

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ABRAM SHNAPER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer:	Edith Millman
Dates:	November 21, 1994
	December 7, 1994
	December 26, 1994

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Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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AS - Abram Shnaper [interviewee]

EM - Edith Millman [interviewer]

Dates: November 21, 1994

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Tape one, side one:

EM: ...first, 1994. This is Edith Millman interviewing Mr. Abram Shnaper. Mr. Shnaper, can you tell me when and where you were born?

AS: I was born in Vilna, 1918.

EM: Could you tell me something about your family, about your father and about your mother and any brothers or sisters?

AS: Yes. My-- when I was three months old my father was, died, in a German labor camp.

EM: That was in-- during the First World War?

AS: The First World War.

EM: In 1918.

AS: That's correct. And I never have a chance to know my father positively. And for this reason I have no brothers and sisters. My mother never remarried, maybe for a reason not to have a stepfather. And she was, all the years she was by herself.

EM: Did you know your grandparents?

AS: No, my grandparents died before I was born.

EM: Could you tell me how your mother supported herself?

AS: My mother was a dressmaker and when my father died-- my mother have a sister, and she was living with the sister's family right from the beginning. And I was part from the family.

EM: Could you tell me if this was a religious family or not, if your mother was religious?

AS: I can say a traditional. You know, like they used to [unclear] in the tradition, especially in Vilna, holidays, synagogue. We were not too modern.

EM: Not, modern, not too religious.

AS: No, I mean traditional.

EM: How about Zionist affiliation? Were you active in any Zionist organizations?

AS: Also for instance I have a Jewish education in semi religion, in, I was, I know everything, I mean not everything, Hebrew, Bible, all the religious books, Talmud, Talmudic history.

EM: Where did...

AS: And the Zionist, I ...

EM: Coming back to the religious education.

AS: Yeah, yeah.

EM: You went to public school, right?

AS: Yes.

EM: That was a Polish public school?

AS: No.

EM: Or was it a Jewish school?

AS: In Vilna was not mixed. The school system was a Jewish separate and the gentile, the *Polaks*, Polish schools were separate, were not mixed. As I was in a Jewish school, I was in a Hebrew school. There is a, was systems in Poland from the Hebrew school what the name was *Tarbut*¹.

EM: So you attended to a *Tarbut* school.

AS: School, yeah.

EM: Now, let's come back to the Zionist affiliation.

AS: Yes. When I was ten years I joined in a scout...

EM: In what?

AS: Scout, the scouts.

EM: Oh, yeah, the scout organization.

AS: The scout organization. I don't know of the difference, if this was a Zionist, youth Zionist group, with the name *Hashomer Hatzair*. And then this was mine affiliate with Zionist movement. And I was all my life, my growing up life till in, till the war, I was active in the movement. I was later in charge for camps, for summer camps for young people. I was managing. And in 1938 I was sent, well this was the organization, have a policy when you go over to, this what you preach. But Israel, at kibbutz you have to do it practically. It was in 1938 I was about 500 kilometer from Vilna. I was in a *Hakhsharah*² kibbutz, preparing to live in a collective, preparing to work while the most, the most members was from middle class high schools, some dropped college. And this is the first time when they work with the hand to make a living. It was not so easy. Economically it was very bad, was very hard to support. And this is until the war break in 1939 it was in the same date when the war started in September the 1st. We was running from this kibbutz. Well this was on the border between Poland and Germany.

EM: Where was the...

AS: Czestochowa.

EM: It was in Czestochowa.

AS: Czestochowa, right.

¹*Tarbut* was a Zionist network of secular, Hebrew language schools founded in 1922.

²*Hakhsharah* - preparation (Hebrew), preparation/agricultural training in preparation to immigrate to Palestine, article "Resistance in the Smaller Ghettos of Eastern Europe: Glossary," accessed June 11, 2011 www.ushmm.org.

EM: Okay.

AS: And when we run, we used to not walk, run, but they was behind us. The bombs, machine, with machine...

EM: Artillery?

AS: Things what they had, until we was running to the Russian border. And then they come and we was, no have where to run. And the, till the German and the Russian divided Poland. And we was on the Russian part. After this I was trying to go back to Vilna, was it maybe six, 700 kilometer with no transportation. And I was manage. I was going with transport from the army. And I sneak in and they let me stay. And I come, after a month I come in Vilna. My mother was [unclear].

EM: Now...

AS: [unclear]

EM: Tell me, you say you snuck in into the army. So you were never called up to the army?

AS: No.

EM: No.

AS: No, no. Just to Vilna, you know, to they come from Russia.

EM: So...

AS: I never change. It was too [unclear].

EM: It was the Polish Army that was retreating that was going, running away from the Germans? That's the one...

AS: The Polish Army was already defeated. But the German started in the 1st of September and this was the 17th. When they divided Poland between them, there was no Polish Army. It was already prisoners.

EM: So there were just groups? Because you said that you...

AS: This was the Russian...

EM: Russian Army.

AS: Yeah.

EM: That, so you were already on the Russian side of, on...

AS: It was the Russian side. That what I was waiting, they was coming, I don't know. They come on the 17th and this was not the German and not, it is the Russian Army. And we was waiting what's gonna happen. Is no where to run.

EM: Where were, do you remember where you were, what was the town or...

AS: Yeah, it was...

EM: Was it on the Bug River?

AS: Kovel, Kovel, in Volhynia, Kovel.

EM: Uh huh, in Volhynia. Now, you came back to Vilna.

AS: Mmm hmm [affirmative].

EM: Your mother was all right?

AS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

EM: Your family was still all right you said.

AS: Yeah, yes. A month, just a month.

EM: Tell me now a little bit about your life in Vilna under the Russians.

AS: In the beginning, Vilna was a different place in other places from occupied from the Russian Army. Why? The Lithuanian have a fight with the Russ-, with the Polish for years. But they think that Vilna belong to them. And the Russian give independence to Lithuania. And they make Vilna for the capital from Lithuania. As, then we have all the Zionist movements was running to Vilna, from all the places. Why? Well from Vilna you have a chance to emigrate. You can, certificates [unclear]. You can go even to, through Russia you can go to China or Japan. And you know about if they come to United States from these. And this was in this condition was a little better to live in Vilna. Why? By the Lithuanian have a lot of food. And the population, especially the Jewish people, they had these thing but they have to pay a price. In my life I read about pogroms in books, occasionally something. In Vilna I saw with my eyes. When the Lithuania Army come in Vilna, it was the first pogrom what I saw with my eyes.

EM: And that was by the Lithuanians.

AS: Lithuanian. The Russian was staying not in town. They let them do what they want. And this is was the experience with them. And but this was one episode, that episode.

EM: Tell me, did you experience antisemitism before the war, by the Poles or by the Lithuanians?

AS: Lithuanian I have no, before the war I have nothing with Lithuania. There was a Lithuanian community, but that was a, it wasn't [unclear], it was like Jewish for boys to sing I think. And so I never come in touch with them.

EM: So the Poles were...

AS: And the Polish are born antisemitism in a sense, even when, even, I believe even now, when Jews are not there, there is still antisemitism there. Well this is a church, a big part from this. And the Polish was a Catholic state. And then was the Catholic teaching was hating the Jew and they killed the God, their God. And they may have it, yeah, sure may have it.

