HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

PAUL KURSCHNER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Ruth K. Hartz
Date: December 5, 1982

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PK: Paul Kurschner [interviewee]
RH: Ruth K. Hartz[1] [interviewer]
Date: December 5, 1982

Tape one, side one:

RH: This is Renee Hartz, interviewing Mr. Paul Kurschner, on this day, December 5, 1982. Mr. Kurschner, please tell me, where were you born, and when, and tell me a little bit about your family.

PK: I was born on May 16, 1916, in Vienna, was the 20th Bezirk District, and the same street, in the same house, actually, my family lived for about three generations. And we lived in the area, my -- everyone knew us. We grew up there. There's a great feeling of security. And we actually felt more Austrians than Jews, at that time. I was the first one in the family to break away from I am Austrian into I am a Jew, and I joined the, originally the *Hashomer Hatzair*, then this, not very satisfied with their aspect of importance, their priorities were different than mine, and I drifted off to *Kidut Tsurim*.

RH: Was that a Zionist organization?

PK: They all are Zionist organizations. *Kidut Tsurim* was a middle of the road group, but not very well oriented. And I finally wound up in *Betar*. *Betar* is a [unclear] Trumpeldor for youth group of the originalist.

RH: In what year did you join these groups? Do you recall?

PK: Oh well, [chuckles] I would guess now that I wound up in *Betar* somewhere 1934.

RH: So actually after Hitler came to power.

PK: No.

RH: In Germany.

PK: No, no, in Germany, yes.

RH: Yes.

PK: But Austria, not until 1938 did anyone think that the Nazis could have any power in Austria. And we were all duped that we are secure. And 1934, Weizmann knew what was going on in Germany. My parents were sure it can't happen to us. I was sure it could happen to all of Europe. I -- my parents at that time had all, my mother's family, was born here in the United States, and they had papers, and I did not. I didn't want any part of it. And we were very active, matter of fact, we used to frequently, if we had a group called *Gedut HaKhoyal*, which is part of the *Betar*[2] movement. And we used to stand watch in front of synagogues, of Jewish organizations, especially on holidays. And

[1]Ruth (Renee) K. Hartz.
[2]Betar: Revisionist Zionist youth movement founded in Riga, Latvia in 1923 by Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky.

frequently lock horns with the Nazis, or with antisemiti-, -semitic elements in the *Heimatschutz*, which is the Austrian militia. They were a paramilitary group sanctioned by the Christian Socialists of Austria, which were the leading power at that time.

RH: Yeah. When did that group become really active, that militia group?

PK: They, the...

RH: When were they powerful?

PK: The *Heimatschutz*...

RH: Yeah.

PK: Were already very strong in 1927 as far as I can remember, when there was a forced shootout between *Heimatschutz* and Viennese labor. It was the downfall of the Democratic Party when Dollfuss or Seipel took over. It was a three or four-day battle in the streets of Vienna, with 1,000 people killed. And at the beginning of the dictatorship in Austria, with Dollfuss was the first dictator. And Schuschnigg[3] his follow-up.

RH: When did Dollfuss come to power?

PK: Dollfuss came to power in 1936.

RH: Yeah. So...

PK: No, sorry. Schuschnigg in a, Dollfuss came to power in 1934, at the, at the first Revolution.

RH: Oh I see, okay. I'm not too familiar with Austrian history.

PK: Yeah.

RH: You'll have to forgive me. What was your life like before the war or before it was changed by the Nazis?

PK: Okay, first there was antisemitism in Vienna, naturally. You know? It was the kind of antisemitism we grew up with and the older generation didn't even feel. They took it for granted that there could be trades that are closed to Jews. Like a Jew could not be a pharmacist and a Jew could not be a weaponsmith, or an army official. I wanted to be a ranger, and I couldn't become a ranger if I was a Jew. And I felt clogged in by that. Also, I did not like the [unclear] Jew, big Moishe, *der Grosse* Moishe, and needling...

RH: You mean they...

PK: …by the [unclear]. Even so-called...

RH: They called you Moishe to...

PK: Yeah.

RH: Which was a derogatory name.

PK: Right.

RH: Yeah.

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[3]Engelbert Dollfuss: (1892 – 1934) was an Austrian Christian Social and Patriotic Front statesman. Became Chancellor in 1932. In 1933 he banned the Austrian Nazi Party and assumed dictatorial powers. He was assassinated by the Nazis in 1934.
Ignaz Seipel: (1876 – 1932) Austrian prelate and politician of the Christian Social Party. Served as Chandellor of Austria twice during the 1920s.
Kurt Schuschnigg: Successor to Dollfuss until Hitler annexed Austria in 1938.

PK: Even so-called good-natured needles, I could not take. Naturally I was in quite a few fist fights in school, but that's the way I had to live. Later on it became very obvious. From 1934 on, Nazis used, 1932 on, Nazis used to march the streets in small groups. Matter of fact, they were so small, the high school I went to, had one Nazi. And I took him home to my parents to lunch one day just to show what a Nazi looked like. [chuckles]

RH: [chuckles]

PK: It was like we had seen a zoo. Heh?

RH: Yeah, he was like a rare creature at that time.

PK: Well, between 80 students and the two, three [unclear], in a two, third class, third grade, in junior high, he was the only Nazi. So, but while we have a number of people that followed either the *Schutzbund*, which is the left militia, or the *Heimatschutz* on the right wing militia. He was the only Nazi.

RH: So what was the difference between the right-wing militia and a Nazi in Austria?

PK: Oh, the Nazis were for a greater Germany, and complete exclusion of the Jews, whiles the right-wing of the *Heimatschutz* or at the *Heimatwehr*, was completely Austrian, not an on -- a unis-, unification with Germany, but Austria for themselves, as a Christian country.

RH: So also freed of Jews.

PK: Eh, no, no, with the Jews kept...

RH: Under control?

PK: Under, at their place, quote, yeah? With, with...

RH: Which was their status anyway.

PK: Status, status quo.

RH: Right.

PK: With no more improvements of the Jews, and not letting any more Jews in, and a quota in the universities of how many Jews can go to the university or not. We frequently at that time, had bloody fights in the University of Vienna. My cousin was thrown out the window one day, broke both legs, and it was very common. I know when I was in vocational school, we had at least two fights a week. At that time, most of the time, since we fought together with the Social Democrats and the Socialist groups united, we won against the Nazis. You know? I was often, very often in police headquarters, but they didn't bother me very much and we were...

RH: They released you?

PK: Well, yeah, well, the longest I was in was two days. It was nothing to worry about. But at least we did not let the Nazis take over the school, as they did in the University.

