HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

LEO MANTELMACHER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Nora Levin
Date: September 26, 1983

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LM - Leo Mantelmacher [interviewee]
NL - Nora Levin [interviewer]
Mrs. M - Mrs. Mantelmacher [wife]
MM - Max Mantelmacher [brother]
UI - Unidentified individual
Date: September 26, 1983

Tape one, side one:

NL: September 26, 1983, Nora Levin, interviewing Mr. Leo Mantelmacher. Now, thank you very much Mr. Mantelmacher, for making this long trip from Harrisburg so that we can have the account of your experiences during the Holocaust. I would like to ask you first if you would tell us a little about your childhood, where you were born, a little about life at home and the life of your parents and the way in which they made their living.

LM: Okay. My father's name was Hersh Leib and my mother's name was Tzina and we lived in the city of Kozienice. As far as I remember, probably from four or five years old, my father was a very religious man, self-educated and very intelligent, but he was also liberal in outlook. He didn't say mussled anybody, as far as I remember. He wrote...

NL: Excuse me, when you say he was a liberal, you mean he was open to secular activities?

LM: Anything, he would read any book.

NL: He knew Polish?

LM: Yes. And Russian.

NL: And Russian, I see.

LM: And Hebrew very well.

NL: He learned the Russian himself?

LM: Yes.

NL: I see, and so he read in the non-religious literature.

LM: Right. Right. He wouldn't go out and get them, but my sisters or I would bring home books and he would be interested. He would sneak a book for himself and read it through, but he wouldn't say he read it.

NL: And he didn't object if you did?

LM: No.

NL: I see. And what was his occupation?

LM: He was a tailor.

NL: He was a tailor.

LM: We were not rich. We struggled to get through day by day.

NL: And you were the youngest of the family?

LM: I was one before the youngest, my brother Max is the youngest.

NL: And would you name the other children?

LM: Yes. My oldest sister is Ethel, my second sister is Sarah and my youngest is Gittel.

NL: You went to *cheder*, I presume.

LM: Naturally. We were poor, but my father, as religious as he was, he wanted for me to have the best education possible, so he skimped from food and he sent me to the most expensive Rabbis, *cheders*.

NL: You had individual Rabbis?

LM: Yes.

NL: I see.

LM: And I think I did pretty good, I don't know.

NL: I imagine you did.

LM: And I learned in *cheder*. I don't know how--'til about probably 12 or 13 years old. But the law in Poland at that time was everybody had to go to public school. My father did not want to send me to public school, but he would be punished or put in jail for not sending me. A neighbor of ours, she knew that, she liked my father so she went and registered me to school and then we got a statement, I have to come to school. I went to school, I had *payes* on and a long *capote* with a little hat and I was not used to the school. You know, they, you come into the room there was a cross on the wall. You had to take our hat off, but that was the law and then they said a Catholic prayer in the morning.

NL: There were Jewish children in the class?

LM: Yes, yes, yes, all the Jewish children. It was not a Jewish school, but maybe 40-50% Jewish, because it was the city, there were more Jews than Poles.

NL: I see. How long were you able to stay in such an environment?

LM: Six, seven years.

NL: Oh, you had to…

LM: Had to, yes.

NL: So you left the *cheder*?

LM: No, after, after. I came home from school I went to *cheder* and one time I remember very vividly, I think I was eight or nine years old. We had a teacher, he was a music teacher, and he was very antisemitic. His name was Mushal, he was Russian. And I think I was maybe the only other, or two of us who had *payes* and a long *capote* so I was very young, maybe eight years, probably eight years old, he took me out in front of the black board. He took a match and light it and he scared me. I thought he's going to burn my *payes* off, but he did not.

NL: You must have been so humiliated.

LM: Yes and the next day I didn't want to go to school, but I had to go and then my *payes* were cut. But I still wore until probably I was fifteen or sixteen years old

the Jewish little cap and the long *capote*.

NL: *Capote*. Did you feel the antisemitism of the other children?

LM: Very much so.

NL: What did they do to you?

LM: Jew, dirty Jew and all kinds of names. Whenever they, if they could beat you up, if they had a chance, they did.

NL: Could you defend yourself?

LM: No.

NL: From the other boys?

LM: Sometimes yes, sometimes yes, but the blame was always on us.

NL: Did you want to add something?

Mrs. M: [unclear]

LM: While I was very young, we had in that city the older farmers came, the city was small but the farmers around, the only big church was in that city, so all the farmers came to the city Sunday for mass. If the priest was antisemitic so he preach to them that the Jews killed Jesus. When they came out, especially Easter time, when the came out, you know, so they wanted to make the Jews holy, what they did they had buckets of water and they sprinkled a little bit of the holy water in it and wherever they could find a Jewish boy or girl, Easter time it's still cold in Poland, they poured the water over the head. I remember my mother hid me in the basement so I shouldn't go out.

NL: Easter was a terrible time, of course, for Jews.

LM: The city it was mostly Jewish. The Jews built it, and everything was Jewish.

NL: About how many Jews were in the city?

LM: When the Germans took the Jews out to Treblinka, there were about close to 10,000, but this was all from the environment from little villages and little towns around. In the city by itself probably about 6,000, wouldn't it be?[1]

MM: I wouldn't know exactly, but I think it was more than that.

LM: Maybe 7,000.

NL: Six to 7,000. And more Jews than non-Jews?

LM: More Jews than non-Jews, very few non-Jews.

NL: When you say Jews built it, it was an old town.

LM: Old Jewish city. They started going back from King Casimir, the Great.

NL: Oh, the 13th or 14th century.

LM: A matter of fact, Casimir the Great was born in that city. It was not a city, it was a plague going around, where he had the palace and his parents wanted to get away from the plague and this was like a hunting lodge, was no houses at all. And she--

[1]There were others in the room with interviewee.

they brought his mother over there and she gave birth to him in that city, in the-- not a city, in that hunting lodge. And they had a palace built after that. The palace was still standing. The Germans bombed it out.

NL: And Casimir the Great invited Jews to come to help build up commerce.

LM: Yes, because he was an educated man. The first King of Poland was a wheel-maker, not educated. He was modern. He studied in France and Italy so he was modern. He saw that Poland is very backward and he knew that the Jews are capable of making something out of Poland, 'cause at that time they were chased out from Germany, from Spain, from France, England chased them out twice, right?

NL: So Poland was a refuge for a while.

LM: And he gave them full rights, full status as citizens with no restriction of religion and they had their own government, so to speak, like *Kehila*, and it was kept until Pilsudski died, until 1934[2].

NL: And what was the chief economic activity of Jews?

LM: Mostly they were shoemakers, a few tailors, some very small businessmen, very small grocery stores.

NL: Artisans.

LM: Artisans, and we had a couple of Jewish doctors, which they didn't get the degrees in Poland, they had to go out to Italy, and one Jewish lawyer that I know. It was as a matter of fact, it was a second cousin of mine.

NL: So now to go back to the public school, you felt the antisemitism very strongly?

LM: Very much so, very much so.

NL: And did your parents also feel it?

LM: Yes, my parents, my father dealt mostly with farmers. He made for them suits and those kind of things, but as long as they came into our house they were-- they didn't show antisemitism. But when they were in church, when they heard the sermons of the priest, then no matter what they became antisemitic. My father had only one friend, a Pole, his name was Dronshkevich and he was a leftist, more educated than the rest of them. Instead to go to church, he couldn't show the population where he lived in that village that he doesn't go to church, a non-believer, you know, they would ostracize him. So he came to sit with us that Sunday, every Sunday, two hours, as long as the mass or the services lasted. My father talked to him all the time.

NL: Interesting. He was a Socialist, probably.

LM: He was a Socialist and a matter of fact, at one time we needed someone because we didn't have any money to eat, so he needed a loan of 500 *zlotys* and this is equivalent probably to maybe $5,000 here now. And we didn't have no co-signator to

[2]Józef Klemens Piłsudski - died May 12, 1935. The first chief of state (1918–22) of the newly independent Poland established in November 1918. (www.britannica.com)

sign for us for that loan and that man, that Dronshkevich signed the loan for us. In the meantime, my father died.

NL: What year was that?

LM: In 1938.

Mrs. M: [unclear]

LM: …to live, to buy bread.

NL: Business had gone…

LM: No business, because we were tailors. If somebody brought in a piece of material to us we made a suit. My father made a suit for him. But we didn't have the material, we didn't have nothing.

NL: This was during the depression in the '30s?

LM: It was in the '30s. It was in America it was already post-depression, but in Europe the depression was still going on.

NL: I see. So this man gave your father the…

LM: …the loan and then my father died and the children…

NL: What did he die from?

LM: He had, I think it was a brain hemorrhage.

NL: Oh, I see, a young man.

LM: Fifty-nine.

NL: And so was mother able to keep the business going?

LM: No, there was no business. Then I was 17, I took over.

NL: You took over.

LM: I was the breadwinner.

NL: You had learned something about the business.

LM: Oh yeah, I was a complete tailor then. I started out, you know, maybe 10 or 12 years old. You live in a tailor's house you had to help. See?

NL: Of course, so you took over the business.

LM: I took over. It was very hard for me, but somehow we managed to keep the family together.

NL: Did your older brothers help you?

LM: I didn't have an older brother, sisters.

NL: Oh, excuse me, Max was the younger one. Of course the sisters I guess did help.

LM: They did help.

NL: In the tailor shop.