EM: Tell me were there...

AS: We have it, they beat up and the killing and everything, yeah, positively, during the years, you know.

EM: Did you have in, you belonged to *Hashomer Hatzair*. Did you have fights with the Poles? With Polish young people with, the *Endeks*³?

AS: Not, only, not I got, not related to the *Shomer Hatzair*.

EM: But...

AS: Positive. I was beaten up. I was two weeks in home, in bed, and so one

³Antisemitic, right wing organization.

time they beat me up, the students did.

EM: That was...

AS: The...

EM: *Endeks*...

AS: *Endeks* students.

EM: That was...

AS: [unclear]

EM: ...before the war?

AS: Yeah, it was nothing to do with the movement. I mean everybody can be a anybody can do what he does. But they started in 1938 they start at the university, they started to make segregation, if you know.

EM: Yeah, I know.

AS: The Jewish have to sit down on the left side, on the left benches.

EM: Tell me, now how did you earn a living during the Russian occupation? I mean...

AS: In, during, it was, I started, in, after when I finished school I was starting, well I have to support myself. My mother can't support me. And this was not an easy job to support myself, especially when my mind was it not to stay, to emigrate. And so I have to look for a trade what is good for me. My mother wanted to make me for a tailor. She say, "Look, I have somebody what they make you *Shomer* and a *Chalutz*." Tailor, like a watchmaker. Doesn't matter with me 'cause I know I don't want a other a good trade you have to pay money. Not just to learn for three years, not to receive money. You have to pay a sum of money. And this was a problem. And so I was trying this and trying this. I was a short time as a serviceman.

EM: A what? A...

AS: A serviceman in a store. This not mine, again was not mine, was not...

EM: Not for you.

AS: Not for me. Is, so then they start for a job start learning, it was a bookbinder place, a small bookbinder place. It was at, in, where I live in the same yard, when I start looking. And so then I start learning a little bit bookbind. Yeah, they pay me, it was six days work. They pay me a *zloty* a week.

EM: Huh!

AS: You can't, a *zloty* a week you can't do nothing. It cost 40, 40 *groszy*⁴ cost to go in the movies. So if you go in with a girl you would, you can't afford it to buy her water even! Is a, but this was temporary, like I feel like I say. But you had to tell the [unclear] was, I was already [unclear]. And, yeah it, now well you will ask me something [tape off then on].

EM: Can you tell me something about other youth organizations in Vilna,

⁴There are 100 *groszy* to a *zloty*.

shortly before the war, and during the war. You belonged to *Hashomer Hatzair*. How about Bund or *Betar* or any of the other ones?

AS: Yeah, well in Vilna was like a miniature, the Jewish youth was divided in different organizations. There was Jewish youth what was not in a, affiliated or nothing while other was, the most was the Zionist youths from all different, four, five Jewish organizations, youth organizations, Zionist organizations. The religion youth of, also...

EM: The Revisionists?

AS: The religion...

EM: Oh, religious.

AS: Religious, they have also a group in Vilna. The Communist youth-- but that was illegal-- was very active. The reason is why the condition for the youth in Poland...

EM: For the Jews...

AS: For the Jewish youth and the Jewish Bundists was very bad. They are not allowed to go in different streets, not in factories big one, not in industry. And they were never, was *schicker* [drunk] and they fight with this *zyd* [Jew] they're gonna be even for everything. The Bund was in a different thing. They was not Communist. It was Socialist. They believe they can live with the Polish worker, especially the Polish Socialist Party, PPS. They can live together and they can have economic Jewish life in Poland. Zionist, they feel is not the right...

EM: Answer.

AS: ...solution. And they was really fighting with the Zionist movement, in articles, in papers, in speeches. Not physically, only one incident was it a physical against us. Otherwise no physically incident between them. Incidentally, and I work with them in trade; I was involved with a Bundish family. Mother and father and probably children was active in the Bundish movement. And I can see them closer. I can say they pay me less maybe the other. This is ironical. But this is not a, I don't want to put the Bund responsible for this. And even have experience, when you come of *Hakhsharah*, in any place in Poland, it was maybe 50, 60, 70 *kibbutzim* in, met from Poland, from different organizations and from *Hashomer Hatzair*. They was calling the Polish worker against us. They was calling us...

EM: The Bund was ca-...

AS: The Bund, calling us *Shtaygbecker* [strike breakers]. And we work for a lower loan.

EM: For a low [unclear].

AS: [unclear] less money but is not true. They will never come, we was doing some work but we never come in the factory [unclear]. And this was ironic for the Bund would never have a politically picture for the future. From one way, they was talking about Jewish worker. The Jewish permit was business people, small business people, some people professionals. If a Jewish youth want to go work for a [unclear], that why

they was fighting with us. Oh this is ironically for the Bund in all the years what we have experience with them. With the one group what we have, the *Chalutz* movement, what is not only *Hashomer Hatzair*, is the question with *Betar*. With them they have a argument, steady arguments, and sometimes physically, physically, very physically, with stones, with rocks, with everything, with fight.

EM: The *Betar* is the right-wing organization, right.

AS: Yeah [mumbling] the *Betar*, the youth...

EM: Youth...

AS: Is *Betar*. And they have a modern solution about the future from the Jewish state, nobody dreamed of a state, from the...

EM: The question...

AS: The Jewish question in Palestine. They did believe they have to start working and make the map a fact, to come and settle in Israel, a *kibbutz* on this border and a *kibbutz* on the other border. And when the country, when the, going back to the, to work, going back to farming, they believe in a solution with...

EM: Fighting.

AS: ...fighting. And we were sure this was not the right solution. The map was done by the *kibbutzim*.

EM: The what?

AS: The map from Israel.

EM: Oh yeah.

AS: The future Israel, the future state, was thanks to the...

EM: *Kibbutzim*.

AS: The *kibbutzim*. The independence was start in Israel is this [unclear], this have a bigger part *kibbutzim* in the north and *kibbutzim* in the south. So this is a, any place, even in Negev. So this was the argument between the Zionist movement and...

EM: Was the *Betar* well represented? Were there many people in the...

AS: Yeah, they have...

EM: ...in *Betar*?

AS: They have, yeah. They have also another element, a more richer element. They have it also in Vilna and I believe this was in Poland too. This was Hebrew *gymnasiums*, Yiddish *gymnasium*, this is the high school, yeah. Only this was Polish Yiddish, Polish, oh but only for Jewish, what this only was, 80% was teaching Polish, not Yiddish. Some a little Hebrew. And the most element come to in this, in *Betar*.

EM: And so they were the up-...

AS: They have another element too. In, all right, a difference you can say only this. But this was eliminated in Poland, not Vilna.

EM: So they were more assimilated Jews?

AS: Not assimilated. This what come they are not assimilated. They are more, you can say they are more, the more, the establishment, they are more the-- let's say you

have a element what they was organized from older, not young, not, let's say from 18, till 18, 20, 25, 30. They have people what are really with knives. And they bring them in and they want to put them in deals and they feel like [unclear]. They, the Polish Army teach them how to use guns. They was marching like bomber with guns in the street. In one way I have to give them credit. When, later when I was talking with, by the *Untergrund*...

EM: Underground.