RH: So they, there were more than Jews fighting against the right-wing militia and the Nazis?

PK: Oh, no, the Socialists, and the Social Democrats, at that time, were still on our side.

RH: Right.

PK: When the Nazis came in, the Socialists and the Communists joined the Nazis. We were very surprised of that.

RH: I see. And when was that?

PK: 1938.

RH: After *Kristallnacht*?

PK: What?

RH: After *Kristallnacht* in Germany?

PK: No, the *Kristallnacht* came in Germany, when Hitler marched into Austria on March 13, 1938.

RH: I see.

PK: And I believe the *Kristallnacht*...

RH: Was later.

PK: Was in October[4].

RH: True.

PK: By that time I was already in Palestine, thanks God.

RH: I see. Well, that's interesting. Okay, so you already answered I think the question of your family belonging to any Jewish organizations. You said you were [unclear].

PK: Oh yes, my family belonged to the *Centralverein*[5] of Austrian, of Jewish religion.

RH: Can you explain it to me a little bit?

PK: Which was a, what?

RH: Can you give a little, few more details about that organization?

PK: I can, but you won't like it.

RH: [chuckles] That's okay.

PK: It was the Austrian equivalent of the Reform Jews in America at that time and in Germany.

RH: I'm a Reform Jew.

PK: Yeah, I know. Who were at, who were first Americans and then Jews, or first German and then Jews. And it took a major victory with God's help in Israel to make them believe that we have rights, too. And my parents were very much against me going to Palestine. They wanted me to go with them to America. I said, "There is no future with us all going in one country again. We need our own country. We are a nation." And all that they did not believe in. But I was brought up as an Austrian, and that per S*hicksal,* fate, has fallen to the, to be unlucky enough to be a Jew.

[4]*Kristallnacht* was November 9 – 10, 1938.
[5]*Zentralverein* is an alternate spelling for this.

RH: But, so you really broke away from your family in, in...

PK: Very strongly so.

RH: Yes. And that's really remarkable. At what age did you decide that?

PK: 13.

RH: When you were 13.

PK: Right.

RH: You decided for yourself...

PK: Right.

RH: …that this was wrong for a Jewish family to feel being Austrian first then...

PK: Oh I wouldn't, oh, oh, you're giving me too much brain power here. No, I did not decide on my own. I was greatly influenced by young men that were either 16, 17 or 20 years old, who already were in the Zionist movement, and who spoke with me or to, I went to a *Sichot* [discussion group] as we called it, called them then. And I was convinced that that is the answer. Reading Theodor Herzl...

RH: Right.

PK: And Sokolov.

RH: Yeah.

PK: I was, I got very, very involved very early and I was so strongly involved that by 1936, when they held the first Congress of the New Zionist Congress, I was elected as the youngest candidate in it, I believe. And I, although I say I was 18, I think I was only 17 at the time. But, I sat in the first Congress in Vienna.

RH: And was that an active group? Was your pattern a familiar one? Did a lot of young people...

PK: Yes.

RH: …walk away from their parents at that time?

PK: Oh yes, yes. In Vienna at that time, most Jews, or let's say a great percent, there may be 40 percent only. But on, especially in our circle, in the middle class circle, most of them were afraid to shake the boat, to rock the boat. It was always the, "We are Austrians. Look how far back. My father was Hungarian and the grandfather, was Yugoslav, it was all Austria." And, besides that, the Austrian Jews shared some traits with the German Jew, namely, that it is brought unjustly, for look at the eastern Jew, the Jew that came from Galitizia, and the Jew that came from Russia or from Poland, who dressed differently, who spoke in jargon or Yiddish, and stuck out like sore thumb. And I felt personally responsible for that. Or, but I felt that is a personal blot on their integrity, if a Jew goes down on the street in a black caftan or the *streimel*[6] rather than in leather shorts. And that created a very strong Austrian Jewish movement. The same as the German Jewish movement.

[6]*streimel*: Fur hat worn by Hasidic men.

RH: Right. Right. Among, you know, your parents' generation, is what you're saying? Or for a lot of the children of...

PK: No, no, no, my parents' generation.

RH: Right, right.

PK: The...

RH: What did they do? What did your parents do for a living?

PK: Oh. My father was a sales manager for a, men's clothing factory. And my mother had a shoe store.

RH: I see. And they lived comfortably, you say?

PK: We lived very comfortably, yes.

RH: Right, yes.

PK: We had a governess, and later on a tutor, what we call a *Hofmeister. Hofmeister* was a combination tutor and governess, male governess. In other words he taught us how to bow down, how to...

RH: Oh, I see, the social graces.

PK: Social graces.

RH: Yes.

PK: And he introduced us to theater, and to ballet and all those good things that you have to know, and to use the proper language. Possibly without swearing.

RH: Yes, I understand. That's very interesting.

PK: Not speaking dialect.

RH: You told me about Herzl. Were you aware of the Dreyfus Affair in France?

PK: Very much so.

RH: At that time?

PK: Very much so.

RH: [unclear].

PK: Yeah.

RH: And did that influence a lot of the young people in Austria at that time?

PK: No, it was more like a, one more convincing evidence, you know? I would not say that the Dreyfus Affair brought us to the folds of Zionism, but it does reinforce us. And we went in great groups, often whole clubs in unity to see *J'Accuse*[7]. And...

RH: So you knew about it.

PK: We heard about it, yes.

RH: Yes, and you all read it and you read [unclear].

PK: We all read it and reread it. We discussed it in *Sichot*. Sure. We were more interested in the cause than in the consequence.

RH: I understand, yeah, very interesting. Did any men in your family serve in

[7]*J'Accuse* – I accuse – an open letter published on January 13, 1898 by writer Emile Zola regarding the Dreyfuss Affair. Later made into a motion picture.

any national army?

PK: Me.

RH: You did?

PK: First of all, my father, and my uncles were in the Austrian army, or rather Hungarian-Austrian army. Two of my uncles became good ranking officers. Three of my uncles. One as a [unclear], was a *Tyroler Alpinjäger* which is impossible to believe that a Jew to...

RH: Right.

PK: … become, yeah. It's a [unclear].

RH: So it was possible for a Jew to become...

PK: Yes, but it...

RH: A high ranking officer?

PK: No, not high, not, it's a, it's a first class.

RH: Middle class?

PK: The middle, middle echelon.

RH: Yeah.

PK: Yeah. One of my uncles became *Rittmeister*, or, rather Captain of a Hussar regiment. That was [unclear], since. Since the [unclear], Hussar*,* the regiment he served with had almost no Jews in it. And definitely no Jew could advance. But somehow my uncle did advance to be *Rittmeister* of that regiment.