LM: Not in the tailor shop. Everybody had different jobs and they contributed and my mother, she got, somehow she got work from the farmers. She told them that you know she propagandized for me that I'm a good tailor and things like that so somehow we paid off my father's debt and we lived. We lived pretty decent.

NL: You left school then when you were about 15?

LM: About 14.

NL: Fourteen. Did you get a certificate, did you graduate from what we would call *gymnasium*?

LM: Yes, I got, but it lost, it's lost.

NL: And you studied Polish history, I suppose.

LM: Oh, yes, I know very well, as a matter of fact, I still I have something in Polish here. I want you to translate it.

NL: I?

LM: Somebody. It's very interesting. It's important for you.

NL: Yes. Alright, we can make a Xerox copy. Now, were your parents actively involved in community activity?

LM: No. No, we were too poor.

MM: The father was…

LM: My father, yes, my father was so educated that he--we were poor, but there were people like not so educated. They knew only how to *daven*, how to pray, but most of the time they did not even understand the praying. So every Shabbos, in morning, he had about 30 or 40 people he taught *Mishnaya*, *Mishnayot*. Taught them *Mishnayot*, explained to them from the Talmud. He explained to them and everything. He woke up about four o'clock in the morning Saturday and went to the *Mikva*. It was a freezing *Mikva*, and then he went to *daven*, before *daven*, before *daven* I'm sorry, and he went to teach to learn with those…

NL: Remarkable man.

LM: Very remarkable, very remarkable.

NL: Now, did you feel the German Nazi influence or fascist propaganda in Poland in the middle '30s?

LM: Yes. Yes. Yes.

NL: Did you see a change in the atmosphere?

LM: Naturally, we read the papers and we felt it in our own city.

NL: How did you feel it in your own city?

LM: For instance, I dealt after my father's death, I dealt with mostly non-Jews. I say 99% non-Jews, and there's always some incident, not toward me, but always some incident of antisemitism showing. Sometimes they beat up a Jew here and there and there were many things.

NL: They were not punished?

LM: No. After Pilsudski died in 1934…

MM: '35.

LM: '35, they, he was, they called him the grandfather of the Jews.

NL: Protector.

LM: Yeah, and after now that he died they said we're going to show you Jews how Poland's supposed to be.

NL: So you felt the antisemitism much stronger…

LM: …very much. Very much. Very much.

NL: Were you still able to make a living in the '30s, Mr. Mantelmacher?

LM: Yes. Yes, because the reason why, because the tailor trade was strictly Jewish. In our city, was one non-Jewish tailor and the whole environment with the Gentiles, in the villages and the Jews and everything, I'd say would be about close to maybe 40,000 population. They need a suit, it's not like here, mass-produced or you go in a store you want a suit you buy. Over there you had to go to a store that sells material, buy a piece of material, then bring it to a tailor to have it made.

NL: Did you want to say something, Mrs. Mantelmacher?

Mrs. M: …slogans [unclear].

NL: Slogans.

LM: Yeah, like in '36, I have here--that's why I want--in '36 in the University of Warsaw, was a slogan, *Żydzi na lewo* [Polish] means Jews on the left. They wanted to separate the Jews to sit on the left side. Those who are still attending university.

NL: Special seats?

LM: Yes, so those people, naturally students didn't want, to, they sit on the floor.

NL: To protest.

LM: And there was a woman, a very antisemitic woman, she was in the Senate, Polish Senate. She wanted to introduce a bill against Kosher slaughtering. So, at that time, I think this was in 1937, I worked in Warsaw, where I was very young, but I wanted to learn the trade a little bit better.

NL: You went to Warsaw?

LM: I went to work in Warsaw for a year.

NL: 1937.

LM: Thirty-seven ['37]. At that time, she introduced that bill against Kosher slaughtering. As a protest, all the Jews abstained from eating meat, religious Jews, non-religious Jews and everything. Somebody sometimes wanted to buy something in a non-Jewish, non-Kosher meat shop, a piece of bologna or something. If he was caught, there were the people who called them the *tragers*, the porters. They were carriers, they were very rough people. If they caught somebody going into a store like this, no matter if he went in there just to look or to buy, he was very much beaten up.

NL: So this was a real boycott?

LM: A real boycott.

NL: Throughout all of Poland?

LM: All of Poland. The Polish government lost in the millions of *zlotys* then. So they saw it's not going to work, so they dropped the bill.

NL: They dropped the bill. And did you feel any support from any Polish

element during these struggles? Did the Polish Socialists come to your defense now?

LM: No, not to my knowledge. Maybe with words but not that I know of.

NL: Not with action?

LM: Not that I know of.

NL: And you would say that the Jews of Poland were quite well united against these attacks?

LM: Yes, but we had all kinds of organizations in Poland, even in our small town, starts from the very ultra-Orthodox to Agudat Israel, Mizrahi then Hashomer Hatzair, Gordonia, everything.

NL: Did you have any Bund? Big Bund?

LM: Oh sure. Yeah. He belonged to the Bund as a kid.

NL: So we'll have to hear about that. That's interesting. So there was some defense against…

LM: When it came to antisemitism we all united. We couldn't do much, but we all united. In a town not far from us, it-- called Vorke [phonetic, Yiddish], [unclear] in Polish, they started to make a pogrom and they killed two Jews so some of the strong men like the…

NL: Betar[3]?

LM: No, not Betar.

NL: The carrier, porters.

LM: The porters and [unclear] they fought back and they killed four Jews-- four non-Jews, four Poles and then it became a trial in Lublin, they make a trial. The trial was very famous. I think was some American lawyers came to defend and was one priest by the name Chechak, he was very antisemitic, and he was accuser. He looked up in the Talmud *Tov Shebagoyim harok*,[4] it's a verse in the Talmud. *Tov shebagoyim harok*.

NL: I see against the *goyim*.

LM: The best from the non-Jews is an enemy, you have to kill him. But the real meaning is *Tov shebagoyim harok* the best of the non-Jews wants to kill you.

NL: Ah, yes. Ah, yes. You needed an interpretation.

LM: Right, right. And they won the case, the Jews won the case because it was self-defense.

NL: What year was this, do you remember?

LM: This was in 1936.

NL: '36. Were any Jews leaving the country at the time, or was this impossible?

LM: From our city, yes. You could have, yeah, if you had money. Yeah sure. But I knew of only about two or three. I met one in New York later on.

NL: Now when you were in Warsaw, who took care of the business at

[3]Betar - Zionist Youth movement.
[4]Good that the *goyim* are far away.

home?

LM: There was no business, my father. No, the first time I went in 1937, my father was still there. And then after my father's death, I went to Warsaw again because I wanted to learn more of the trade than I knew and I stayed close to probably a half a year, maybe a little bit longer.

NL: And how was the family supported, the girls were working?

LM: The girls were working and everybody pitched in and we helped.

NL: Mrs. Mantelmacher?

Mrs. M: Big rooms, small living room [unclear].

LM: No. No. We had two rooms. One room divided, okay, one big room divided. Was the beds were there, the linen from the dining room there, the workshop, everything together and the chickens, too. As a young person, I remember many, many nights while I was growing up that I went to bed hungry, not for meat or chicken or cake or anything else, just for bread. Just for bread.

NL: It was so hard.

LM: I remember like now. Some people come here, they say my father was a millionaire, rich people, rich person, no it's not with me.

Mrs. M: Was an honest man, a hard working man.

LM: He was very honest. He was so honest at one time a non-Jew, Leshes, he brought in a pair of pants to alter and he left a 20 *zloty* in the pocket. This was 20 *zloty*, probably $100 and he found it. And my mother, who needed the money so bad, we were starving really, you know…

Mrs. M: He didn't keep it.

LM: No, he waited until he came back and he gave him the money. He didn't even know, the man didn't even know that he left the money.

NL: Did he at least give him a little bit of reward?

LM: No.

NL: No. Now, we'll move on, do you want to add something else?

Mrs. M: [unclear] your mother [unclear].

LM: Yeah, okay, my mother--we didn't talk about my mother too much. My mother, she came--my father was not rich, he came from a poor family, but he studied all his life, so his brothers did the same thing. But my mother, her father was rich at one time. He was a Pograichik, that means something, he delivered to the Russian Army supplies and he made a lot of money. And my mother was kind of spoiled. She didn't want to go to school and she was not educated, but she was a very good person. What happened later on when we were born already, we had food for *Shabbos Chalashudish* afternoon. We went out to the woods or to relax places, when we came home the food was gone. So we came home, we asked where is the food, so she said the dog grabbed it. Almost every second Shabbos was the same way. What she did, she went gave it away to people poorer than us and my older sister always says this is the

cause that's why we survived.

NL: She felt that even though you were so destitute there were still people worse off.

LM: Yes. And she went to people who were sick with boils and everything else, and nobody would touch them. She washed them. She gave away linen and things like that, everything possible.

NL: Remarkable. Now in '38, '39 were there any German agents or representatives in Poland as far as you knew?

LM: Yes, where we lived in the vicinity, there were many villages in the *Volksdeutsche*, this is German ethnics. And a matter of fact, we dealt with quite a few of them. They came to our house, they spoke Yiddish. They were very, very nice to us, they did not show any antisemitism, nothing whatsoever. A matter of fact, they were in bad terms with the Poles. It was an ethnic group. They stuck with the Jews.

NL: Interesting.

LM: But in the meantime, they were agents of the Nazis. Right after the war when the Germans came in…

NL: After the war started.