AS: Underground, we have a lot of problem, when nobody from us know how to hold a gun. [unclear] we pay a price for this. [tape off then on]

EM: Were the Zionist organizations still active after the Russians marched in?

AS: The, yeah, you have to understand, to belong to a Zionist organization, when the Russian Army in Vilna, or in any place, is, it's...

EM: Was dangerous?

AS: Dangerous. They arrest you and send you any place.

EM: How about the Communist Party? I mean the Bunds or the Jewish Communists?

AS: The Bund, yeah, the Bund, they treated Bunds very badly. They, why? Well they figure they're-- we was talking before on television, well they figure they're not-- they are against them.

EM: The Communists.

AS: Yeah, against them. And they take the Russian during the years and they arrest the leadership, they arrest two very, very important persons from the Bundish movement in Poland. They arrest them and they kill them. [unclear]. And they, was a lot of-- one of the...

EM: They were what?

AS: They was emigrate, when they have a chance, from Vilna, to go when Lithuania was independent. And the rest was-- that was not-- in the first couple months they was not arrested, later. The dangers of war maybe, I don't know, if they start arresting a lot of people. And they start arresting Zionists. And they start arresting the Bundim. And legally was not the Zionist movement if you have to work you have to work illegal. They give you example...

EM: Yes? [tape off then on]

AS: Jew [tape off then on] [unclear] I was talking about Czestochowa in *kibbutz*. Here when we coming in Vilna after we was running...

EM: After what?

AS: After the month we was running from Czestochowa, and we come to Vilna they're all the Zionist youth movements, the most was running to Vilna, he make a picture from people what he can reach, what belong to the *kibbutz*. And he put, some have names, and we make postal cards and make names. And one from the pictures fall in the hand from the NKVD. And they arrest one from us. And they ask questions. And so you have to understand me. It was, this was, it was the first couple nights I was not sleep-

ing at home. And you know you never know what can expect you. And then I have time where there was, when we start running away. We didn't have time to look on this picture or from the pictures and when this is a fact, yeah. Was the Zionist movement in their time is, was not legal. This was in Vilna at the time.

EM: Yeah. But did you still continue meeting...

AS: Illegal.

EM: ... illegally, you...

AS: Illegal, yeah.

EM: Were you at that time still thinking of going to Palestine, illegally I mean? Were people trying to get out?

AS: This was otherwise if not believing, if not believing in Zionist, the one have to work illegally, is the, the thing is what keep us, is keep us...

EM: Going?

AS: Going.

Tape one, side two:

EM: Abram Shnaper. It's tape one, side two. We are continuing. Now Mr. Shnaper, could you tell me what happened when the Germans marched into Vilna?

AS: The, let me just to give you in mine personally. I was very calm, nobody expect them. The, when they started Sunday, the Sunday, summer Sunday, six o'clock, the people was going picnics and everything ready to go, then we heard on the radio as the German was in...

EM: Breaking...

AS: Breaking the [unclear], I don't know what they're breaking. The piece of paper what they sign when they start marching in the Russian borders. And it was no time to run away. And the first thing what came, the communication was only one night. Sunday night. Monday morning if you can catch a train, maybe, maybe you can go. Otherwise you have no chance. The, we have a big airpor-, not airport, a military airfield, yeah?

EM: Yes.

AS: What they have a lot of modern airplanes. Not even one airplane have a chance to be in action. They destroying Monday on the fields. This whole thing is the Russian was escaping. Not organized escaping with the families with their families already. Only they have, they use the transportation. As, I give you example. I, when I start walking, I walk with a cousin, I walk maybe about 20 kilometers. And a descent [phonetic] was in front of me.

EM: The what was in front of you?

AS: A descent [phonetic] from German, from the German Army already. They skipped, you know, and they was, you know, they know how they was doing. Is then they figure we better go home. Run back. At least we will be with the German in the same city. Then we have more flexibility. And this way I come back is the situation was the Jewish people what had no chance to run away was in the middle. In the first couple months, in the first probably say five weeks they was not doing harm. They give you orders not to walk on the pavement. Walk in the middle of the street. They limit streets.

EM: They what?

AS: Limit.

EM: Limit the amount...

AS: Limit in the streets. And transportation, not [unclear] walking and some thing. They also when they start giving bread, with lines, is the Jewish, the Polish was chasing out the Jewish from the line. And we have to stay on the end. Only the end when we come was no bread. It was a difficulty, this was the difficulty right from the beginning. And a couple days and a couple weeks was the yellow star. And they start...

EM: The yellow star was put on the shoulder? On the...

AS: On the shoulder, and on the front.

EM: Mmm hmm [affirmative]. Only the...

AS: On the chest.

EM: In the front, on the front.

AS: In the chest, not on the arm, maybe no. And there is the-- and they start taking people to work. No ghetto. People to work.

EM: How did they organize it? Was there a *Judenrat*?

AS: There was not a *Judenrat*. It was the Jewish *kehillah*. It...

EM: The *kehillah*.

AS: Before the, yeah *kehillah*. Before the war. And they, they have if you, you have to come to them and they send you what the German want kind of labor work. Some work for the, what was a, walking. And sometime they beat you up, especially when it's come the Hitler Youth. And they come in a place where we're working. This was a, they did to you anything what they wanted. And, but this was also...

EM: Would they go for the day or were there little camps established?

AS: No, only...

EM: Were they...

AS: ...for the day.

EM: ...for the day?

AS: For the day. And there...

EM: Did the *kehillah* pay you for working?

AS: No.

EM: No?

AS: No pay. No pay.

EM: No...

AS: No, nothing, no pay. The first thing you are paid just to work. And all, you say what they wanted to, the pay was that they give you identification you was working. You understand?

EM: Right.

AS: But if you work a day, [unclear], like I, after six weeks I was not going to work. I was not trusting them. And I have a reason. And later some people never come home. Is, I give you example. I was hiding in the house. And Europe, you know, is the houses with the apartments is like a [unclear], you know, with a door. In the night, ten o'clock, usually you have to close the door with a janitor and he have to let you in.

EM: Yeah.

AS: Is, I live behind this, not in the center city. And I was also close on the other end from the house, from the yard, was a lake. Is, any time when is ring the bell in night, I was running to the window, right to the lake. And I was hiding. This way I was six weeks, it was I and other people not going to work.

EM: Were you living with your mother and your family...

AS: With, yeah, all, we had the same thing, yeah.

EM: ...all together.

AS: Same thing. And one night same thing happened. And they ring the bell. And I was I and, who was there, I forgot, a cousin with his father, with other, and a few neighbors around the same. And they was waiting for us by the...

EM: In the front.

AS: In the front from them. And why? A Polish neighbor was in the same with us. [unclear] he called in Lithuanian *choppers* [Yiddish: somebody who grabs, catching a Jew; snatchers] calling, Lithuanian youth.

EM: Yeah, *chopper*.

AS: *Chopper*. They was worse from the German in the beginning. And they, is, I no want to tell you what happened with the *chopper*. Maybe I will tell it. Is, yeah, I can tell you right now. They-- see what they was doing for the time, they was taking men, special men, they was taking to Ponary⁵, they tell, telling to work, and they take them right to Ponary. Ponary is six kilometers, seven kilometers from center city. Ponary was the place from 80,000 people who...

EM: Killed.

AS: ...was killed there.

EM: Well what year was that? That was in...