RH: Do you know how he did it?

PK: Yes. First of all, he was the *Visier,* or supervisor, or whatever you call them, they call them *Visier* there, for a big count. He, how do you call that? He ran his estate.

RH: I see.

PK: Heh?

RH: He was a manager.

PK: He was a manager.

RH: Estate, estate manager.

PK: He was the estate manager...

RH: Right.

PK: Of one of the big counts in Hungary.

RH: Oh, I see.

PK: And he went into the same regiment with his boss. He advanced there since he is a great horseman anyhow, they advanced him to *Rittmeister* in the regiment.

RH: Right.

PK: When he came back he was still manager of the same estate. He was later on killed by this, by his own people. Him and his wife and his daughter. They were very religious people. They were the only one in the Kurschner family who were really Orthodox Jews. Very observant. And they got wiped out completely.

RH: You mean in a concentration camp?

PK: No, they did not make it to the, in concentration camp. They were killed in their own home. They were just slaughtered as sheep.

RH: In cold blood.

PK: Yeah.

RH: Do you remember how you and members of your family reacted to Hitler's appointment as Chancellor of Germany in 1933?

PK: Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in Germany? Yes. As an unbelievable catastrophe. Although even between the Jews, not my parents but others I spoke to, thought, at that time, that anything was better than letting the Communists in. Also, I don't know if you are aware of it, there was a movement of a Dr. Naumann, of the German Nationalistic Jewish Party.[8] You know?

RH: Hmm. So he was actually a Nazi Jew?

PK: There were, there was a whole group of Reform Jews who, under Dr. Naumann, joined the Nazis, and even worked as a quasi-fifth column in the Jewish movement, you know, to point out the Eastern Jews. They were a blot on our, they were the money lenders, you know? After Dr. Naumann and his group[9] had done all their duties to Hitler, they were exterminated the same as any other Jew.

RH: Oh, of course.

PK: But for two or three years they were a great menace to us.

RH: Unbelievable. How would you describe your life from 1933 to *Anschluss*? And how was...

PK: I, oh, hectic. We had numerous street fights. And we lived in a fool's paradise. Incidentally, I remember the name of the Jewish, of the new Jewish party my parents belonged to. It was the Union, *Oesterreicher Juden*.

RH: The Union of Austrian Jews?

PK: Yeah. It was the equivalent to the *Centralverein Deutscher Juden*[10]*, Frauen Komission* in Germany. You know? And a Union Jew was vehemently anti-Zionist. You know? For after all, what would the *goyim* think if we have our alliance with a foreign country? We'd have to prove twice our strong, we are true Austrian. Your question was, between, yeah, between *Anschluss* and Hitler's...

RH: 1933 to *Anschluss*.

PK: As I say, at that time we lived in a fool's paradise. Since in street fights we always won against the Nazis. I mean, we had a group organized as a role corps. Role corps was a group of Jewish hoodlums, if you want to call them, we all belonged to

[8]Max Naumann founded the Association of German National Jews in 1921. The goal was total assimilation of Jews into German Volk, self-eradication of Jewish identity and expulsion of Eastern European Jews. Supported Hitler but not accepted by the German government. Dissolved in 1935.
[9]Max Naumann was arrested in 1935, imprisoned in the Columbia concentration camp for a few weeks and released. He died in 1939 of cancer.
[10] *Centralverein Deutscher Juden* - Central Organization of Jews in Germany.

Betar,[11] or to *Brit HaHayal*,[12] connected by telephone or runners, but each one of us has anything from bicycle up to small trucks. And we, whenever there was an assault on a Jewish, on *Judenstrasse* or on a synagogue, or on a Jewish conference, you know?

RH: Yeah, you had a whole network, and...

PK: There would, we had a network. They would notify us and we would stream there. And we always, always made it there before the police. And when we were through with them, they called the police. We never called the police. You know? They were happy when the police came and took them away.

RH: I see. But they started all, they started again and again anyway.

PK: Oh, the Nazis started all over, only, on a few occasions we started. And obvi-, I went to two Nazi meetings. You know? Actually in with them in the meetings, as a spectator, and we started the...

RH: Sort of spying on them?

PK: No!

RH: No.

PK: Just to break it up.

RH: I see. I see.

PK: So, I got a knife, you can see here I got a knife cut in the face, because somebody threw a knife across the room at me. But, oh, at that time, that was, it was just common...

RH: It was part of everyday life.

PK: Everyday life, yeah.

RH: Yeah.

PK: We were in the street fights and knife fights and very, very rarely a shootout, very rarely. But it could happen. And we were prepared. We too had our arms, you know?

RH: How did you get your arms? Was it difficult, or...

PK: In Austria? No.

RH: No.

PK: No, getting arms in Austria was easy. It's one of those countries, it's a hunting country, you know.

RH: Same as here, you just went out.

PK: Besides that, they have a older, yes, there was a, normal restriction of hand guns that were smaller than I think 18 centimeters. We had to have a license. But anything over 18 centimeters you could have your owner license, you see? No, that was, it was no problem in Austria to get weapons.

RH: Was the Jewish Council in your city or town able to guide you in any

[11]Betar – Revisionist Zionist youth movement founded in Riga, Latvia in 1923 by Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky.
[12]Brit HaHayal – Revisionist Zionist Association of Jewish reservists in the Polish Army. Formed 1932.

way? Was there a Jewish Council? Or, it seems to me that you, in your particular case you actually belonged to enough organization and were active enough.

PK: I don't realize what you call a Jewish Council. We had a, what do you call, what is...

RH: So you had several factions.

PK: *Kultusgemeinde*.

RH: *Kultus*?

PK: *Kultusgemeinde*.

RH: *Kultusgemeinde*.

PK: Was the organization of, in Austria and in Germany, that, they, the synagogues were not kept a single congregation, but by a central organization, you know?

RH: Right, yes.

PK: Where all Jews were taxed, on from the taxes to synagogues and Jewish schools...

RH: To provide money.

PK: Were kept alive.

RH: Right.

PK: You know?

RH: Right.

PK: But, I don't know what you...

RH: Did they do anything?

PK: What?

RH: Were they active as far as you...

PK: The *Kultusgemeinde*...

RH: Remember?

PK: …could not work with groups. It would have put them in peril as being quote a political organization rather than a governing organization.

RH: I see.

PK: So all they could do is try to influence our councilmen and our government. But the government officially was always against antisemitism. It was what they did unofficially by closing their eyes, you know?

RH: Right, right.