LM: Yes, after the war started, when the Germans occupied our city, I went to one of the *Volksdeutsche*. They took my machine on a horse and buggy and I worked in their house and made suits for all the people that lived there, the sons, nephews and everybody else. And I got paid with the food that I ate there and then a little bit of flour, a little bit of potatoes and then you couldn't bring in to the city because if they caught a Jew smuggling they would kill him. But the *Volksdeutsche* himself, he brought us on his wagon straight to our door, so we had a little bit more food than anybody else.

NL: Now, when did the Germans come into your town?

LM: So, she was bragging, that woman, the German was bragging that right before the fall of our city, she had a German soldier dressed in a Polish uniform. And she showed them where the main, the bridge over the Vistula is and where the main Army is supposed to go through. She was bragging to us, to me that she was helping the Germans come into our city.

NL: Why was she telling you that?

LM: Because she thought that the Germans were going to stay forever, so she was just bragging.

NL: She was bragging, I see. And when did the Germans actually occupy?

LM: Seven days after the war. The war started on September 1st, on the 7th they were in our city.

NL: You want to say something, Mr.-? Did you know what was happening in Warsaw early in September?

LM: Yes, because…

NL: You knew the Germans were advancing?

LM: Yes, we know, because Warsaw fell four weeks later when they came into our city. You see, we still got, whoever had a radio, but they took the radios away, whoever had a radio could still listen to the Warsaw radio. They want to fight to the death and they're not going to give in. We knew what was happening.

NL: Now when the Germans came in around the 8th or so, were there any Polish Army Units trying to defend the city?

LM: No, they didn't defend any city, they were running.

NL: The city surrendered. The Germans just came in.

LM: How can an army on horses fight tanks? They slaughtered them. They had no chance even to keep one yard of ground.

Tape one, side two:

NL: This is tape one, side two, continuing our interview with Mr. Leo Mantelmacher. Now, tell us your impressions of what happened when the Germans came into your town.

LM: We were, we knew, that somehow, that they're going to come in. This was a Friday, Friday morning there was a house over there made out of brick. Usually, all the houses were made out of wood, and was a sturdy house and they threw a bomb at it and they killed the whole family, not, almost the whole family just a father and a son survived, a father and two sons survived and then they came they bombed the bridges made out of wood and it wasn't easy for them to liquidate them. We knew if we wanted to stay in the city, something is going to happen to us, so we went to the villages. We marched the whole night.

NL: The whole family?

LM: The whole family. My younger brother, he liked to sleep a lot so we always told him if you want to sleep you will remain here, they're going to get you, so he was walking half-asleep. We walked the whole night until we came to a village.

NL: Do you remember the name of the village?

LM: Yes, Stanislawice.

NL: Could you spell it, please?

LM: Stanislawice.

NL: Well, we'll let your brother write it out and we'll continue the story. I just want to have a little note of it. And were there other Jews in that village?

LM: Yes, quite a few Jews.

NL: And did you find some refuge there?

LM: Yes. And lived in barns. Paid, naturally.

NL: You were able to bring a little money out?

LM: Yes, we had the money, whatever we had, it wasn't much, but you still could buy bread and things like that, and we paid and we stayed there. We stayed there for two nights, and then somebody came back from the city and told us that the Germans are in the city, they don't bother anybody.

NL: Back in Kozienice?

LM: They don't bother anybody, we can go home.

NL: A Jew came to tell you this?

LM: Yes.

NL: So you went home?

LM: We went home.

Mrs. M: Walked home.

LM: Yes, we walked home maybe five, six miles.

NL: And your store, your business was taken…

LM: No. We didn't have a business. [unclear] just a room. We didn't have no materials. What I did is provide a service. I made suits when somebody brought my material.

NL: But you had some machinery?

LM: Machine, just old machine with a pair scissors and a press-iron of charcoal.

NL: I see.

LM: This was the whole thing.

NL: And the Germans had taken that over or could you go back?

LM: No, we were not important.

Mrs. M: Nothing there.

NL: Not wealthy enough.

LM: So we walked home. Coming home we saw the first Germans on the road. And they didn't bother us. They let us through. We came home a few hours later, a German with a gun came and rounded up every person from 15 years to 60, Jew or not Jew. Rounded them up and took them to one place, and took, the yard of the church and put us there. He was young…

NL: Under 15?

MM: I wanted to go, they wouldn't take me.

NL: Was this for labor?

LM: No, they put us in over there. The first day they didn't bother us and then came the SS, the Panzer Division, and they segregated the Jews from non-Jews and they started to punish the first day. Calisthenics, up and down, up and down, no matter if you're sick or not sick and there was no toilet facilities so everybody made on the place where they sit. In the morning the Jews had to pick up the…

NL: Waste.

LM: The waste with the hands, nothing, just with the hands.

NL: Oh, my God.

LM: And you know, we were not used to, some people vomited and things like that, because we were not used to something like this. Food, they didn't feed us, but my sisters once in a while smuggled some in. They begged a German *Wehrmacht*, soldier, and he brought it in, he called out the name and got the food there. And then they kept us over there for about two weeks.

Mrs. M: In the churchyard.

LM: In the churchyard, no building.

NL: Outside.

LM: Outside in the churchyard. But the calisthenics, they took us into the church. They themselves did all kinds in the church, they needed to relieve themselves, they did it on the altar, they themselves. So after that they took us to Radom.

NL: Excuse me, but meantime, did you hear what had happened to your family, your sisters and mother?

LM: Yeah, I knew.

NL: They stayed in the…?

LM: I saw them, but I couldn't see, the churchyard was with not even wires, with wood fences.

Mrs. M: Iron fences.

LM: Iron fences? Okay, iron fences.

NL: So they took you to Radom?

LM: Took us to Radom and put us in a former military barracks and there we were segregated, the same thing again. And there were military people from the Polish Army and there were civilians. Civilians had a special barrack and the military had a special barrack, but they segregated the Jewish soldiers in the Polish Army.

NL: And you saw some of the Jewish soldiers?

LM: Yes. Yes, they segregated them and they put them in with us and they took us to work, same thing, cleaning toilets and all kinds of the dirtiest work. We got beatings in Radom. And one time, I remember very vividly, there was a Jewish soldier over there and naturally he didn't wash, he had a beard after three or four weeks. He was very dirty. They give him a stick and they told him to march like a soldier and they took a film and photographed him to show to the Germans how a Jew in the Polish Army, how he looked like. Propaganda.

NL: And of course, they took their uniforms away? Polish uniforms.

LM: Yeah, naturally. No they left them, they didn't take their uniforms away because they had to give them something, they didn't have anything to give them.

NL: Did you get any food to speak of at all?

LM: No. No, the food only one of my sisters came to Radom and the same thing.

NL: I see, packages, smuggled in.

LM: It wasn't that strict because it was under the *Wehrmacht*…

NL: Not the SS.

LM: Not the SS.

NL: And how long did you stay at Radom?

LM: I think six weeks, then one of my sisters came. There were the *Volksdeutschen* there, the ethnic Germans, there in the camp. They could go in and out. She walked over to one ethnic German and told him that I'm here and I'm the only provider for the family and if he can get me out. She had 20 *zlotys* with her and some in change. So, he went to the office over there and he told them about me and they called me up to the office and they asked me what kind of work I do and I told them the truth, I am the sole supporter and then he shook hands with my sister to get the money.

NL: That is the *Volksdeutsche*?

LM: The *Volksdeutsche*. One of the silver dollars fell out and somehow they didn't notice it otherwise who knows what would happen to me.

NL: Oh, is that so?

LM: Yeah.

NL: But that enabled you to leave?

LM: Then they gave me a *Passierschein* [German pass permit], a piece of paper that I could walk home. So I walked home 30 kilometers, half starved, with my sister.

NL: And were you able to do any work when you got back?

LM: No, later on, no later on, no, later on, you lived whatever you could.

NL: And how long did you stay then in Kozienice?

LM: Then later on, like I said before, the tailor trade was strictly in Jewish hands, and the Poles they needed something to wear, so they smuggled in bread, potatoes. We made, I made the things for them like coats and pants and things like that.

Mrs. M: In the ghetto, [unclear] this already.

LM: No, not in the ghetto, this in my own house.

NL: That was like smuggling?

LM: Not like smuggling, they paid…

NL: Barter.

LM: They paid, they paid, they paid for my ability to make suits for them with food.

NL: And mother and sisters were still there?

LM: Yes. Sisters didn't have any jobs anymore, so I was the sole provider. And about six months after they came in, see, we lived in our city in order to protect ourselves. We made ourselves a ghetto, ghetto like, it was not a ghetto. We lived, everybody lived in…

Mrs. M: In a courtyard.

LM: No, not in a--everybody lived in a very close environment. Only the very rich, they lived outside. So when Germans came in they had a ready-made ghetto, they threw barbed wired around, this was in 1939, they threw barbed wire around. But you still could get out, but if you caught you out they didn't shoot, they beat you up. See, and there was, was a law that every Jew who sees a German, no matter what rank in uniform, he has to take his hat off and bow. If you did bow, then he came over to you beat you up. "Am I your friend?" If you didn't bow, "Why didn't you bow, I beat you up again." So either way it was going on like this all the time. And the very beginning, there was Jewish bakers over there and they had flour left over, from, probably for two months, three months, you know…

NL: Storage.