AS: This was in 1941.

EM: In 1941.

AS: Before the ghetto, before the ghetto. And they, when they-- I work, when they catch me I work on the railroad. And they supposed to give me a paper I'm working there. Now this guy what was in charge was not giving the papers. He wants to sell to people what was not even working. Anyhow, then they catch me with my family. They bring it to the jail, the main jail in Vilna. And this was the place where they concentrate and they send after when they have 100, 200 people, they bring, they send them to Ponary.

EM: Did you know what was happening at Ponary there at that time?

AS: They, it was...

EM: Did the people...

AS: ...special. I know what the *Untergrund* know.

EM: The underground knew.

AS: And they tell, and they will tell me while we worked. They, you can see it. There is a proclamation in 1940, and in 1941 there's a proclamation if that, work mean Ponary. And this was that. But the population, not even in the city, not in the ghetto, never believed this. You can say this in public but they can kill you, the Jewish people, that you are panic makers. You're a panic...

⁵Ponary: A forest and resort area located about five miles from Vilna; from July 1941 to about July 1944 about 100,000 men, women and children, most of whom were Jews, were murdered by the Nazis with the aid of special Lithuanian units. (Jewish Virtual Library).

EM: You're a panic maker?
AS: Panic maker, that's all. Is when they catch me and they bring me in the train...
EM: When did they catch you? Well did they catch you from the apartment?
AS: From the yeah, and they bring me right in jail. And when I come in the, in jail was about 30, 40 people. And when I look at the people who they send to work, one is with one leg, one with one eye, one crippled. And I saw right away they're not working, I'm not going to work.
EM: So they, when they caught you they said you, they're catching you to go...
AS: All that was...
EM: ... to work.
AS: ... go to work. Everything is...
EM: All to...
AS: ... to work. And you have to, you have to...
EM: Go to...
AS: You have to remember that this saved my life a couple of times, I remember this. And they, yeah, and there was not too many people.
EM: What do you mean, you said that saved your life a couple of times.
AS: To remember when they tell you they take you for work. Not to the...
EM: Not go to, not to go.
AS: And then later like they will tell you during the time what they talk to you. And in this time my mother's sister was a [unclear] woman. She was going to the guy, "Give me the papers for the family." They give us only two, not three. And this was that, the son, the father, and I was and I tell the father, "You go on with your son." You do for me [unclear], in jail.
EM: Fl-, what in?
AS: So you can go on with two. And they take it, they had two pieces paper. And...
EM: What, these were papers to go to...
AS: To this is paper what keep you a this give you that you're working.
EM: Uh huh, the right to, right.
AS: You have a job for the railroad.
EM: The railroad.
AS: Well you are so, you excused.
EM: Right.
AS: Yeah. And you're excused. And he give only two after, when she start hollering if he is...
EM: So you had no paper.
AS: He have only two. And then we was three people. And I say, "You go with your son. You did for me plenty." He say, "No, you're young. And I don't want it."

And after we will meet you and also the other sister is smart not to bring the paper to jail, for the Lithuanian was taking the paper and cut them in pieces.

EM: Tearing them up.

AS: She pick a German, a *gendarmerie*, really, this is true.

EM: Yeah.

AS: And she tell him, "Look, come with me." And this way we go out from jail.

EM: So you and your cousin...

AS: This-- nobody go out from jail. Nobody go out from jail.

EM: You and your cousin.

AS: We two, only two. And he left me. And in a couple days they take him to Ponary...

EM: That's your uncle?

AS: My uncle. Is-- this was when they catch people. When they start planning the ghetto, they decided where...

EM: Do you...

AS: ... where to make the ghetto.

EM: Do you remember when the first plans were made for the ghetto?

AS: I can tell you the ghetto was at, I be saying in late August, in 1941. Well what they was doing, they take the, in the, this is the ghetto. The old ghetto what I show you on the picture was in the 19-, 15 century, 16th century.

EM: Yeah, okay, that does...

AS: Yeah, this is the...

EM: We're looking at the picture...

AS: Yeah.

EM: ... of the ghetto, of the...

AS: And they put you in this, they're supposed to put you in this area. And over there was 10,000 Jewish people live. And what they was doing, they take in, they was eating, lunch or breakfast. They take the families, fool them all, and they take them right to Ponary.

EM: They...

AS: To make room for 10,000 people. And when I and the other come in the houses we find on the table everything, everything when they start eating. And this what started. They make two ghettos.

EM: Now, they, why didn't they leave the people in that ghetto, because they were not working? The people that lived there in the certain...

AS: No, they work in different places. They didn't care...

EM: So why did they take them out to the Ponary and brought other people in?

AS: They until, the first thing, they no want to bring in 50,000 people in the ghetto. You understand? They, why didn't tell till later who is, was going in the ghetto.

They figure why they have to bring them and take them. They take them right away. They no want, they no have room for, they no wanted to have so many Jews. They have no...

EM: How many Jews were in Vilna?

AS: In, before the war it was about 30,000. Oh but during the, when the Russian come was already, the population was, small towns and from them, was already about 44,000.

EM: About...

AS: 50,000.

EM: ...40, about 40, 50,000.

AS: And they start killing. And when they take the 10,000 people, they make a, like a German soldier was killed from a Jewish window you know, just a lie. And they have the excuse. Later they no have excuse. And they make two ghettos. This was the first ghetto. And they make another ghetto, a bigger one they make. And also in-- the Jewish [unclear] but separated.

EM: How were the ghettos, how did you know what belonged to a ghetto? Was there a wall around the ghetto?

AS: No, was not. It was not a wall. It was not a wall in the beginning, no. Was not a wall. They tell you, they, when they tell you to go to the ghetto, they tell you, go...

EM: Which street.

AS: In, which street. That's all. When they tell this, "Go in this street." So you know, and some people they take right away to the jail. See?

EM: Yeah.

AS: People from other neighborhoods, they tell right go to the jail. In the jail they think they send you to work. So in jail they put them right to Ponary. And started-- see they have another system in the east, from the Poland, where they have in Poland the Russian is occupy they have a different...

EM: System.

AS: Totally destruction right in the beginning. And they put us in the ghettos. In the ghetto they give you a couple minutes, take everything what you can carry. No transportation. In other ghettos they tell you, the Warsaw Ghetto, they, you can take two days I believe you can go with...

EM: You had some time.

AS: Yeah, you have time. Here you have, they give you 15, 20 minutes with how many you can carry only, and you go. We go in the ghetto. And I come in the smaller ghetto, in the ghetto what I was talking, only, and I don't know what they want, for killing, or what they want for survive. And I was working already in this ghetto.

EM: At what?

AS: At work in the airfield, with the airplanes. I was working there.

EM: So you were in a labor battalion that was going out and...