PK: And so there was very little they really could do.

RH: Right. So really the youth groups you belonged to...

PK: The youth, yeah...

RH: …were much more effective in fighting antisemitism.

PK: The youth groups were effective, and, thanks God, at that time in Austria and in Germany, many of the, of our elders, the elder Jews, were also organized. Like, I was in *Betar*, which was the youth group of the Revisionist. But the Revisionist of itself

had a great following in Austria. And there were many, many, many people who belonged to the party who were in the age but between 25 and 50, or between 20 and 50, you know? So there, yes, there already was a strong Zionist movement in the grownup population as well, yeah? So...

RH: And you would say they were the most active in fighting antisemitism.

PK: Definitely.

RH: Right.

PK: Definitely. Not only, they were active in fighting antisemitism. They were also active in providing training and arms to us and to prepare us to go to Palestine.

RH: Right. Right. Which was their primary goal.

PK: Which was our only goal.

RH: Right. Right.

PK: I want to highlight something there. You speak about how we felt at the time. We were so sure that on March the 13th -- I was already in the army. I was on leave for, I was wounded. And...

RH: You were wounded in the army?

PK: A street fight.

RH: Oh, oh, okay.

PK: It was in the army but it was a street fight. Not in a political action, polit-, act, political action, yes, but not a big action. Well anyhow...

RH: When you said you were in the army, you were doing your military service in Austria?

PK: Yeah, yes, yes. I joined the army in...

RH: Because you had to, as an Austrian citizen.

PK: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I believe in October, 1937. And, in March I was on convalescent leave at home. On March the 13th we went to center city and demonstrated to free Father Niemöller.[13] If you remember, Niemöller was a Lutheran priest, or a Lutheran Reverend who spoke for the religious freedoms and human dignity in the German Reich. And consequently wound up in concentration camp and was kept incommunicado, you know? And we demonstrated to free...

RH: I see.

PK: Niemöller from German jails.

RH: I see.

PK: Like we today demonstrate to free Russian Jews from Siberia.

RH: Right.

PK: You know?

RH: Right.

PK: It helped us much, definitely it helped us. But...

[13]Martin Niemöller, German Lutheran pastor. He was interned in Sachsenhausen and Dachau for "protective custody" from 1938 to 1945.

RH: You mean, meaning he was never...

PK: He never, he never was released. Yet I heard that later on when, middle of the war somewhere, he was released. But...

RH: But it didn't do any good at the time.

PK: Well, no. I wouldn't say that that way. Men like Niemöller did a lot of good. Whether they lived through it or not. They gave so many of us, of the others, you know, their, the first flicker of light, that we can think, we can answer, we should speak out. And without that, many of us maybe would not have spoken out.

RH: He was a real inspiration in that way.

PK: Inspiration is the most important part in that situation. You know?

RH: Right.

PK: Well anyhow, what I wanted to say, we went to demonstration. The Nazis tried to break us up. We came in a terrific fist fight with the Nazis in center city, [unclear] *Strasse,* and we beat them to a pulp. And so when the police came we marched away triumphantly. You know? When I came home...

RH: They didn't arrest you?

PK: Well, no, not at that time. When we came home, I, my father, who was at that time travelling the provinces as a salesman and [unclear] busy with some of the salesmen in the stores there, came home early. And he was ash gray and was shaking. "The Nazis are coming in." I said, "What are you talking about? We just beat them to a pulp in the city. Who is scared of Nazis?" He says, "No, you idiot, you never know what you're talking about. You never believe me. I just come from Salzburg."

[Tape one side one ended.]

Tape one side two:

PK: ...hands off. I told him that, "You are seeing things. It couldn't be. We're stronger. And, Dollfuss, the Socialist Party is stronger, yeah? Austrians are not Germans. You wouldn't." Anyway, while we were still arguing, Mom flipped on the radio. And here came the great announcement that Schuschnigg said goodbye to the Austrian nation and to hear, that he said, "It was no chance of us to fight. They are much power over us and the Germans are on the march." And that was it, the *Anschluss*. And from that on a very bitter time for us started.

RH: Yeah, I'm sure. Were you and your family able to support yourselves after *Anschluss*?

PK: Tricky questions. Not really. We lived off of some savings, of the savings we had, you know? And later on off things we could sell. Well I could not speak about all of it, for as soon as I was released from the army, I went...

RH: Were you automatically released or was your time up?

PK: Oh no, no, no, no. It wasn't an automatically. First of all they wanted us to put up an oath of allegiance to the leader. All of us had to do that, the whole army. When the Jews refused, at first the officers said, well, was understandable. And a soldier, and, would not lie, naturally, and honored that. The same evening all Jews were arrested and all Jewish soldiers were arrested and put into jail. In that, in that particular camp. Not in, in all barracks. That barrack that refused, I don't know what happened in other barracks. But in our barracks, all Jews were arrested. And...

RH: Do you recall the year, the...

PK: What?

RH: Do you recall the exact moment?

PK: The exact moment, it, no, it would be around March 15, somewhere around March 15, 1938, you know? The exact moment I couldn't tell you, you know? Afternoon somewhere. And then came word, three days later words came from headquarters finally. See, there was no precedence to it. The German army had no Jews. So finally the word came through that all those who refused to put up the oath of allegiance to our Führer were traitors, and therefore have to be treated as traitors. And that came through our mayor, our major, came in and spoke with us like a Dutch uncle, inspired us to go out and take the oath as long as you hold your [unclear], we understand. And we became good German soldiers with a, with an eagle swastika on our left breast pocket and an eagle swastika on our hat. And with that we got [unclear], we got leave to leave the barracks for the first time. Incidentally, not only us Jews were duped when Hitler marched in. I was, I wasn't in the barracks then. I was told the following day when I reported back on Tuesday that the moment Hitler marched in, when it was announced on the radio, that, yeah, that the order came out, all army units have to fly the swastika, the German flag with the swastika, our colonel said, "How can we? We don't even have a

flag like that." And his lieutenant colonel said, "Oh yes, you have." It turned out that other officers, including that man, had hidden the Nazi flag for months already in our stables. And that more than half of the regiment was pro-Nazi.

RH: I see. And they had the flag all this time.

PK: So the, the takeover came very much from the inside of the army.

RH: Mmm, very interesting. And how did the rising antisemitism affect you and your family and friends? Did your parents lose their jobs? Is that, when you said you lived from savings, was that...

PK: Oh, my...

RH: Because they lost their jobs automatically?

PK: Yes, yes. Since the factory...

RH: Was that true...