LM: Storage, and they made them bake bread. But a Jew could not stay in line, only what was left over they give it to the Jews. And the Poles, when my sister

stayed in line, the Poles could recognize a Jew because you live with them together. So she would, the first thing what they learned, the Poles, *Jude*. So they went over to the German, *Wehrmacht*, whoever it was, "*Jude*," pull them up.

NL: And you had to take what was left, if anything.

LM: Right, right.

NL: Besides those Poles who exchanged bread for your services, were there any Poles who tried to help you?

LM: I could only think of one. He probably saved my life and probably not out of the goodness of his heart. It's for money, too.

NL: Can you tell us that story?

LM: He dealt with us, this a little bit later though.

NL: Oh, I see, well we'll stay in '39. So you stayed in this ghetto-ized community for how long, Mr. Mantelmacher?

LM: Probably until they closed the ghetto up, until 1941.

MM: May I interrupt? You didn't say, you are the thoughtful writer, but we had to go for forced labor. I was young, I was underage but I was big, so I wrote his name, I worked under Leo Mantelmacher until 1942.

LM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

NL: They didn't catch you?

LM: No, no, no he was…

MM: I had to be 16.

LM: He was tall.

MM: But I was only 14 you know, so I worked until '42. But in '41, I was Leo Mantelmacher.

NL: And you were able to send some money home?

MM: No, no, I worked in the city.

NL: I see, in the city.

LM: He brought home flour, they gave him some rations.

NL: And your sisters and mother were still at home until '41?

LM: Yes.

NL: And then what happened in '41, Mr. Mantelmacher?

LM: In '40, in 1940, like I said before, we had from my father left customers, Germans, ethnic Germans. And they took me one German at a time for a week or a month. They took me to make suits for them in their homes and they brought, they brought home food what couldn't get into the ghetto and we had food until the end, until they took all the Jews to Treblinka. But we stored the food we had not in abundance, but we didn't starve, we didn't starve, we didn't starve.

NL: And that was because of your occupation?

LM: Yes, yes.

NL: Mr.--something else?

LM: You want to add something?

MM: You missed out something because like from every family, you know, every household, you know, you had to give certain days, you know, to go for forced labor, two days or four days, you know. He missed that, but it's not so important.

Mrs. M: He did that for him [unclear].

LM: I would have told. You see, the Germans demanded forced labor and if I would have gone to forced labor, they probably would have starved, so he was my younger brother Max, he was…

NL: Your substitute.

LM: He was young, but he was strong, strong built and he went on my place so it meant that I worked for the Germans.

NL: And could get some food, I see.

LM: That's why we had a little bit better than the rest of the Jews.

NL: No one suspected that you were Leo Mantelmacher?

LM: No, the Jews, the Jews leader, leaders, they knew, the *Judenrat* they knew, but they were glad because otherwise they would have to support us from the kitchen, from the communal kitchen which they don't have.

NL: One less family to take care of.

LM: Yes. Right, so we never stayed in line for soup or things like that, so they were glad. This was in 1940 and we struggled to 1940. At one time in 1940, there was a-- the Germans gave an order to all the farmers to deliver to the city potatoes, when the harvest of potatoes was. And they neglected to tell them not to give it to the Jews. It was administered by Poles. So my mother knew one of the Poles who administered that, he was formerly a post-office employee. She bribed him. She gave a few hundred *zlotys* so we got quite a few.

NL: Potatoes.

LM: Quite a few. We had to dig under the bed, had to dig a big hole.

MM: [unclear] basement.

LM: Yeah, and to keep the potatoes.

NL: The basement. So you had a supply of food.

LM: We had a supply. Somehow luck was with us all the time.

NL: These were lucky things, of course.

LM: And then in 1941, they took my brother Max, they took him to a labor camp. I don't want to elaborate, because he's going to tell you the story himself.

NL: Alright, and what happened to the other Jews in…?

LM: Most of them, I'd say 40% died from starvation. Those who didn't have trades what they could trade or deal with the Polish population, they had no way of making a living.

NL: There were no food packages coming in from America?

LM: No! No! No!

NL: Because in some of the ghettos…

LM: No. Don't believe that!

NL: Well, in some of the ghettos…

LM: Not in Poland.

MM: In Poland?

NL: Yes, up until Pearl Harbor, but we don't have to go into that. In your town, obviously no.

LM: Miss Levin, in 1940, one time at *Pesach* we got matzos from Denmark. That's the only time we got a package.

NL: Did you have any contact by phone or mail with any of the other ghettos in '40?

LM: First of all, there was one phone in the city, it was in the post office.

NL: One phone?

LM: [Laughter] and the second thing, and the second thing…

NL: That tells me a lot.

LM: Yah. The second thing, it was so the Germans so situated the way they wanted to be, that one city from another was like from America to Europe.

NL: Isolated.

LM: Very isolated.

NL: Did you get any information through a secret radio.

LM: We didn't. No.

NL: Or any news from the war front?

LM: There were radios, but the minute the Germans came in they confiscated all the radios. If they caught somebody with a radio, he was shot.

NL: So you were really isolated.

LM: Very isolated.

Mrs. M: Just like having people that moved out from Warsaw from the big cities they came to the small town.

LM: Yes, but this is the only news we got.

NL: Alright, so in '41 then you said by that time many had starved?

LM: Many had starved.

NL: There were deportations already?

LM: No.

NL: Not yet.

LM: No. Not deportations. There were killings for minor infractions. Somebody did something or smuggled something or they caught them with some food or something. One time in '41, at that time I had to work on my own already because he was of age, so I had to go to work, but still--we drained swamps. There was a Polish engineer and he talked in the Germans that if he could get people to work for him and drain those swamps they would add a certain amount of acreage for them to…

NL: Was this done to try to help to preserve you?

LM: No, that's not, they wanted money, the Poles. And somehow through them a few hundred survived.

NL: And you were part of that brigade?

LM: I was part of that brigade.

NL: I see.

LM: So, and this happened in our village, I forgot to tell you before. Before the war my parents, during the summer, they rented orchards, trees, apples, and the pears and plums and during the summer we lived in that village, where the orchards were. The food was provided for us, not much food, like potatoes and milk, was provided by the farmer and this was our livelihood during the summer because there was not too much tailoring and so happened, the swamps were in that village. So they knew me very well and I had friends over there, even they were antisemitic, but still when I was in trouble I was their *mushkie*, their Jew.

NL: Their Jew, yes.

LM: See. So I went to work every morning, out of the ghetto, and I cut things for them for pants and coats and took it home and made it overnight or two nights. And I made suits for them or pants, whatever it was. Then they brought in, they were allowed, those foremen, Poles, they were allowed to come into the ghetto to collect the Jews. They were allowed to come in without nobody bothering them, so they brought the food in.

NL: So that helped some to survive, too?

LM: Yes. At one time, we would home from work and the German police knew that smuggling is going on. At that time, particular, I had with me--see, in 1941 there was a law by the Germans that every Jew who has a piece of fur, a collar, a coat, anything must be given to them. This was the beginning of the winter offensive in Russia. We dealt, we worked with these kind of things. I made coats with fun linings and things like that. I brought home a piece of fur and a piece of material to make a jacket for a farmer and my sisters saw that the *gendarmerie*, the German police is coming to check those who come back from work. So they sent out. I told you about the Gentile, you asked about the Gentile before, if I had anybody that helped. This was a Gentile. They sent him up, on the road he told me, give me your package. He took it away from me and I went back to the city. When he came to the bridge, he had to cross a little bridge over there, they picked up, I think it was seven or eight who brought home five or six kilo of grain and they took them to a field and they killed them all. They killed them, they buried them in the plot, because of that. See, I was saved that time, that was my first…

NL: Near miss.

LM: Near miss, yes.

NL: And so you stayed within the area of your home through '41?

LM: Through ’41.

NL: And how about ’42?

LM: ’42 was the same way. We went to work out of the city, under guard, but we still, like I said, as a tailor I still could bring in some food.

NL: What identity did you have then? Were you still, did you still have your own…?

LM: My name was Leo. He changed identity. My brother changed identity, not me.

NL: But were there two Leo’s?

LM: No, later on when he became 16, he went to Max, to Moishe.

NL: Oh, I see, I see.

MM: You see, he figured from 1941 that he was working for them, because I was doing his work, but his name was there.

NL: I see, I understand now.

LM: And we worked this way until September 1942. In the meantime, I want to tell you a thing what I saw. In the beginning of 1942, one Sunday, Sunday I didn’t go to work, I was standing near the gate, where you have to go out from the ghetto.

NL: The exit.

LM: Exit. And was a Jewish, a little girl, she was a blonde, about 10 years old. Her father was, his job before the war was he went to buy cattle and things like that and they were very impoverished. So the child, she didn’t look Jewish, she went out to back where the farmers what the father knew to give her some potatoes and things like that. And she came back one time with a bag, a few potatoes in a bag and so happened one of the police, Somers was the name, in Kozienice, a German, he saw her. And he says--he saw her near the gate. Otherwise, he probably he wouldn’t know because he was a skinny, you know. “What do you have here?” and she showed him she has potatoes. Then he said to her, “Put the sack down. I’ll help you carrying in the sack.” The minute she put the sack down, she bent her head, he shot her in the neck.

NL: Killed her.

LM: Yeah. And was going on…

NL: Terrible things.