AS: Yeah, yeah, yeah, all the people, but they take everybody have to work.
EM: Tell me, when you went into the ghetto, did the *kehillah* help you get a place to live or...
AS: Nothing.
EM: No.
AS: Nothing, no.
EM: You just had to find...
AS: ...they, the first thing...
EM: ...yourself...
AS: The first thing, you come in the ghetto, they tell you "Get a room."
EM: You what, your own, you...
AS: A little place. And what is in a room with a family from *drei*, three, four people you have 25. Was no room. And some people they select maybe a friend. Some people let's say not in this ghetto, in this big ghetto, they take for labor. The other ghetto, they left. They left the people that lived there. If you have a friend...
EM: That lived there.
AS: You go in this side. [unclear] that you know anyhow. They won't give you an apartment to, for himself. So you better to have people what you know.
EM: Know.
AS: So this was working out some way when we know the people was some strangers, 25 when we came in....
EM: So where, did you go...
AS: I stayed...
EM: With your mother? And...
AS: Yeah, all the f-- yeah, with my mother, with my, with mine...
EM: Cousin?
AS: Two cousins. One die, Potacol, Potik [phonetic], she die not a year ago. A brother with sister. She die and my both mothers-- both my, both sisters, they was in the, they went in the ghetto. And I was working in this ghetto. Every day you have to come back with a guard. You have to go back to the ghetto.
EM: So you had to leave with the, under guard to the airfield.
AS: Yeah, and bring, yeah...
EM: And work there and they brought you back.
AS: Yeah. They was right in the beginning you can bring something, you know, they was not checking.
EM: From the outside.
AS: They was not checking you. There was no, there never was a surrounding the...
EM: Surrounding? No...
AS: This was only a-- but you see the Jewish thing, this was the main entrance

was...

EM: Guarded.

AS: Guarded. And the other if they have a other, they have a key what the Jewish leaders, what the Gestapo have a key, to come in the other place in the ghetto. And all...

EM: What do you mean a key? I mean the...

AS: A key to go in with another door, not with the main entrance to the ghetto.

EM: Well...

AS: They had different entrances.

EM: Yeah, but was it...

AS: And this was closed. This was closed for anybody.

EM: Well were the buildings themselves part of...

AS: They...

EM: The, of the...

AS: No, they, just to, let's say they make on the street the, they block the street. They block the entrance on the street like a...

EM: Yeah.

AS: Something what you...

EM: Okay. With barbed wires or...

AS: No, not with wires.

EM: No? So what door? I mean how can you en...

AS: Let's say a street.

EM: Yeah?

AS: Was it a, they put a barrier, they put a wood, they blocked the street with a wood...

EM: With wood, oh, wood.

AS: [unclear]. And they have a door.

EM: Oh.

AS: They have a door to go in for them, in emergency what they want to come, if they want, whenever they want to do it. They have, they know what they want to do it. Is, let's say windows would come up on the...

EM: Windows?

AS: On the Polish side. They had, you have to close it, you know, to...

EM: Yeah, okay.

AS: You're not allowed to look on it. And so...

EM: Was the...

AS: When I come and I work there, one day, Yom Kippur, Yom Kippur, you can expect, a Jewish holiday, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah.

EM: Yom Kippur.

AS: Yeah, I come back from work. And I no find my mother, with mine aunts.

And...

EM: You didn't find?

AS: No, I didn't find. They take away. Was a action in the morning. They take a couple thousand people from the ghetto. And mine one cousin, one cousin, was going in the other ghetto wanted me to understand it's not gonna happen two ghettos. But the main ghetto was the ghetto there. And he was going to look for a place where to move.

EM: Yeah.

AS: And so [unclear], you know, we can...

EM: Try to move...

AS: We come to work we come to-- oh he was not, he was only mine second cousin. And I come I find empty, no people here and there. And they're not there. And I was going downstairs. I don't know where, I know they're not coming back. It's Yom Kippur. I know. If they start a, [unclear]. And I go downstairs ready for work. And I figure, what I'm going do here? I can't hiding in the bed. I just don't move, they're coming again. Again the Lithuanian, the Lithuanian fascists. And they have me, they had me.

EM: They what?

AS: They had me.

EM: They, the fascists?

AS: Yeah, they got me. What they going do? And I, then they used the trick what they say they send me to work. What they was telling you, they will send you to work, take a towel and soap. Don't take nothing. Towel...

EM: Towel?

AS: Towel and soap.

EM: And soap, yeah.

AS: And that was downstairs with them in the yard, small yard. And I came to him, "Look," I make a honest face. I say, "Look, you take away all my family."

EM: You what?

AS: "All my family you just..."

EM: Took.

AS: "Take them to--what is the big deal? You can take me too. I don't care. Just I want to take a piece of soap and a towel, and give me a chance and I'm coming down from the second floor." I look like I'm honest. He say, "Go." And I say, "All right. In one second."

EM: So what did you do?

AS: So what I was doing, I was going right on in attic. In the cities you have big attics. Not in a like a private, yeah.

EM: Attic, yeah, attic.

AS: Where you hang the laundry. You can...

EM: You hang the...

AS: Is no dryers, you know that. And you can do anything in, and I come in the, on the attic. And is about 100 people maybe.

EM: How much?

AS: About 100 people.

EM: Oh, on the...

AS: [unclear] there was no time.

EM: The people were...

AS: Full, full, really it was full of people. And I figure I'm, this is not the place. And I go on the roof. The roofs was not with tar, it was with shingles.

EM: Shingles.

AS: Shingles, yeah. You know in Europe what they have on the...

EM: Yeah.

AS: And I move up the shingles. And I go and lay down in the gutter. You know, in the gutter.

EM: Yeah, yeah.

AS: And I hide in the gutter and close again the thing and nobody can [unclear]. It was already dark. It was five o'clock and this time of the year, and I heard when they come in the attic and they...

EM: Shoot.

AS: Shoot. People was screaming, everyone. And I laid down till the morning, till it start light and I could see.

EM: So that was on the roof where you...

AS: On the roof, yeah, on the roof in the attic.

EM: Yeah, on the roof yeah.

AS: I was in the attic you can see it.

EM: Yeah.

AS: That is, then they-- she writes in the book she have a story with a picture we are laying in the attic in the story. And then I was, I figure, what I going do now? And we have, we was making ready a place where to hide.

EM: A bunker?

AS: For that time.

EM: A bunker?

AS: Not a bunker, in a cellar. And when these old houses, in the ghettos was it before, who know, was not one cellar, was two, or sometimes three.

EM: Right.

AS: So you know?

EM: But a, yeah...

AS: That's a...

EM: But a...

AS: As I know there is, when I, after when I go out from the roof, in the

ABRAM SHNAPER [1-2-20]

morning I was going, I-- there's nobody there, not too many people. People was hiding, you know. And I was going to this place. They let me in. I know their name and I call the name, they let me in. And I was with them, hiding in their room. And there was about 50, 60 people there. No air to breathe even. And a little baby was there, maybe from a couple months. And she start screaming. And we could hear the boots from the German. Later on the baby is killed. Sure, you know, this is a classic thing, put a pillow on, and it's not that I'm repeating, they're putting a pillow on the baby and we tried to give it candy or something, sugar, you know. Nothing helps the screaming. And we put a pillow, somebody put a pillow on her and the mother find out and she start screaming. Anyhow in this tomb, I heard my name, they call my name, on the street. I was thinking I'm not normal, they, who is calling me? [unclear] You heard of it?

EM: Yeah.

AS: This was my cousin. Now he came over in hiding. So [unclear].