PK: Since the factory was Jewish-owned, it was closed down immediately, and taken over by a, by one of the employees. Papa's driver became owner [unclear] of the factory.

RH: Your father's driver.

PK: Yes.

RH: The chauffeur.

PK: Yeah, the chauffeur, became the owner of the factory overnight.

RH: And he had no idea how to run it of course.

PK: Oh yeah, no, that, not, no after only, he, he left all the gentile personnel in there, you know? But all the Jews were immediately dismissed without any compensation at all.

RH: Right.

PK: You know?

RH: Right.

PK: And without any income thereafter.

RH: I see.

PK: You know? And my mother's store was closed, you know? They had broke the windows and they plundered it and that was that, you know? Plunder was very common. We were too scared even to look out the windows. They used to go to stores which were Jewish-owned and paint swastikas on it and write on it. *Kauft nicht bei Juden*. [German: do not buy from Jews]. You know? [unclear] to, "Jew, go back to Jerusalem." You know? And so on and so forth. It became a nightmare. We used to stand behind shutters and look out the windows. Incidentally, there's a, we looked out one day and they had the Jews cleaning the trolley tracks with toothbrushes, brushing them. And I said, "Ma."

RH: They forced them to do that?

PK: Oh sure, now. They didn't do it voluntarily.

RH: Right.

PK: Sure they forced them to do it.

RH: Right.

PK: They were standing over them with guns. But, I turned to my mother, who was shaking, and said, "Mom, one day we'll laugh about all that." And she hit me, and said, "You idiot, always finds something to laugh." I quieted down, and I left one day later for what subsequently became Palestine. I went to Greece. I went through half of Europe [unclear].

RH: How did you leave?

PK: Heh?

RH: How did you leave?

PK: I left over the mountains.

RH: You just fled.

PK: Yeah. Yeah. And we, we converged together in Italy, you know? And we got [unclear] trains. We went to Yugosla-, through Yugoslavia into Albania, into Greece. In Greece we were, I believe, in Volos.

RH: Where is that exactly?

PK: Volos is the southern...

RH: In the northern?

PK: Southern, southern Greece.

RH: Southern Greece.

PK: Yeah. Where we waited for...

RH: You don't mean the Peloponnis-, the Peloponnese, southern part of Greece?

PK: No, no, no, no. Well, I don't know. I'm not a geographic expert, really. You know? Anyhow, we were, it is right outside of Athens. Volos is not far from Athens.

RH: Okay.

PK: It's a fishing village. The people there were marvelous to us.

RH: Did they know you were Jewish?

PK: Did, yes, they know we are. They knew exactly who we are. They also knew that we don't have any money, and they allowed us to pitch a big circus tent in the middle of the village. They brought long hoses with water lines to us so we can have running water and showers there. They allowed us to use their houses for toilets and for anything. And the priest came out of, the priest spoke German and Hebrew.

RH: Really?

PK: There they called the priest the pope. And he came out and he spoke to us and welcomed us. The mayor came out. I have never since, before or since, felt that welcome between strangers.

RH: That's wonderful.

PK: It was wonderful. It is heartwarming. It's unbelievable.

RH: Were you the first escapees from...

PK: We were the first group of Austrians that came through, yes.

RH: Oh, oh. And had they heard what was going on?

PK: Yes.

RH: Were they very aware?

PK: They knew. They knew. Yeah. And, well we were the first Austrian Jews to -- I was in the first group to come out, since I was politically very active. And it seems I didn't go out too soon for my mother told me later on when they met me in the States, that two hours after I left, the Nazis came looking for me. You know? So, well, we knew exactly that I had to leave.

RH: Right.

PK: You know?

RH: But your parents stayed back.

PK: There were over 700 of us who left with the first group.

RH: Did any non-Jews help your family in Austria?

PK: Yes, yes. We had...

RH: What exactly did they do?

PK: All, first of all, that, one family was hiding me for a couple of days. You know? They also brought us provisions when we were afraid to go out to shop. Or at least information, you know? Where it was clear to go or where not. And they give a lot of moral support. We had at least three families who felt that they owe us that much.

RH: Mmm hmm. Did...

PK: My mother was the head of a businessmen organization in Vienna. Also, she always did a lot of communal work, volunteer work, and glad...

RH: So she had a lot of gentile friends.

PK: Glad to help anyone, yeah. Yeah. Since the area we lived in was 50 percent Jews, 50 percent Gentiles.

RH: I see. Some people do try.

PK: Yeah, beside that, my mother's, my grandmother was born in that house. It was a, as I say there, it was a area where everyone...

RH: Knew each other...

PK: Knew each other...

RH: For generations.

PK: For generations.

RH: Right.

PK: It became a great shock to us, a great shock to us, to see some of them work against us.

RH: But some of them did work against you.

PK: Some of them did, yes.

RH: Yes.

PK: Although most of the Nazis that oppressed us came from other areas.

RH: From the outside.

PK: Not from the immediate, our area.

RH: So had you fled Austria by the time *Kristallnacht* came?

PK: Oh yeah, I was in Palestine by that time.

RH: I see. How long did it take you to get to Palestine?

PK: I was in Volos about two weeks. We had to wait for the ships to come back. The gentleman that was going to land us illegally on the coast of Palestine was at that time running guns to Spain. And when he came back from Spain then he loaded us on three little ships and on high sea we eventually convert all three ships into one ship, the *Artemisia*. And we spent, all together we spent seven days on board ship, with two days of provisions. In the end we st-, we lived off onions we stole from the kitchen. And then [unclear] some provisions we had with us, carried with us, you know?

RH: Right. Right.

PK: But we were in Greece itself for about two weeks waiting for the, those ships to come.

RH: Passage, yes.

PK: And getting us over. We landed, later on, much later on I found out where we landed. It was somewhere between Binyamina and Zikhron Ya'akov. You know? In the north. And we marched for four hours inland, you know? We were then brought on the bu-, in buses to Pardesiya, outside of Netanya.

RH: Oh yes, yeah.

PK: Which was our first hiding place for four days.

RH: I see. Why did you have to go in hiding in Palestine?

PK: We were illegal.

RH: Oh. Yeah, but I mean...

PK: It was a British Mandate.

RH: Oh, of course.

PK: There were 700 of us, 760 of us. We didn't have any papers. Where should we, we couldn't all of a sudden show up on the streets of Tel Aviv.

RH: Okay, okay. Of course. And what happened to the rest of your family?

PK: Okay. My immediate family, thanks God, made it out of Austria very soon. My sister and her husband and her little daughter left shortly after me and went to Switzerland. With them also was my hus-, my brother-in-law's family. And they all went to Switzerland and stood there until Mom was able to send them affidavits to come to the United States.