LM: Every day every day you had different, different stories to tell. Then I had a friend and I was most of the time I was in their house ‘cause it was better hiding. They had an attic. Besides working for the Germans or cleaning up the cleaning the swamps, they even Saturdays and Sundays they even called people to work for them. And they had a neighbor, two boys, one was 10 and one was 12 and they were starving. So the boys risked their lives and they went out to beg for some food to the Gentiles and they were caught and they were shot. So to identify them, the police called the head of the Jewish police and the Jewish police. He went to identify them, he didn’t know who they were because they didn’t have identification, so he brought back their belts. So the

mother saw the belts, she lost her mind.

NL: Did the Jews in the town feel very negatively about the Jewish police? In some ghettos the Jewish police behaved very badly…

LM: Yes. Yes.

NL: Was this the case in your town?

LM: Yes, we had special the elders, Jewish elders there, he was--it's paradoxical. He was a Zionist, a strong Zionist before the war. He did all kinds of things for a Zionist organization, Bordonia, and when he became--he was from a poor parentage, he struggled, but he was a little bit more probably more educated and when he became--he, himself, pushed himself to be the [unclear], not the [unclear], the ghetto [unclear] *Judenrat Juden* [unclear] and he has on his conscience more Jews from our city than anybody I know.

NL: What is his name? What was his name?

MM: Moishe Brunstein.

LM: Moishe Brunstein. A sister of his survived, he didn't survive. They killed him some place, the Jews killed him.

NL: Was his motivation to survive…?

LM: His survival and his family survival.

NL: So he lost interest in all of the other Jews of the community.

LM: Yes, yes, and he beat people up. He sent…

Tape two, side one:

NL: This is September 26, 1983. Nora Levin, continuing the interview with Mr. Leo Mantelmacher. This is tape two, side one. So now, Mr. Mantelmacher, if you'll continue with where we left off.

LM: Alright, I think we left off at 1942, right?

NL: 1942, yes.

LM: And we were in the ghetto and the ghetto was strictly closed. Anybody who walked out, if he was caught, he was shot on the spot, and many people were. Then, that was going on until September '42. In the spring of 1942, I had--we worked at the place where we drained the swamps, I had a foreman, a Pole, he was a college man. He was a decent person, so he told us that in the spring of 1942, not far from us, a matter of fact where my sister-in-law comes from, Sonia Mantelmacher, this was across the Vistula and this belonged to the Lublin District. They took all the Jews out, a lot of them were killed on the streets, many of them, and they took them to a camp named Treblinka. Over there they were gassed and burned.

NL: Now. How did the Germans, excuse me, how did the Germans describe that transport. Where they rounded up the Jews? What did they tell them?

LM: They said, they didn't have much to say.

Mrs. M: They didn't say nothing.

LM: They said to the [unclear] they said that the Jews are going to the Eastern territories for work, that's all.

NL: And that's all you knew?

LM: And most of the Jews, they were so discouraged and so hungry that they had no willpower even to resist. Get it over with. So he told us the story, and a matter of fact, to me and a friend of mine by the name of David Goldman. And he was hinting to us, now I remind myself, that we should do something about it, maybe join the partisans. He was liberal. He was a college graduate. He was not antisemitic, but we mistrust every Pole and I didn't believe what he said because a civilized nation like the Germans, it's not possible, and little by little it filtered through to us.

NL: You heard more rumors?

LM: Yes, some escaped, some came to our city and they told what happened in the Lublin District and we knew that somehow, sooner or later, we're going to suffer the same fate as the Lublin District did.

NL: Was there any talk of resistance in the ghetto or was that impossible?

LM: If would have been talk, if there was talk, I don't think they would accomplish anything. Because you couldn't get any weapons, or you didn't have no place to run, flat territory, no woods, nothing. It would be suicide. Only those, only those who looked like Aryans, like the so-called Aryans, and they got themselves papers…

NL: False papers…

LM: Papers. False papers, the Aryans, and they were lucky not to be checked, those people had a chance to survive.

Mrs. M: They didn't survive either. The Poles recognized them.

LM: Some did, some did not.

NL: Very few survived.

LM: And it happened in September that the train, the train stationmaster, he was a friend of one of the Jews from our city, so he told him, "We have an order for 90 cattle cars to bring in to our city and those, the destination is Treblinka."

NL: I see, and he knew?

LM: He didn't know, but we knew what Treblinka was already, okay?

Mrs. M: Some ran away in their clothing, they hid themselves in the clothing.

NL: So this was…

LM: We knew what happened to Warsaw already, because Warsaw started in July, in June, and this was already September. So we knew already, but there was no choice, couldn't do nothing about it.

NL: And I suppose many Jews didn't believe it?

LM: They did believe, they did believe but they couldn't do nothing about it. And then they made the Jewish community, the *Lage*--, the *Judenälteste.*[5] They made them collect a certain amount of money to pay for the transportation of the Jews. And this was accomplished. The money was collected from the rich Jews. The *Judenälteste*, he himself got himself [unclear] even my brother who came later with his sister and the rest were all left on a limb. He didn't tell anybody what, nothing, but he knew. And I still worked at draining those ditches. So the Poles over there, the leaders from that company, they saw there's money in it so they somehow, by a miracle, they persuaded the Germans to let us stay. Put us in a barrack and let us stay there until we finished. It would be another five, six months to finish it and then, they told the Germans, they could do anything they want with us. So, naturally, there was a lots of money involved, some rich people bought themselves places in. And they were decent enough to let those who really were without money, they were decent enough to leave them, too. I was one of them. And we worked there. We went there, let's see, on Wednesday. And Saturday, Friday I came home and-- to take some things from my house like a covering and maybe a pants or whatever I had, and that time I saw my mother for the last time. My sisters were already gone[6] and when I came home I didn't know that my sisters were going. At that time was a man over there, now I think he was Jewish, but he was on Aryan papers and he lived not far from the ghetto and I did a coat for him and he did not pay me 'cause

[5] *Judenälteste* – Ger. - chief of elder of the Jews. Here Mr. Mantelmacher is referring to the head of the Jewish council in this town.

[6]This episode is only briefly mentioned here. For more details about how his sisters escaped the trains to Treblinka see his brother Max Mantelmacher's interview, page 7.

he couldn't get the money to us. So when they took the-- my sisters to, to my brother, to Max, not to [unclear] to Kruszyna, so he gave him the money. And when I came back I stopped, when I go-- I went from that place, I went to his store, he had a grocery store, I stopped in for a second and I asked him for the money. He said he gave it to my sisters, which was true. And then at that time I saw my mother and she told me that my sisters are gone. I started to cry because you know, I felt I was left all alone and I said goodbye to my mother, kissed her. She couldn't work, she was 58 years old, 59 years old.

NL: And that was the last time…

LM: I remember the face like now. I'll never forget it, how I felt and how she looked. And then they took us on a horse and buggy. We put our packages and they took us back to the place where we supposed to stay at the swamps. And by the way, when they took us they wanted to check what kind of packages we have. They went around all the way through the Jewish cemetery and over there, if they would make a left turn, they would kill us on the Jewish cemetery. Somehow-- they were very vicious-- somehow we passed through, they took us to the barracks, the Santa Marie Barracks, and they searched everybody and then they put us back on those-- packages back on those horse and buggy and we went to that camp.

Mrs. M: Who was on the horse and buggy?

LM: The packages. We walked, we walked. So we came there and we worked at the same thing. No, it was no Germans there, just the Poles. They had the say. Three days later, they, the Poles supposed to leave there, over there about maybe 6 or 700 Jews, I don't know how many, and many people came there like not supposed to be there. So the Germans came and they told the Poles to leave a certain amount. The rest they have to deliver themselves. The Poles choose who has to go, who has to stay. So my sister, the oldest one, she was not supposed to stay there because she did not work and she had a wedding ring on her finger. So she saw what's going on. They picked her out to go to the…

NL: To Treblinka.

LM: Yeah, naturally to the trains. So she had the wedding ring, she gave it away and they let her in with the group to survive. And so happened, we stayed there about 10 days or so and then a truck came, two trucks came from Wolanów. And Wolanów was more important to the Germans than the cleaning, I mean draining the swamps so they took us to Wolanów.

NL: And that was in late '42?

LM: This was in October, October '42. And while we were in Wolanów, the first days, we right away we saw you came in to a death trap. Right away. Food, they gave us military bread and a soup, we could not get fat, but we wouldn't die, starvation diet. But the, the minute we came, there was the German *Lagerführer*, he was a caricature of a person. And he right away picked out those who were not capable of work in his opinion, sick, elderly, and he picked out that time, was I think 138 or 137

people and many from our city Kozienice and he killed them. The Ukrainians came and they were killed in front of us. In our camp things like this happened. Every time they were taken away someplace else and killed and were buried in the same graves where my brothers were before.

NL: Also Ukrainian SS?

LM: Ukrainian SS and they were buried near the Russian prisoners of war, like we mentioned before.

NL: Yes, yes.

LM: And every day, every day the, the German overseers from that camp, they found fault with the Jew, so they brought the Ukrainians…

NL: To kill them.

LM: To kill them. Every day two three Jews were killed and there was an order, a steady order that all they should one grave should be always open. And it was there.

NL: Now, what sort of work did you do in Wolanów?

LM: I worked there, in the beginning I worked very hard. I worked at cement.

NL: Carrying?