EM: We are interrupting. Mr. Shnaper is overcome by emotion. We're taking a brief rest. [tape off then on]

AS: And I heard the voices calling my name. I was thinking there's something wrong with me. Anyhow, my cousin know the place where I'm supposed to hide if something happen. When he come, he know he can't do by himself. He find a German on the street. Again, he find a German on the street and he tells him, "Look, I have a group of people that they are mechanics, they are this, and you can use them." And the, he said, "Look, I am not in charge." He said, "Maybe you can't help." He say, "Look, you know what?" He risked, he really risked his life. For he had no paper, he had nothing. [unclear]. He come with him and when he call my name I say to the people, "It's my cousin. If he come, he'll take all of the 60 people out from there."

EM: Out from that, from the...

AS: From this ghetto, and bring them to the other ghetto. When they catch, when they stop and catch him, [unclear].

EM: But they didn't catch him.

AS: Didn't catch. He come, he say, "This is my work, my," the German say, "my workers."

EM: That was the German who did this?

AS: The German. He did it by himself that he ask him a favor.

EM: Did you have to...

AS: When we stop...

EM: ... pay the German? No?

AS: No, he had nothing to pay him, no money. He gived it, he took...

EM: He went to the German...

AS: Luck like you find, I have, this is the second German; there are four Germans what saved my life. And what he was doing, he start hollering, when he bring us to the ghetto, from the ghetto, from the...

EM: The small ghetto.

AS: From the small ghetto, he start hollering at us, “*Verfluchte Juden*, [damn Jews]” you know, “*Verfluchte Juden, Scheisse Juden* [shitty Jews].” This was, when we came out again and we scream, you know, before [unclear].

EM: So everybody walked in.

AS: They walked in there.

EM: Ran away.

AS: This is where I finish with him, in this ghetto. Then I come in the second ghetto. Okay now [unclear]. Do you want to go into the ghetto or what do you want?

EM: You went to the other...

AS: Or do you want to...

EM: Yeah, well now...

AS: What do you want?

EM: ... now, tell me about life in-

Tape two, side one:

EM: ...[tape] two, side one, interview with Mr. Abram Shnaper, Edith Millman interviewing. Mr. Shnaper, tell me about your life in the second, in the bigger ghetto.

AS: Yeah, I was working in a different place and I have, I find also the place where was, the place where I have to sleep or something we was four people. We find somebody what we know. My cousin was, arranged to go there then we have where to sleep. We sleep all four on the floor what it, again was 20, 25 people. And that was at least a family what we know. Later come another family what we had good relations with after the war with them. And I start working on the railroad. And not exactly on the railroad, just to, in connection where the-- this was what the hotel for the German when they was coming, when they was on the Russian front, when they lost a lot of people and they had to come, they are called, and they have to regroup. They come in this place. And we...

EM: Tell me, how did you get that job? Did you get it through the *Kehillah* or...

AS: Through the, this was...

EM: Did you have to go...

AS: Yeah, this was...

EM: ... register for...

AS: This was already the *Judenrat* was working, and the *Judenrat* have a labor department. And they send you to work. I was lucky that this was a good place. We can work indoors. We didn't have to work outside. You can have, from time to time you have a chance to have some piece of bread from the soldiers. And this is survival. Because we was inside and we're working 30 people. And you have more freedom there.

EM: Tell me, when, first of all, when was it, what year was it?

AS: This was, the ghetto was in '41.

EM: Yeah, and you went there in '41.

AS: [unclear] yeah.

EM: Now, when you say you were working, when you came back from work, was there a curfew in the evening in the ghetto? Could you get out in the street in the evening?

AS: No they give us special time, till ten o'clock or something. You can't go till six o'clock in the morning.

EM: And then...

AS: Then until ten o'clock you can go. And we go to work early you can-- you're not allowed to go on the street or they can arrest you.

EM: Did you get food rations?

AS: Yes.

EM: Some special food stamps? Food rations?

AS: Yeah the ration [unclear] with the *Judenrat*. And, yeah, they, for the first

thing they, you're talking about food? We have a, well the ration was a very poor, you can imagine, not enough what to survive on. And if you, if you have nothing else, you can't survive. You have to have some substitute from somewhere, from at work where you work, and...

EM: So there was a black market in...

AS: There was a black market where you can buy, if you have money, if you have money, you can buy. But people there they was working, stealing, risk their life to bring food. It was difficult in the ghetto, difficult, very difficult. The-- at the door, at the gate of the ghetto was the Lithuanian police, Jewish police, and from time to time was the Gestapo. And if the Gestapo will find something, he have a gun, he can shoot you right on the spot. And it was a famous singer, I saw this in ghetto, and she was carrying these two green peas or something in a bag. And he shoot her right on the spot. Otherwise he give you 25.

EM: Lashes?

AS: Lashes. This was the Jewish police or the Lithuanian. And what happened? In, when the people are going from work, and they, if they have something they was looking if they have potatoes or they have food. [phone; tape off then on]

EM: So...

AS: Let's say people was carrying something what they steal, they change it with clothes or something and they bring some with in ghetto. And let's say the Gestapo was at the gate. Then the columns to go to work was not provided by German. You can go, the group can go in the middle of the street by himself.

EM: Okay.

AS: With a *Kapo*, the Jewish *Kapo*, and not even, and let's say there is a signal in the one from the houses. If he say the window is open, I mean somebody's at the door, somebody's at the gate, a Gestapo man. He can't go in. As he was walking sometime, dead tired from all day work, we was walking for an hour, in fact, you can't imagine where you will steal potatoes. I was in charge also for a pig, to feed the pigs. When I steal the potatoes and I...

EM: To feed the pigs?

AS: Yeah.

EM: The pigs that were in the ghetto?

AS: No, at work.

EM: No, oh at work.

AS: Work, yeah, at work.

EM: Oh, at work, okay, okay.

AS: Yeah and I, when the German was telling me, "Look, the pig is not gaining weight. What happened to him?" They, I'm going to tell him I steal the potatoes over there. And when I put the potatoes in the, you know, in the coat. And I, what am I gonna do with potatoes when we have no hot water to cook something? And so I take a

wood, I put a wood in my stomach. And I put when I came from work, with the potatoes, with the wood.

EM: Under the coat, right?

AS: Under the coat, under the-- everything. And like this, to give you example, with this you have to walk until your square. You can't go in with the others. These columns of columns was walking and give signal, "Don't go. Don't go." They told me go right...

EM: Around, in, before...

AS: Around on different streets. This was, you know, we have to use, this is the question from why otherwise people can starve from hunger with, if you're not-- not everyone was working outside. There was a industry in the ghetto to make a li-, better, to secure the security for the ghetto to exist is the leadership from the *Judenrat* was trying to put industry in the ghetto. If these people work in the ghetto, and they have a job, like shoemakers or German, for the German Army uniforms or other things you know, is these people were stealing. They were stealing material, and they were selling it. And they have again something to eat. The shoemaker was stealing, he have something to eat. He's stealing yarn.

EM: Yarn?

AS: Yarn, yeah.

EM: Then was selling it outside and got something to eat.

AS: Yeah, that's it. So you go and you exchange it. You see this was going, the business was going for them, the people what had nothing is they just starved.

EM: Well, did they have food kitchens?

AS: Yeah, they have...

EM: Soup, I mean soup kitchens?

AS: They have soup kitchen, not too many, oh but they have. They have also for the *Judenrat* was a, is a how to make tea. They make tea, barrels, hot water. Not tea, hot water. And you can take a hot water in a two places in ghetto to take it to home and you do what you want with it, drink tea or [unclear] tea, from something. Also they had kitchens, not too many, not too many. But they had this...