RH: Did they flee the way you did, over the mountains to Switzerland?

PK: No, no, no. They had passports. They were...

RH: They were allowed to leave officially.

PK: Yeah. Yeah. That was a different story with them, you know. But my mother's family had sent affidavits for my mother's sisters and most of their brothers. I

say most, not all of them, unfortunately. No, their bro-, her brothers, oh, none of the brothers got affidavits. Only the sisters got affidavits.

RH: From whom? Who sent these affidavits?

PK: From aunts, uncles, and...

RH: …who already lived in the States.

PK: ..who were born in the United States. In New York, one of my mother's aunts, or her uncle, had a fish chandlery, a ship chandlery. They were chandlers and then they are, were very wealthy, they are very wealthy. And they helped them to come over. They gave them affidavits. They had enough banking to give an affidavit to everyone. By the time my mother came here, my uncles were already in, one of them had left. He went to China and Shanghai in the end. Another one went to Turkey and one went to Mauritius.

RH: Oh.

PK: Yeah.

RH: The French island in the Pacific?

PK: Yeah.

RH: Yeah. Yeah.

PK: But, the uncle I loved most was interned together with his wife and killed in Auschwitz. His wife was a Himmler. And she's...

RH: Related to the...

PK: Yes, exactly.

RH: German Himmler?

PK: A cousin of Mr. Himmler, Heinrich Himmler.

RH: And she couldn't save herself through that connection?

PK: No. Since she refused to divorce the uncle, and both of them were too stupid to fake it, too proud, the most idiocy was our pride at the time. They wanted to prove something. You cannot prove that love is bigger than bigotry. It never was. So, they both got killed. It's horrible. It really was. It really was a lovely, lovely family, or couple, rather. They never had any children. He, I did-, never knew why they remained that long in Austria, since he was previously in America and they had American papers.

RH: It would have been easy for them.

PK: Passport. They could have come out, just when Hitler came. But at that time they didn't abandon us, you know? They were the well-to-do in the family. They had a big night club and all.

RH: So when exactly did, when you say your mother got an affidavit but not your father?

PK: My father did, no, my mother's brothers...

RH: Okay.

PK: The, my mother's sisters all got out. Her brothers did not get affidavits. Her brothers...

RH: How about your father?

PK: My father went with my mother...

RH: Okay.

PK: All one family.

RH: Okay.

PK: No, you only needed one.

RH: Oh, I see. The sisters got affidavits for the whole family.

PK: Correctly.

RH: Yeah.

PK: Yeah.

RH: Yeah.

PK: My father could not come on the quota, let's say, yeah, for the quota system here was based on I believe the relative population in the 18th century or the 17th century, you know? And our great friend in his wheelchair never thought of changing the quota system, you know? And since my father was born in Yugoslavia he would have to wait something around 45 years to get an affidavit to come to United States. So he came on my mother's affidavit.

RH: Okay. How, oh, I see. That was the Austrian quota. She was under the...

PK: My mother was on the Austrian quota, yeah.

RH: And he was Yugoslavian.

PK: Although she didn't come on the quota, since she had a personal affidavit.

RH: Right.

PK: Yeah.

RH: In that case...

PK: Yeah.

RH: Anybody could come...

PK: Yeah.

RH: Because...

PK: Not anybody, but it was easier, yes, that so many more could come on the, that. It was still a quota system, you know?

RH: And when did they, and when and how did they make it to the United States?

PK: Sorry?

RH: When and how did they come over?

PK: My parents came over, what was the name of the ship? It was a French ship, *Titanic*? They came in a big storm. Anyhow...

RH: *Liberté*?

PK: Heh?

RH: *Liberté*, maybe?

PK: No, no, no.

RH: Oh.

PK: They came over...

RH: No, the *Liberté* was a German ship, I'm sorry.

PK: They came over in...

RH: The *Normandie*, maybe?

PK: In Octo-...

RH: I don't know.

PK: They came over in October of 1938.

RH: I see, yes.

PK: And they left...

RH: And they left, where did the ship leave from? Le Havre in France? Did you say it was a French ship?

PK: Yes. And they went to New York. From New York they went to Uniontown, Pennsylvania.

RH: I see.

PK: And they were there for about two years, I believe, before they went into Philadelphia and my mother opened a business here, a very small store at first. Pop worked as a, as a presser for a laundry.

RH: I see.

PK: For Forest Laundry.

RH: Oh yes, yes.

PK: You know? And they worked themselves up again. They were, they became pretty prosperous in the States again.

RH: That's good.

PK: But it wasn't the easiest here.

RH: But at least it saved their lives.

PK: Yeah.

RH: Yeah. Very nice. Were you in touch with your family in Austria while you were in Palestine? Were you able to...

PK: Yes, oh yes, we corresponded.

RH: Were you able to, you did. Between '38 and '41?

PK: Yes.

RH: Yes.

PK: Oh my, in '41 my parents were not in Austria any more.

RH: Your own parents, I realize that.

PK: Yeah.

RH: But other people...

PK: I didn't corres-...

RH: … from the family.

PK: With anyone else in Austria any time. I'm not...

RH: So you were aware...

PK: I'm [unclear].

RH: …that your parents were able to get out.

PK: Oh yeah, I knew that.

RH: You knew about it.

PK: Yes, I knew about that, yes.

RH: And then of course after they were here you were able to correspond from Palestine.

PK: Yeah.

RH: In Palestine. Did the German invasion of Poland in September cause, well, that wouldn't have affected you.

PK: Right.

RH: You had already left.

PK: Yeah.

RH: Do you know that this invasion-- do you know anybody who was in Austria at the time of the invasion of Germany, of Poland?

PK: Yes, I do know people that were there at the time.

RH: And how were they affected?

PK: Actually, the, from, well, I cannot speak for the *klal* [Hebrew: community], for the people as such, but two families I spoke to felt like it was easy on them since the pressure was on in the war and there was too much concentration on Germany and Poland and it eased some pressure at home for them.

RH: I see. The way they...

PK: For them particularly, you know?

RH: Mmm hmm.

PK: Whilst...

RH: They felt the Nazis were busy elsewhere.

PK: Yeah. Whilst from what we heard later on, the reverse of that seemed to have taken place in most other places.

RH: Yeah. So, how long did you stay in Palestine?

PK: Until September 1950.

RH: Oh, I see. And what made you decide to leave?

PK: My mother was dying of cancer.

RH: Oh. [pause] And, well, how did, you know, this whole experience, affect you personally?