LM: Carrying cement bags, 100 kilo bags, 50 kilo bags on my back. Very hard. And then somehow I found over there, I met over there a Pole. He was from the south of Poland, from Silesia. He was a marine, a mariner during with, in Poland. And he didn't know antisemitism because Jews didn't live there. And I told him I was a tailor. He was very sloppy dressed and he didn't have nothing, so he provided--he said okay if I can make him a suit. He got himself material, he got a machine from a farmer, he put me on a farmhouse…

NL: He put you in a farmhouse?

LM: In a farmhouse with that machine and I made a suit for them and then he went around to the farmers because I told you, like I said before, tailors were very scarce. He went down to the farmers and he collected money from them, good money.

NL: And you made their suits.

LM: And I made their suits and I got very good food, cheese, butter, and bread. And I took my brother with me and we worked together for quite a while we had very good.

Mrs. M: [unclear]

LM: Yeah, I'm going to tell the story.

NL: And the Germans, Polish police, the Jewish police, didn't know about you or didn't care?

LM: No, they did not know.

NL: They did not know.

LM: If they would have known, we would have been killed, both of us.

NL: You had to do this secretly.

LM: Everything secret. He covered for me.

MM: How about the time when…

LM: Yes, I'll tell. He covered for us. So it was going on for probably about three, four months.

Mrs. M: Together there.

LM: Together. We had good food and…

NL: And you survived.

LM: Survived, yeah. And then one time my brother got sick-- in the ghetto, I forgot to say, in the ghetto I got typhoid fever and this was in 1941 in the beginning. And they took me to the hospital, quarantine hospital, and I was almost dead. I was young, somehow, three out of four died. Somehow I, I survived that, too. So I was immune to typhoid fever and my brother, he didn't have it, so he came to Wolanów, was an epidemic of typhoid fever and he got it. But to stay in the, in the barracks, would mean death. So he had a high temperature, I had to drag him every day. And across where I worked as a, as a tailor, there was another farmer, and they had a, a place over there, they used to bake bread in a heart--how you call it?

NL: Hearth.

LM: Hearth. It was a top over there and they put him up over there the whole day, he was laying over there…

NL: To keep him warm…

LM: He was laying over there and then there was a girl over there, she was living with a driver. She was living with a truck driver who worked for the Germans.

Mrs. M: A Polish girl.

LM: A Polish girl.

MM: I don't know who she was.

LM: Wait, I'm telling. A Polish girl. And she saw the way he suffers, so she went to Radom, about 20 kilometers away. She brought him all kinds of medicines. Every day I took him to work, every day she massaged him and everything. She was, she had very, *rachmones*.

NL: Amazing!

Mrs. M: Took pity on him.

LM: Pity, yeah.

NL: [To MM] And you had a high fever?

LM: Very high fever. And was for ten days, for ten days, it, he went on like this and then somehow he got better. I took him back to the tailoring with me, we had food, so he survived there.

NL: [To MM] You did tailoring too?

MM: [unclear]

LM: Yes, sure, sure. I wouldn't do it by myself, I have a brother. I was the

boss, there.

NL: So both of you were working secretly, interesting.

LM: Yeah, yeah, and I think that girl who helped him, she was Jewish. She was on Christian papers.

NL: I see.

LM: Because, because…

Mrs. M.: [unclear]

LM: No, she lived there I told you, with a truck driver, and such devotion. I would not attribute to a, to a Polish girl, it's impossible.

NL: So she looked Aryan.

LM: She looked Aryan or not, I don't know, but she devoted her life to save my brother.

NL: Did she help other Jews as far as you know?

LM: No, she didn't, she had no contact with other Jews.

NL: I see.

LM: See because she couldn't get to them. To us, she could get.

NL: Amazing! So you were in Wolanów and you did the secret work for a few months?

LM: Yeah. A few months and then this fizzled up.

NL: No more customers.

LM: No not more customers, the foreman was transferred and no more connections. On my own, I didn't want to risk, so I went back to work, and that [unclear] like my brother said before, was no worry. But the firm where we worked, a Polish firm, they had a little booth near they built a transformator for electricity. They had a little booth over there, there was water over there, they had a kitchen over there. And Sundays was our day off and one day I told my brother, "Max, let's go up, and we have to wash our clothes, we have to wash ourselves, let's go up to work, they don't know if we have to go out or not." But some people went out to work on Sundays, so I told my brother let's go and we went there. And we had, lighted a fire and we did our washing and everything. And there was there a Polish boy, a student; he worked for that firm and he saw us there.

MM: A technician.

LM: He saw us there. So he said or give me all the money you have or I'm going to report you to the *Lagerführer* and you'll get shot. We didn't have much money so whatever we had we gave it to them and by luck they let me go. If I wouldn't have the few *zlotys*, we would have been shot right there and then. Right?

MM: That's right.

NL: Another near miss.

LM: Yeah.

NL: Amazing.

LM: Yeah. And then we went there until my brother told you the story until he had to get out and I stayed there longer.

NL: You stayed longer.

LM: Then they came, they brought in Russian prisoners of war who defected to the Germans and those were the Asian Russians and they formed a brigade, *Wehrmacht* brigades.

NL: Out of the Russians.

LM: Yeah, and they train them over there in those barracks what they built for them in Wolanów.

NL: Did the Russians then survive?

LM: I don't know anything about them what happened to them. Then Himmler gave an order that to liquidate all the labor camps. Only the concentration camps should be in existence. And they took us from there, they took us to all kinds of ammunition factories. I choose, I volunteer to go to Radom because I knew my brother is there, maybe he'll be able to help me.

NL: And this was early in '43?

LM: This was early in '43. In Radom, when I arrived there, I suffered very much hunger. I never suffered so much hunger in my life until my brother found out where I was. Then I started to eat.

NL: You found the gold?

LM: Yeah, found the gold and he gave me bread.

MM: Bread, every week.

LM: He gave me bread every week. I became a millionaire.

Mrs. M: [unclear]

LM: Yeah. This is later.

NL: Did you work at Radom?

LM: Yes, I worked in the, we made guns. My job, my job was, the guns in Europe at that time, they had numbers. You know, if you want to shoot you lift up a number, you could shoot a velocity, farther or lower. I worked on that thing.

NL: The mechanism?

LM: Yeah, and somehow…

NL: You hurt your hand?

LM: Yeah, I got this.

NL: Were you able to get any medical treatment?

LM: No. No, it happened that we worked there for a while in Radom until the Russians came close to the Vistula. This was like in July, 1944. I still had the bandage on and it was still bleeding. We came to Auschwitz. No, they took us to Tomashev Mozaviesk [Tomaszow-Mazowiecki] first. We walked, walked about…

NL: Tomashev…?

LM: Tomashev Mozaviesk.

NL: You have to write the last part for me. [long pause] Well, we'll find it in the *Gazeteer*, but I want to get at least some of it correct. And this was in Poland still?

LM: In Poland, yeah, in Poland. Just in Poland and over there we stayed in a, I remember like now, it was a factory over there. They made artificial silk, like nylon and things like that, and they took all the machinery out because they knew the Russians were going to come soon. But we knew already about the gas chambers so the entrance and the roof, the building, it looked exactly like you would imagine a gas chamber would look like.

NL: You were afraid…

LM: So nobody wanted to get in. We pushed ourselves, pushed ourselves, then the, the head from the SS, he saw, so he took the *Judenälteste* in and showed them there's nothing in here. There's no machinery. I mean no gas, no nothing.

NL: A real factory.

LM: It was a factory 'cause the stumps from the machines were still there and we went in over there. We worked there in that city for about five, six weeks.

NL: Also ammunitions?

LM: No. No, we dug tank ditches against tanks.

NL: Anti-tank ditches.

LM: Anti-tank ditches we got there and the food was very scarce, almost nothing. And then they…

NL: Were you in touch with your brother at all?

LM: No, at that time I didn't know nothing what happened.

NL: You didn't know what happened to each other.

LM: Nothing, nothing.

NL: And after…

LM: Then they, somehow-- we were in Tomashev Mozaviesk only because they couldn't get transport for us to Auschwitz. It was too hard to walk.

NL: I see. I see.

LM: When we went out from Radom, there were many sick people over there, people with money. When they liquidated the ghetto in Radom, they came into our camp, they paid and they were, they created, created a small hospital and they were there. And they, when we walked they couldn't walk so they took a horse and buggy from a with the farmer and they took them out from about 30, 40 kilometers from Radom and they killed them and they left them over there. And there was one SS man, he was the head of the hospital. When I had this, he knew me because I didn't work, see. So he come over when we walked, he come over to me and he says to me, "You sick, why don't you go on the horse and buggy, you don't have to work." I was smiling at him, I knew what the horse and buggy meant. So I didn't wal--, So I didn't go, I walked. So we came to Auschwitz, they put us on a train, they separated the men and women. They put us on a train and they told us they're going to take us to the Lodz Ghetto. And we

knew about the-- we couldn't-- I told you we were helpless, we couldn't do nothing. We came in about three o'clock in the morning before Auschwitz. I remember like now; it was a Polish railroad man, he switched the rails to get in to the Auschwitz camp. I was near the window so I asked him in Polish, "Where are you? Where are we?" So he said, "You are in Oswiecim Auschwitz. So, he said, "Where do Polish Jews come from, there's no more Polish Jews?"

NL: Did you know what Auschwitz meant?

LM: Yes, that time, yes.

NL: You did know.