EM: They had...

AS: [unclear] just to survive, yeah I was using from time to time too, for the people, but if time to, people who wasn't so lucky.

EM: Was there, were these soup kitchens organized by the *Judenrat* or the...

AS: No, the *Judenrat*.

EM: By the *Judenrat*.

AS: The *Judenrat* was the, was, one, the first *Judenrat*, when the German come and they organized before the ghetto, they organized a *Judenrat*. And later they killed them. They take them away and they [unclear] and they kill them. Come in ghetto

they make another *Judenrat*. And they put in charge Gens⁶, Jewish Gens, and I really don't like to talk about him. Is they have different department, labor supply for food or anything, police.

EM: How many people approximately were in the large ghetto?

AS: I would say it was about 25,000.

EM: About 25,000?

AS: In the beginning. Later they start, later they start to...

EM: Were they still taking people out to...

AS: Well in con-...

EM: To Ponary? Or...

AS: Constantly, constantly. They started, they started with older people. They started with difference...

EM: People who didn't work?

AS: With different papers. One is a yellow paper a document for your working. The second is a metal you wear on your...

EM: Chain?

AS: Chain. And they later was a white paper.

EM: Which one was the best?

AS: They every time is a different kind. Let's say if you have a white paper was it good. If they wanted to take 5000 people, they change the color. They make a yellow. Is this and this groups what you got, these what have white, they come and they take you away.

EM: Take...

AS: They take away, sometimes they was doing for three days, to give you example. They take anybody with a yellow paper, papers is another word used with it. They take them out for the ghetto for three days. They work on the work place or they work in the shops where they organize there, they sleep there. When the other people what have the white, they come and they hide, if they're hiding, they're hiding. If they're hiding they open up places, [unclear]. And they take them away there. They're using all the tricks to eliminate the amount of people. And then come when they wanted 2000 people. They come to the ghetto, *Judenrat*, and they need 2000 people. And they give them. The police help them to give them. I remember this, we going to talk later too, is constantly was a selection in the ghetto.

EM: And, tell me something. How about children? Schools? Were they permitted to go to school? Were there Jewish schools for the children? Were there secret schools do you know?

AS: There, was not legal schools, not legal schools. They was orphan houses, orphans.

⁶Jacob Gens, the Jewish police commander, was made *Judenrat* chairman in 1942, replacing Anatol Fried.

EM: Orphanages?

AS: Yes. Yeah, there is a, I believe one or two in the ghetto. This, yes. The schools, was not synagogues and schools for children was illegal in ghetto.

EM: All right, do you know if there were any illegal courses given, any schooling, illegally, by teachers? Because I know in Warsaw for instance...

AS: Yeah...

EM: ... they had a school.

AS: Later when I talk about culture in the ghetto, I will mention to you. If you want it I can start it now. In, let's say also about the youth, about the children, there is a group of children what have no parents, where the parents was taken away from this action and the other action what the German take. They organized them in a transport group. They was making a living from carrying small carriages. What's a better word for that? With no horse, was no transportation.

EM: A rickshaw?

AS: To move...

EM: A rickshaw?

AS: No, not a rickshaw. A little, similar to rickshaw, to not carrying people, no let's say a, people are moving or something was just, they was working and they received money for that. And they survived; they work a half a day and they give them education, illegal education. This was the, for them. The schools like I say, no. Cultural activity it was legal in ghetto. This is the synagogue not, schools not. Cultural, we had choirs and dramatic the...

EM: Dramatic?

AS: Dramatic groups was legal.

EM: The theater?

AS: Yeah, that was the theater.

EM: How about concerts?

AS: Concerts? It was they was closing their eyes. It was not, nothing. And the paradox was, let's say it was in the theater. You have to understand it was not classic theater. And we, they allowed for the establishment, the ghetto establishment want to play *Pak Sich Ayun* [Pack It In], you no have a change in your, you have to go...

EM: [unclear]

AS: To *Pak Sich Ayun*. It was the...

EM: Yeah.

AS: And one way, this another thing. So everything was in the theater. Everything was something...

EM: Hidden?

AS: Hidden.

EM: So, a hidden meaning. It...

AS: See. They're not, make sure you are not, you, you are, *Pak Sich Ayun*,

you're not living here. So and they think this. But the other was translated the other way around. Don't think you are here for life in ghetto. They're going to take you away. So every, you have to hide is, let's say there was a choir in ghetto. I remember in Vilna, a public choir, a Hebrew choir in Vilna, a Yiddish choir, yes. I-- there was a Jewish studio in Hebrew in ghetto.

EM: A Jewish what?

AS: Studio. A dramatic studio.

EM: Dramatic.

AS: [unclear] and they play famous symbolic [unclear] but *Sheynit Masada lo Ti pol*. A second time that Masada will not fall.

EM: Will not fall.

AS: You understand what I mean?

EM: Yeah.

AS: The Germans they don't know because this was, but this was symbolic. What else, concerts, lectures, a, about health.

EM: What?

AS: Health.

EM: Health.

AS: Health lectures, yeah [unclear] sickness, about anything. So I don't know if this is, only Jewish people in those situations can have so cultural activity as this was in the Vilna Ghetto. Let's say all the songs. The classic songs come from Vilna. *Zog nit Keynmol*⁷, *Yugnt Himn* [youth hymn]. Anything was...

EM: What kind...

AS: It, this was a youth group what, a *Yugnt* club was it. But there was steady concerts with songs...

EM: Tell me about the underground activity. By that time there was underground activity.

AS: The underground was it in, the official underground meeting was in 1941, in the end of the month in December, December 10.

EM: Who took part in that meeting?

AS: They-- who take part? All the Zion-- the, it was the youth.

EM: Youth.

AS: All the Zionist youth from all the groups. And the Communists, the Bund. The Bund was in one respect difference from Russia. The Bund in Russia was not joining in the beginning in the underground. Well they no want to be with *Klal Yisroel*. They no want to be with all Jews. They liked better to be, collected with...

EM: So...

AS: PPS, [Polish Socialist Party], with the Polish worker. And this was a big

⁷The complete song title is *Zog nit Keynmol az du geyst dem letstn Veg*. Never Say That You Have Reached the Final Road.

disappointment, not for them but for us too. The Zionist was not disappointing me.

EM: Yeah.

AS: Anybo--, in Vilna was difference. They, it was right in the beginning the Bund was active in the underground. The Communist as a group were active. Their leader, the official leader was a Communist. Why? The Zionist youth movement was in the majority. This is partially a play for practical purposes, that they can reach the partisan movement. They can reach the Communist underground in Vilna. They can use more with the Zionist youth this was active group.

EM: Did the *Betar* [unclear] join?

AS: All the Zionist groups no difference were [unclear] no difference were. Every...

EM: Now...

AS: ...group was joined, and this was called FPO.

EM: F-...

AS: FPO, *Fareynegt Partizaner Organizatsye*. This is United Partisans Organization. But they was playing a big part in it.

EM: So what were they doing? I mean...

AS: Is, the first meeting was in a soup kitchen, under the pretext from the, from soup was the first meeting. Well there is a proclamation from the meeting, this is interesting. They have them in Yiddish and they have them in English. Was it calling about Ponary.