PK: It's really hard to say. Emotionally, it's hard to describe. Well, I would like to say one thing. One of my uncle, and my father's brother, this family did, who did not escape, who returned back to Hungaria, was captured by [unclear] in Hungaria and delivered to the Germans. He died in the concentration camp. And his wife and daughter remained in a concentration camp. The girl was at that time, I believe, some 10 or 11

years old. She practically grew up in the concentration camp. I have spoken with her numerous time afterward. When she came to Palestine finally, in 1948, you know? I don't know how to describe it, the horrors that that girl explained to us, what was, what went through there. It's, it's unbelievable. What it did to their personality is something else. I admired my aunt very greatly. As tired and as hungry as they were, and as hard as they worked, first in Dachau and then in, oh, what was the other camp? [pause] [to someone else: "What was the camp?" She says, "Buchenwald?"] Buchenwald. And, and in Auschwitz, you know? They had, they were transferred periodically, you know? But my aunt insisted in the evening when they came home, no matter how tired they were, that she had to learn. My aunt always told her daughter, my cousin, that there will be a day, there will be a day when we get out of here. In the outside world you have to compete with the children that went to school. And my aunt taught her English and German and history and geography and mathematics. I...

RH: From memory? Because they didn't have books, right?

PK: Sure from memory.

RH: Of course.

PK: Sure from memory.

RH: Right.

PK: But I admired that woman.

RH: Sure.

PK: And I admired that family of going through that. You know? And they finally made it here into, made it into Palestine. Well, all right, at that time it was already Israel. Israel was already two months old. Anyhow, they came to us, and she was married to a young man she met in concentration camp, on whom the Nazis had done numerous experiments, with venereal diseases and other diseases. And he fi-, he died two years ago, a very painful death. He was, his arteries deteriorated. And he could hardly walk. And I knew him for the last two years that they really just suffered a, to wait when he could die. And so, but it was a lovely couple and they brought up two very lovely children. But as I said, I admired that spirit.

RH: Yes, indeed.

PK: Of my aunt.

RH: How were they...

PK: I would like to point other point that her father was one of those Jews, a Union Jew, and since he was a lieutenant in the Hungary Hussar, and from here he had a whole chest full of medals. He had some three or four rows of medals and the silver star on the-- you name it, he had it-- he also was the commander of the Jewish Legion in Vienna, in Austria, which is the equivalent to the American Legion or the Jewish War Veterans. That's it. He was the commander of the Jewish War Veterans for Austria, and he was very proud of the numerous, numerous medals he had. When Hitler marched in, he simply said, "They are not going to want me. They will honor. They'll respect what I

have done. I love my fatherland. It's those other Jews, the Polish Jews and the swindlers they are after." Well he was too proud to say he's not a, he's not an Austrian. He was always Austrian.

RH: And you s-...

PK: He was the first one to be killed on the streets.

RH: And you seemed to indicate that a lot of Austrian and German Jews felt the way he did.

PK: A lot of them.

RH: Right.

PK: A lot of them. And beside that, many of them, I couldn't understand that, that none of them or very few of them would give money to the Palestine cause, or to our youth groups, or, would join us. They did not believe in the Zionist movement. They also did not believe that the monstrosity like a Nazis could be true.

RH: Wasn't the history of antisemitism taught to the Jews in Austria and Germany?

PK: No! Oh, no!

RH: I mean there's...

PK: Oh no!

RH: Antisemitism...

PK: No, antisemitism was always excused and veiled, veiled very strongly on where it happened. "Oh, that happened 100 years ago." And then besides that, you got to understand, we are a little different. And if a Jew converted, he was accepted with the rest. You know? So it was not really, it was common. Like my major in the army was a converted Jew. As a Jew he could only go as high as captain. When he converted he became a major. Well most likely he would have become a general in the very end if he lived long enough.

RH: Well that's true in the history of antisemitism.

PK: Good, fine...

RH: It's true in Spain...

PK: Good …

RH: It's true in Portugal.

PK: At that time it wasn't a big headache. Whoever didn't want to take the pressure could convert. You know? And beside that, the type of antisemitism that Hitler brought into Germany, we could not even visualize. Unfortunately, many of the German Jews didn't believe it either. Especially I think now of a Jew that came into Austria. He had a big fish store. He had a chain of fish stores in Germany. This was taken by the Germans. He came to Austria and opened a smaller chain in Austria. And believe it or not, when the Nazis came to Austria, instead of fleeing, he went to Czechoslovakia, where he finally got killed. But this is a typical, how many of us could have saved themselves if they would have been willing to leave their money behind. We went out, I

had 10 *Marks*. And many of us called us fools. "Where you going to go?" But we didn't care where we go. We wanted to live enough to turn around and fight the British and then maybe the Germans. You know?

RH: Right.

PK: And the idea of us wanting to fight the British raised horror in our parents and their generation, you know?

RH: So they were more influenced by, you know, the Austrian and German indoctrination...

PK: Right.

RH: …in school, and...

PK: Beside that, the order of...

RH: …than history of Judaism.

PK: Right. Exactly. Also they did not believe in a history for us. They believed that we deserved what we got. Why don't we acclimate more? Why we don't bend down more? They didn't realize that the more we bent down, the more that they will step on us.

RH: In other words they refused to be analytical. I mean, if they had analyzed the past events, I mean you just had to look at France, you know, which was much more lib-

[Tape one side two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

RH: This is tape two of the interview of Mr. Paul Kurschner, on December 5, 1982. Okay, well, you were saying...

PK: Many of the Jews...

RH: …that many Jews could have...

PK: …could have saved themselves...

RH: Right.

PK: …if they would have realized that their life is in stake. If they really had believed us. They thought we are exaggerating. They always thought that, I'll talk tomorrow, somebody from outside is going to help them. They always thought they may be able to take out a little more, never realizing the only thing worthwhile to take out is their children and themselves, Jewish life. Many, many, many could have saved themselves crawling across borders, if they in '38 would have known or realized what's, will going to happen in '39 and in '40. You know?

RH: It's very, very hard to believe, given the circumstances at the time. I mean, there were uprisings all the time and they were, the Nazis were constantly destroying synagogues.

PK: Exactly, but...

RH: And...