LM: Yeah, yeah. So we came there, on the ramp, they wouldn't let us out until about maybe six o'clock in the morning. Six o'clock in the morning everybody had to get out, leave the packages, whatever we had. We didn't have much because we were already striped uniforms, because before that Radom was a labor camp. Then the SS took it over and they made a concentration camp out of it. But it was a labor concentration camp, no killings. When the SS took it over, a matter of fact, we had better than when Ukrainians ruled over us, 'cause we had better food and cleaner clothing we had because they needed us. And when we came into Auschwitz, six o'clock in the morning, we had to go out from the--leave the packages like I said, they made a selection.

NL: Right there.

LM: Right there, right near the train. Everybody has to stand in five in a row. Mengele, I remember him like now, so he didn't, he didn't see everybody personally, but he walked like this see, from one five to, you know.

NL: Group of five.

LM: It so happened, it so happened that I had a bandage on my hand, I took it off because I didn't want to see white whatever it was, and I passed through. But they picked out was a German Jew, somehow he was in Radom. He was a medal winner, from the first--the highest award, the *Ritterkreuz*. The *Ritterkreuz*.

NL: Red Cross.

LM: No, the highest award that the German Army could give.

Mrs. M: The Iron Cross.

NL: Oh, the Iron Cross.

LM: The Iron Cross, they call it *Ritterkreuz*. He was an elderly, elderly I mean he was 50 years old.

NL: He still had his medal.

LM: Fifty years old. And they took us. I remember was a boy 13 years old, his mother worked in the kitchen in Radom. They took him out and people which I don't remember, but those two I remember. The boy begged, he says, "I'm strong, I can work, why don't you let me go back?" They didn't let him and the German, he knew where he was going, the German Jew, so he told him, "I'm a better German than you are. I fought for my Fatherland. You're going to pay for this." And anyway, they took him and put

him in a truck, took him to the gas chambers. And…

NL: He was killed.

LM: Killed him. We stayed in Auschwitz. We didn't go into the camp. We stayed there on the ramp. We stayed almost two days, slept on the ramp and everything. And then came an order that we going to Germany.

NL: This is still forty…

LM: This is in July '44.

NL: '44.

LM: Yeah. And Mengele, I remember like I see him now. So they put us on a train, on the same train we were and the Jewish prisoners came, they brought us a br-…

Tape two, side two:

NL: Continuing our interview with Mr. Leo Mantelmacher. So the prisoners brought some food for you.

LM: So he said to us, he said, "You are the lucky ones, you going to survive. You have a chance to survive. With me even I have, you see, I am well fed and everything, I don't think I'm going to survive, but you have a chance."

NL: Because you were leaving.

LM: Because you're going out of hell. When we came on that train, the same train that brought us from Radom to Auschwitz, we were traveling for three days. We were traveling through Czechoslovakia and we stopped on certain places. The Czechoslovak people were very good to us. We stopped under a bridge and they threw bread to us. And we traveled comfortable to Germany.

NL: You did?

LM: Yes, about 40 to a…

NL: Compartment.

LM: …a car, cattle car, but we had both sides to us, but where the doors were, the SS, two SS men with guns, they were sitting over there, and the doors were open. We had air and then they brought water when it was necessary.

NL: Why do you think you were given so much consideration, was it just luck?

LM: The same SS men, they were with us already for a year and a half and they knew almost everybody, each one of us.

NL: There was some kind of relationship?

LM: Probably, and they needed us in Germany because we were already trained people.

NL: And they wanted the work potential?

LM: Right, so we came to a place named Vaihingen, Germany.

NL: Vai, hingen.

LM: Vai [pause] hingen. The way I say it, the way it is spelled…

NL: Vaihingen.

LM: It's right close to Stuttgart, about 15, 20 kilometers to Stuttgart.

NL: And there was work there?

LM: There, over there, they, there were brand new barracks they built for us.

NL: Brand new barracks.

LM: They built for us with straw mattresses. Everybody had a bunk for himself, but they were close together, but separated bunks.

NL: Were there other prisoners there?

LM: No, nobody was there, we were the first to come.

NL: You were the first?

LM: The first to come, and we came there, but the food was very bad. No food whatsoever, a leaf of cabbage in water for a whole day, a piece of bread, maybe two ounces and we lost strength.

NL: Of course. What sort of work were you doing?

LM: We dug tunnels. The American and the English they bombarded the top ground and they destroyed all the factories so they were building underground. That part of Germany had many mountains, stone mountains, so we dug in the stones and the, with the, how do you call it?

NL: Drillers, drill press.

LM: With the press, yeah, we worked at that and then we got to know the German overseers. They were not SS, they were ORTE, Organization Todt,[7] you probably heard of them.

NL: Todt Organization, yes.

LM: Yes, and especially I got to know one, an elderly man, and I told him I'm a tailor, so I did things for him. Sometimes I made a cap for him and he brought me some tobacco. I did not smoke so I sold it in the camp for a piece of bread, sometimes he brought me a piece of bread. Sometimes he hid me and-- we worked by cement. He hid me on the, in his office, there were a big place with cement bags. He made a place for me, he saw I very weak. He let me lay over there. Sometimes he put me there to sew for him.

NL: I see. Were there other Jewish workers who could give the Todt people service also given…?

LM: Yes, they had, many friends of mine, they created a tailor factory, but I was not chosen because of my hand. See.

NL: But the Todt people did want the workers to survive?

LM: Oh, yeah. No, no, they just did it for the German Reich. It so happened that I had one who was human.

NL: A personal. I see.

LM: A personal…

NL: …A personal interest.

LM: …he was human. Yeah, but to them it was the Reich, nothing else, and we worked there very hard. One time, I remember, I was working by putting together, mixing cement with steel to make the concrete.

NL: Reinforce.

LM: Yeah, and was an office right there. And three girls were working there. And one looked very Jewish, a brunette, but she was on Aryan papers and one of my friends, she called him into the office to bring something, you know something, she confessed to him…

[7]Organization Todt - Organization for the large scale construction work headed by Dr. Fritz Todt.

NL: That she was Jewish?

LM: That she was Jewish. She was from Czestochowa, and three days later she disappeared.

NL: Why did she do that?

LM: Maybe she didn't see a Jew since 1940. It was a mistake, so another girl probably overheard and informed and she disappeared. And we worked there in that camp until September. In September, they stopped. They saw the war is lost, so they stopped digging. They only digged whatever was necessary, like making oil or gas from the shale and this was a different camp. They took most of the people from our camp, they took to that camp to make the oil and none survived.

NL: But you didn't go there.

LM: None survived. But at that time when they took those people, I had something on my leg and then I had a yellow streak all the way up to my groin and they thought it's blood poisoning. So I had to undress, and the doctor, was a Jewish doctor, he explained to the German SS leader what it is. So he says he's not going to survive anyway, why drag him. And so at that time, the transport went away, I didn't go. And I was the only one from my city who remained in that camp until the end.

NL: Another good angel.

LM: Yeah.

NL: Incredible!

LM: And in that camp…

NL: What was it, just a wound of some kind, or was it blood poisoning?

LM: No, I had the infection on my ankle. On my ankle, and it spread, but it was not blood poisoning.

NL: [To Mrs. M] Did you want to say something? [unclear]

LM: We're not going to be able to finish everything.

NL: Were you in the clinic there, in the dispensary?

LM: Yes, in the dispensary. I was there for three days and then they saw everything is alright they let me go. Was no blood test, you know. And then they took us from there, I walked there. Yeah, one thing I want to say, Christmas Eve they bombarded a city by the name of Fortzein. The city, they manufactured before the war, watches and during the war they manufactured ball bearings. So the English came at night and they put like Christmas trees, you know, like in parachutes. They lighted up the whole city and they destroyed the whole city and the next day they took us to work in that city.

NL: I see. To rebuild?

LM: No, not to rebuild, to clean up, to find dead people. We worked in the basements and we found all kinds of foods.

NL: Oh, I see another…

LM: Yeah. All miracles, and after that there's a lot more to tell, but I want

to cut it short. Okay.

NL: We're now, in the fall of '44. Were you moved again?

LM: No, I stayed in Vaihingen until 19- until almost the end of '44.

NL: Until the end of '44.

LM: Yeah, in the end of '44 they took us, they walked us to Dachau. It was a very long walk, but in the meantime, halfway, they found cattle cars and they put us in the cattle cars. We came to Dachau. Before we were loaded off the train from Dachau, the Free French, the front belonged to them, that section of the front, so they were flying to check out the reconnaissance planes and they were flying. We saw the tricolor, but we knew who they were but--. We saw a plane, I remember like now, he, he recognized…

NL: Tipped his wings?

LM: Tipped his wings. That time I didn't know what it was, but now I know. So we were in Dachau, and Dachau was--we were in a quarantine, we hungered. It was Purim.

NL: You didn't know that?

LM: No, no. I was in Dachau, for about, I'd say, about four weeks, almost starved to death and somehow in the second barrack, across from me was a guy, a Pole, who knew me. I did work for his father and for him. He knew me and we talked and everything and then two days later they took, there were about 15,000 Jews, they took us all out from Dachau and they put us on trains, some passenger train, some cattle trains, and while walking out of Dachau, everybody got a Red Cross package, a Swiss delegate was there. This was the first time that they give anything to the Jews. There was, I remember, there was a kilo of sugar in it, the hard sugar, and two pounds of honey cake and a can of condensed milk.

NL: You know, this is the first time, I've interviewed many survivors, the first time I hear of any Red Cross help. The first time. After the war is over.

