Brazil and bought a glass factory. How he found out that I'm alive, I don't know, I couldn't tell you, but we got in touch—and he offered me a job to manage his factory, glass factory in some part of Brazil. Now of course, I accepted it. He had an offer at that time in 1946, '47. $1,500 a month, a car, a house and a maid, and it was a good thing. We decided to learn the Portuguese language in order not to be without knowledge of the language. But one thing, Brazil didn't let Jews in. When I had the application for the visa, among other things was

the religion. From my first and last name they couldn't realize it that I am Jewish, and then the religion and the German language. Hebrew is Mosaic and so I put down in the Hebrew on the blank, Mos. which was the abbreviation of Mosaic and Moslem, and they took it that I am Moslem and they gave me a visa; otherwise if they would know that I am Jewish, they would never let me get a visa.

ES: So here you had a visa.

Tape two, side one:

ES: Now you have a choice, you can either go to Brazil or to the United States. Why did you choose the United States?

AG: In Germany, the Jewish Committee, and them people and other Jews, used to ask each other, "Where do you want to go?" So we were going to Brazil. It was a hot summer and my wife felt sick. She had to go to the doctor and he found her not well. And he asked her, "Where do you intend to go?" So she said, "Brazil, São Paulo. The altitude is high, and the temperature is not so low." He said, "Do you have another choice?" She said, "Eventually we have another choice, the United States." He said, "Brazil, and São Paulo, is not for your health. You can not go there." So we decided to disregard the trip to São Paulo and we had to send a letter to my boss, that I am forced to resign. And we worked on the United States.

ES: How long did it take for the paper to come through for the both of you?

AG: It took since we arrived to Munich until we left for Bremen, two years.

ES: It took you the two years and you left and you came right to Philadelphia because your wife had relatives in Philadelphia.

AG: Correct.

ES: What did you do after you got here? Did you know any English when you arrived here?

AG: No. We didn't speak English. At that time I still spoke Yiddish and my wife understood Yiddish, so we got some conversation going but not in English. Then we went to school, about one night at school. The teacher told us, "You don't belong here because this group of people here are learning their ABC because they didn't have their citizenship yet." All the Jewish people—and they learned how to sign their names in order to sign the citizenship papers—they spoke English, of course, broken, "But you don't need the ABC. You have enough basics from other languages, you have to learn it some other place, a private teacher or read the books, listen to the radio," and so forth, which we did. We picked it up little by little and my wife works with the English people, as a nurse, so she picked it up there and I was working with other English speaking people.

ES: What kind of job did you have at first when you came here?

AG: A steel tile setter. I earned a lot of money, $.75 an hour, which wasn't enough, yeah, we put savings in the bank out of the $25.00. In the beginning I was working hourly and then I learned the trade, and I told them I want to go in piece work. And piece work if you know the job you could make more, $75 instead of $30 a week and so forth which I did. They didn't let me in the beginning. I pulled it through. The first week on piece work I made $85. After six weeks, as a matter fact, later in a home show, I had 16 helpers for me and the home show building, Civic Center.

ES: At the home show at the Civic Center back in 1949.

AG: 1948, 1949. But I took sick. I was always working man like a white collar man and this was too much and then I have a nice cousin, one of the nicest relatives. He had a little factory; it was making ladies' housecoats. He put me on the machine and I was sewing there for a while. He put me in the shipping room and the funny thing, I remember, I was working alongside an English-speaking boy and I was printing nicely—the company the merchandise came from—and one said, "I don't understand this guy; he doesn't know how to speak English and take a look at how he writes."

ES: You could write it but you couldn't speak it.

AG: And then I picked up the language and I didn't make too much making the housecoats. He gave me his line and then I had another line, a salesman on the road. I needed a little car so a friend of ours lent us $300. We both had Plymouths for $1,700.

ES: How long were you a salesman?

AG: Maybe a year. I couldn't have shipments. They didn't have enough material to produce what I sold. I gave this up. We came in 1948; in 1950 I was already looking for some other job. I was selling magazines and I was collecting from customers for the magazines and so forth. And then I was looking in the papers and I saw an ad, Fishman and Toben. They are looking for somebody. They wanted a stockman.

ES: And what did Fishman and Toben do at that time?

AG: At that time they were in the children's outfit. Manufacturers of boys' clothing. The job they offered me wasn't for me. I couldn't do the kind of work what they wanted me to so I left my address. I didn't get the job. Two weeks later they wrote me a letter, they have another job if I'm still interested. Of course I was interested. I went there and I took the job and I had, at that time they put me sort of in charge of Sears. They were making outfits for Sears, Roebuck and Montgomery Ward. At that time I had only Sears. And little by little I got acquainted with Sears and so forth and then they gave me Montgomery Ward, the same line of merchandise and the same type of dealing and so forth.

ES: And you stayed with Fishman and Toben for 31 years and you just retired not too long ago.

AG: 31 years, 1981.

ES: I guess you did a good job for them.

AG: Apparently, yes. As a matter of fact, don't get me wrong, it's not a matter of bragging, they called me into Chicago and I didn't know what I'm going there for. I went with my boss and I had the red-carpet treatment there. And all the people I know for so many years, we didn't know each other, over the phone only.

ES: And you got to meet everybody.

AG: And they came running out from their cubicles and come to me, "Anatole, Anatole," I had a red-carpet reception there.

ES: Before we finish up the tape, I just do want to go back. You went through a lot during the times you were in prison, the times you were in the ghetto. I would just like

to ask you what was it that helped keep you going through all these terrible conditions that you had to endure?

AG: One thing for sure among other things, I was never a big eater and this what we had to eat wasn't enough, hardly enough for me, but was enough to be able to survive; like other big eaters, they didn't even last half a year. This is for sure. And then I wasn't Agnostic. I wasn't too big of a believer. But the circumstances and the will of not to survive yourself but to survive and see your family. I had my prayers—marching to work every morning—and this kept me and kept me. Another four weeks, if the war was four weeks longer, I couldn't have survived. And then a miracle, I have no other explanation.

ES: Thank you very much for sharing your story with me.

AG: You're quite welcome.