PK: You have got to realize we are speaking of a central Europe where since the First World War, uprisings were the occasion of the day. Austria itself, I have to speak of Austria because I grew up there. I know it better. On July 17, 1927, we had one uprising of the *Schutzbund*, which is the left-wing militia, against the government, and a three-day shootout. Heh? And we had another shootout in '33, in '34, in '35. And the--people died, yes. Some went to jail, yes. But, but, at that time, central Europe was blasé with smaller, with minor coups and putsches and uprisings and street fights. It was the way of life. And the, in most of the street fights, the brunt of the people who keep getting killed were Gentiles. The Jews didn't get involved, you know? Here and there maybe two or three or 10, you know? So, besides that they always believed, especially in Austria, where a Social Democratic country was ruling for so many years, that democracy has, is bound to come back again, you know? They didn't believe that a dictatorship could survive.

RH: Yeah, they just felt it was bad times but it will pass very quickly.

PK: Yeah. We also were sure that the big talking England and America would not, would never let that happen. As it turned out, we know what happened. We know that England and America just shrugged their shoulders and said, "Isn't that a shame." You know?

RH: What lessons do you have for the children of today, of the young people today or even the adults of today?

PK: What message I have? First of all, you are not your brother's keeper. By that I don't mean that you are not responsible for his life. But, if your brother slashes the gasoline hose, you may not agree with it, but no way does it mean you are bad, for he is bad. You know?

RH: Very true.

PK: Don't feel responsible, or don't feel ashamed what other Jews do. You are no more responsible for the deeds of our brethren than the Irish or the French or the German or the, whoev-, who else have you. On the other hand, we have to stay up straight. History has taught us if we fight, we win. Those who die in the battle would also have died in shame and dismay and hunger in concentration camps. But in a battle you have, we have a real chance to win.

RH: I see.

PK: I've seen Israel. And, I was an atheist, a really, well-sophisticated atheist from way back, you know? I believed that...

RH: So you didn't frequent synagogues.

PK: What?

RH: You didn't frequent synagogues.

PK: In 13 years in Israel, I went twice to synagogue. Once to fix a spigot, and the other one in a demonstration. And that was that.

RH: What does it mean to you to be a Jew then?

PK: For me to be a Jew was to belong to a nation. I was at that time only nationally a Jew, not religious, you know?

RH: Do you still feel the same way today?

PK: I was, no. I...

RH: How do you feel the Jews of the Diaspora should unite? Or should they unite?

PK: Definitely.

RH: I mean if there's not a religion, then what else is there?

PK: Okay, first of all.

RH: I'm talking about the Diaspora now.

PK: Diaspora. Yeah. Good. I understand. No, we are a nation. Definitely a nation. But we also are, we are a very unique nation. A nation that is held together by the fact that we believe in the same faith, you know, more or less, whether we are Hasidim, Orthodox, or even Reform or Reconstructionist. Essentially, we are a faith, and we are bound together by that. We should accept each other, you know, as full-blooded Jews. Whether we agree with the, with the degree of religious, and the original interpretation of each other, is irrelevant. Important is that we recognize the fact, that we are one unit group. Whilst we are not responsible for each other, in, ourself, the outside world makes us responsible for each other. So therefore, no matter what you say, no matter how often--Hitler taught it very beautifully-- even if you are converted for three generations, you

know, they'll make you toe the line. And the only way to live is to stand up and fight for your rights. We should learn from Russia, which did horrible things to nations, knowing that if you do it fast enough, one month later the world forgets. The march into Czechoslovakia, and the whole world was in an uproar for two months, until something else happened to hit the newspaper, it was out again. Israel made the mistake of lingering months in Lebanon, instead of marching directly to Beirut and wiping everything out. Today Israel feels, or we Jews in America, in the world, try to make Israel responsible for not having done what is impossible to do. For 1800 years the world had tried to restrain Christians from killing. In two weeks, or in two days, in Lebanon, the Jews could not restrain Christians from killing, and we are responsible for it? That is ridiculous.

RH: Yeah.

PK: You know? Beside that, that same thing went on, on the auspices of the Lebanese Army two weeks later. The Lebanese Army started a massacre against Muslims and Druze in Lebanon. So, so feel, we should never feel responsible for others. And we should stand up and fight for our rights. You asked about religion before, and I tried to, started to tell you. I was an atheist. And when our fight began in 1948, May 15, '48, and the British left and the Arabs attacked, we got 500,000 Jews, most of us did not have rifles. The army at that time was three underground groups pulling together, with arms of great differences. Very often when a soldier was killed, his friend or his neighbor could not even use his ammunition. You know? We didn't have a uniform. We didn't have anything then. We, we had no big airplanes. We had no tanks. We had one Howitzer. You know?

RH: Which is...

PK: A Howitzer is a small cannon which was transported from the north to the south and the south to the north.

RH: I see.

PK: Attacked by 95 million world-formed Arab armies, with bombers and tanks and weapons that would make your hair raise and give up in that minute. But that small nation didn't give up. And I be-, don't believe that without an interference of a higher power we could have won. It was impossible. It's impossible, no matter how ingenious you are, that a handful with, men with rifles and pistols and slogans and good lungs to shout could overcome tanks and planes. There must have been a, heard from above. But that was I think the first time...

RH: Was that a turning point for you?

PK: It was a turning point for me. And I, yeah, would say that immediately I turned into prayer. But I started to think. And I think, being a slow thinker it took me another 10 years before I finally returned to the synagogue.

RH: And how do you practice your Judaism?

PK: I am a Conservative Jew.

RH: Alright.

PK: I'm in, now a member in B'nai Tikvah – B'nai Jeshurun, in Paper Mill Road.

RH: Oh I see. Okay, very, very interesting. Would you like to add anything else?

PK: No thank you.

RH: Well I thank you very, very much.

PK: I'm so, you are affected but I don't know why...

RH: Well [tape off then on]...

PK: I'm sorry. When you spoke right now, I remembered there's one thing I want to add to it. I don't know if has any significance, but it really followed me throughout my life since 1938, or let's say 1939, when I heard for the first time what concentration camps really were. Whenever I was at a situation, at work, or in anything, that became almost unbearable, or when, when I thought, well, by pulling a rope or pulling a tree down, that my muscles are going out, I said, "If you were in Dachau, you wouldn't give in. If somebody would hit you over the head, you would still pull." You know? And I pulled. And I think a lot of the strength to pull out of situations came from the awareness that would I be under a death penalty, with a sword hanging over my head, I would pull. I would pull some more strength out of myself to do it. And I'm ashamed actually to say that, but I really, I very often, even today yet, when I'm, when an impossible situation arrive, or when I feel work crashing on me, yet I still think, what would you do if somebody stands over you with a rifle?

RH: Yes. I think we have more inner strength than we know we have.

PK: Right. Yes. Yes.

RH: Very nice. Very moving.

PK: Thank you for listen to that.

RH: Okay.

PK: But I really, I...

RH: Thank you very much.

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