LM: Okay, and they took us over there, they took us to Garmisch[8].

NL: Oh, yes. Near…

LM: Over there they let us out and we walked from there we walked to Mittenwald. And this is the German border between Germany and Austria. And this was already the, April the 27th when we arrived there. Over there they let us off the train and a policeman in German uniform came on a big ramp and he said to us, "*Kameraden*…"

NL: *Kameraden*?

LM: *Ja*, "*Ihr zeit frei. The Krieg is zu Ende. Wir sinen Austreicher. Wir haben kein Schuld nicht*."[9] Translation is, "Comrades, we are your friends and the war is finished. We're not guilty, we're the same victims as you are. You have to go back." It's all baloney, naturally. "You have to go back to Germany because we don't want to

[8]Garmisch-Partenkirchen, a town in Germany, also the site of a subcamp of Dachau.
[9]Actual translation: "Comrades, you are free. The war is over. We are Austrians. We are not to be blamed."

take the responsibility." So they took us 50. They had only one locomotive and one open coal car. They took us 50 at a time, cross about six miles across, and they dumped us in Mittenwald. Was a big, two mountains, high mountains, you know the Tyrolean mountains, and a road was on one side and between the road and the mountains was a river. It was a clearing near the river about let's say about 200 feet with many big stones and they left us, left us there.

NL: Just dumped you?

LM: And no guards, no nothing. When evening came, all of a sudden SS man appeared with machine guns and circled us.

NL: The war is over.

LM: Yeah, they encircled us and we didn't know what to do, we couldn't run. So then one young SS man came on a motorcycle with a machine gun mounted on it and he started to shoot. Some were killed and I had *seykhl* [common sense] enough, there were big stones over there. The first thing what I thought, I hid my head under a stone. If the body gets hit maybe I'll survive. It so happened I didn't get hit and we stayed there, we stayed there 'till about twelve o'clock at night and then the front came very near. We heard the shootings already. They started to, the Germans, those who watched us, they took out the mechanism from the guns so we wouldn't be able to shoot. They threw the guns away. They took the ammunition with them and we were left alone again.

NL: They ran away.

LM: Yeah, and we started to walk toward Garmisch, toward the front and while the gun was shooting at the-- SS men on the motorcycle, so a woman came from somewhere, I don't know, a young blonde woman and she started to kiss the guy and hug him.

NL: The SS man?

LM: Yes, and he stopped shooting and he go away with her, otherwise he maybe he would killed all of us up.

Mrs. M: It is a very important thing I have to…

LM: Okay.

NL: Another miracle.

LM: Yeah. And…

NL: Her boyfriend.

LM: And, who knows who. And we walked back toward the front at twelve o'clock at night. I didn't want to walk because I was afraid 'cause some stragglers, some SS men might be there and so I said I suffered so much I don't want to take chances. I remained over there until daybreak. A matter of fact, some of those who walked, they were killed, some of them survived and they got in, to houses and they survived. Six o'clock or five o'clock in the morning, daybreak, we started to walk toward Garmisch. While we walked the *Feldgendarmerie* [military police] was already backing…

NL: Retreating.

LM: Retreating, and the army came after them and we walked already for about--toward Innsbrook, across the Austrian border.

NL: Over the mountains?

LM: No, on the road across the Austrian border and we were already beyond Seefeld and we walked there and we saw like a Lincoln cabin, what the farmers, the shepherds in a storm they take the sheeps in over there, and they leave them over there. And we walked there. Was a little bit of snow. It was already April, the 28th or 29th. Was a little bit of snow on the ground, so we walked over there and when minute we opened the door, there two soldiers over there. German soldiers.

NL: German soldiers?

LM: Yeah, and they already know who we were because they saw many before us, so they told us if they going to find us, the *Gendarmerie's* going to find us with you we all get killed. They're going to say that we took them out to desert. So they had bread and they had bologna they shared with us.

NL: They did.

LM: Very decent. They shared with us. And…

NL: So you stayed there?

LM: And he says, "You stay there and we're going to go look for some other place." We stayed there and a matter of fact, three hours later the *Feldgendarmerie*, they saw the steps on the snow. They came looking, they saw us and we told them, we explained and we didn't know if they're going to shoot or not, but first thing what I did, put my head down on the floor, was the first thing, was no floor, was a earth, and they went away. They went away and we had a boy, we had about 12 kids, young people, we had a boy he was about 16 years of age and he was strong enough to go out. We stayed there for almost 36 hours, not knowing that the Americans were there. He walked out because we were starving, he walked out and he came back three, four hours later with K rations and then we started to walk out and the first American what I saw was a Jewish man. He was laying with a machine gun on a corner, a three-forked road. He was laying and watching that road. He spoke a little bit of Yiddish. And he knew already, I didn't have to tell him anything. He had already, had already K rations prepared because he knew somebody was going to walk by. And we stayed there and then he stopped a jeep and he put us on the jeep, all 12 of us. And it so happened the jeep driver was a Jew, too. Spoke Yiddish to us, too.

NL: And where did they take you?

LM: To a Seefeld, to an Austrian town, over there he let us go. He said, "You find the most beautiful house you like and move in." So we did, found the biggest house and moved in over there.

NL: It was empty.

LM: It was empty. We found a turkey over there in the yard, all by itself.

We found in the basement macaroni, we found a big [asks in Polish to others] spirits.

Mrs. M: A jug. A jug.

LM: A jug. A big one. With the…

NL: Wine or liquor?

LM: 100% strong vodka.

NL: Oh, vodka.

LM: But the glass, but the glass was with…

MM: Straw around it.

LM: Straw, yeah, yeah.

NL: Oh, covered with straw.

LM: We found that, yeah and then we found dry prunes. We make a dinner.

NL: Oh my. The best for five years.

LM: But I was sick for 10 days after that.

NL: You ate too much.

LM: Sure, and then we-- while we were there, the owners from that house came back and one of our friends, a matter of fact, a young boy, he got typhoid fever then. And we went out and called a medic, an American medic in the US. It so happened he was a German, he left Germany in 1938 and he studied medicine in the United States.

NL: Anti-Nazi?

LM: A Jewish guy! A Jewish boy! He was a medic, see. He came in and first time he gave us chewing gum we didn't know what to do with it, we swallowed it.

NL: You didn't have any in Poland?

LM: No, no and he started to talk to us and to advise us what to do, what to eat, what not to eat and then the owners from the building came home. There were two sisters, a father, an old father, and a mother. So the German had no idea that a Jew would be in any army.

NL: Of course, the propaganda was so…

LM: So she says in our presence in German. He spoke, naturally he was a German Jew. She tells him, "I'm afraid of the Jews. I don't know they're going to do to me at night." This was the first night when they came home. "Would you stay with me? Would you sleep with me?" The man, he was a man maybe 22 years old, he pulled out a gun, that big, from his side, and he gave her in German. I don't want to repeat what he said.

NL: I can imagine. I can imagine.

LM: And she--"*Ich bin Jude, ich bin a deutche Jude*, you going to tell me?" he said.

NL: What a scene!

LM: And then little by little…

NL: You got stronger.

LM: Yeah, I got stronger.

NL: Did you go to a DP camp?

LM: Yeah, and then after that they pulled, they took everybody from the private houses from Austria back to Germany and they put us in a military *Kaserne* [barracks].

NL: What was it called?

LM: In Mittenwald.

NL: Mittenwald.

LM: Yeah. The *Geburgsjaeger Kaserne*. *Geburgsjaeger Kaserne*.

NL: And how long did you stay there?

LM: I stayed there for about six or seven weeks. All of a sudden…

NL: Did you have any word about Max?

LM: Nothing, nothing. All of a sudden a guy who spoke German and English, one of the survivors, comes into the barracks and on the loudspeaker, Leo, at that time it was Lazer Mantelmacher. I thought maybe I killed somebody, "You are wanted in the office." So one of my sisters, she traveled from Munich, she found out by accident, I found out later, that one man who was with us in that march, he left a brother in the hospital in Dachau. So he came back, he came back to look for his brother. So my sisters always asked people what's what, so he told them that the transport. No, my sisters met a Polish guy, but he was near. He said that all the Jews they took out that day, they were shot and they brought them back to cremate to Dachau. It was not true, they brought another transport back and she found out--they found out from him that all the people from Radom, from Radom camp, they were on that transport and they survived. So she told them how I looked, I had no teeth, the front teeth were out and I was skinny and tall and I was a tailor. Over there they called me a cap maker. Oh, that's a *hittel macher* [hat maker].

NL: A *hittel macher*.

LM: Yeah, so they find out that I'm alive.

NL: What a reunion.

LM: And she came to Garmisch, and from Garmisch the German, the English, American Commandant from the camp from Garmisch called up the Commandant in Mittenwald, that's why I was called to the office, and he said to me in German, "Don't get shocked, sit down. I have a call for from you from your sister." And that all that I needed, and the next day, the next day, they put me on a jeep, it was about 30 kilometers from Mittenwald to Garmisch, and I came into Garmisch I found my sister and she tells me quietly, "Shh, don't say anything, but everybody, everybody survived."

NL: Oh my, oh my. [to Max] She had heard from you already?

LM: She knew, they knew, I was the last one.

NL: And when did you come to America?

LM: In 1949.

NL: Same time. 1949. Well, thank you so very much for your experiences for you…

LM: I still want something…

NL: May I turn this off?

LM: Yes.