EM: What? Col-...

AS: Calling Ponary by the name.

EM: Calling Ponary.

AS: Well the Jewish population in ghetto, to the last, almost the last minute not believe that Ponary is death. They no believe it. If, later was a incident when two people escaped Ponary. And they come in the ghetto. The police have to hide them. First the police they no want it. And the people they threaten to kill him why they make a panic in ghetto. This Ponary he [it] was, you can't even mention the word even when you wanted to warn somebody. You want to go, you didn't want, you know the underground know these people are going to kill they don't take him not to work. They're afraid to tell. You're a panic *macher* [maker]. That's all. You have to understand, the underground when they started they have no guns. They have nothing. And they can't even start a warning. Start a panic, what? Make a panic in the ghetto? That's what you can do. What they gonna do? Is the main purpose from the underground was it to establish the organization, the technically, to divide it in two battalions.

EM: Battalions.

AS: Battalions?

EM: Battalions.

AS: Battalions, one and two, and divide it the battalion in fifths. You know

only the fifths. You don't know [unclear].

EM: Oh, the five people.

AS: Five people, that's all. And that's who your connection. And you have to deal with them through the, if you learn to hold a gun. Let's say, every night you have a bulletin, a news bulletin what's going on, not in the ghetto. We have a illegal radio. And you have a place where we meet by yard somewhere you know there is some place every time, the five people and they read it and they have to give back [unclear] copies. And then you have to know what's going on you listen to BBC. You know what's going on on the fronts and everything what's going on in Germany. And you part from the, from, where otherwise, from paper you're not allowed to having it. And a radio you didn't have already. And this is the fifths what meeting; also they're meeting for strategy, getting by-laws when we move, what is the purpose when we move, to learn to hold a gun. You have one gun. You have to take it apart and you have to learn at night how you can, how you aim...

EM: All right...

AS: ... if you use a gun in the ghetto. So you, what you have to do, you have to, is to look on, for, what is called *tarcza* [target].

EM: Oh, to look at a where to aim.

AS: Where to aim with the gun, and the aim, exactly to them and the instructor what have to say how good you are. This is the only thing. You can't use the gun. And this what you're doing in the night. You are afraid. Sometimes you're bring 10, 15 feet from people. And you are afraid to do it. You have to do it in the night, in the library. There was a big library in ghetto, a Jewish library with books. So what are you going to do when you have to accommodate, when you're not coming home? You see the structure in ghetto is, if you-- the, at the house, at the apartment have somebody in, responsible for every person. I don't even [unclear]. And if you're not coming to sleep is the responsible person have to tell the police you're not coming to sleep. So what are you going do? You have to be careful. You find a solution. She think I have a girlfriend, my aunt, the person that was in charge, that I have a blonde girlfriend. So she [unclear]. This is the fifth what we was doing, what else with the underground. There is, what is the solution? There was two approach to the problem for the future from the, for the fighting in ghetto. The majority was for, not to go in the forest.

EM: Not to go.

AS: Not to take the, all the youth from the ghetto, even when there is a possibility. And take all the young people from ghetto and leave the ghetto...

EM: Defenseless? Without, no...

AS: Special the Zionist youth what...

EM: Didn't want to go into the...

AS: You know, the *HaShomer Hatzair* wasn't [unclear]. And what is it? The first thing we *schlepped* arms. And later, if we have enough arms, and if is the time come

to start a struggle with the Germans, and you know I mean they're not gonna ninety percent will not survive. At least they gonna resist. They're gonna resist, and who can run away, who the lucky one that can hide somewhere or [unclear]. At least they have to make a possibility to use the underground water system.

EM: Are the...

AS: In case to run away.

EM: The sewer system.

AS: The sewer. Guns, for escaping too. And this was the first, the majority. The others say that the ghetto is too small to have a fight with the Germans. It is suicide, is Masada. Let's go to the forest. But the majority was the majority and...

EM: They wanted to stay.

AS: Some groups was pleading, a few individual into the forest. And there was, half escaped in the night.

EM: That was what year, in 1942?

AS: Yes started '42. And the ghetto was growing smaller and smaller. But like I say, one after the other they find us, they find the excuse. They find the excuse how to also when the ghetto was growing bigger from one people they take...

EM: People from...

AS: ... from all the small towns they bring them. With some they bring them in ghetto, some they located them in town. You understand? They're locating them in town, and some they bring in ghetto from the important young people, they're most young people. And they can't run away. They have to come in ghetto. They know the forest. They know the people what they live with them. Some...

EM: But then the...

AS: ...escaped. But some, more they give them, the police come, the Jewish police come from Vilna. And they tell them they are...

EM: To come to...

AS: To come, they're gonna survive. And later we go in the forest, Gens [unclear]. He was the military man. He is a, he was a milit-- he was supposed to be in the ghetto, Gens. Well he was a high officer with the Lithuanian Army. We have a lot of, lot of things, this, for independence for Lithuania is this was a, he was supposed to be in the ghetto too. His wife was a Lithuanian, and they lived in, they were hiding with the officers. The high officers were hiding him. He come in ghetto and later I'll tell you why he coming in ghetto. Is this what, this was a, the, by the resistance. And they start going in groups. They start going groups in '44, end of '44, start going groups. Twenty people.

EM: To, going where? To the forest?

AS: To the forest, when the forest was with, it's not a question to go to-

Tape two, side two:

EM: ...[tape] two, side two, the interview with Mr. Abram Shnaper. We are continuing on December 7, 1994. Mr. Shnaper, when we talked last, you were telling me about groups going out of the ghetto into and joining the partisans.

AS: Yeah. You see it is not only a question for the Jewish underground or the population what want to go in the forest. The forest have to be ready. The partisans' movement start organizing themselves a little bit in 1942. And the connection with them was taking time until we had the connection with them. Well otherwise you can't go just a group with a few guns and think you're gonna stop something, when you're gonna fight with a lot of enemies. And enemies, there was a few; there was the German. This was the population. And this was the Polish AK, the Polish underground what supposed to fight with the German, they, the first thing they fight, they help to destroy us. And they was doing anything if we come to the forest, we have to be careful with them. They had good arms from the Polish government where they what was hiding. And they was, they use all the arms, the most, against the Jews. Is, and this thing take a little time in, I would say in the three-quarter of the, of 1943, is established the partisan movement. And they start giving the permission to send groups.

EM: What partisan movement was it? Was it mostly Jewish? Was it helped by the Russians?

AS: They, no, no, this was not Jewish. There was not a Jewish movement before the ghetto fighter was coming in the forest. And the, this was only a, people from the Russian Army what was escaped in the forest, prisoners, Russian prisoners what escaped from the prison. They was going to the forest. And the Russian command had contact with them and they sent even the [unclear] troops or [unclear]. They send these instructors from Russia to lead the partisan movement in, all over, all over the border with Poland. Not only in this part from Poland, the other part also. And different parties parachute. They parachute arms to them. They parachute medi-...

EM: Medicine?

AS: Medicine. And they parachute some food that people need...

EM: What were the partisans doing? Were they attacking the Germans?

AS: Yeah. They start making a base to attack the army what was going on the front. They used to, how you say this [unclear]? They was waiting for them, the partisans...

EM: Ambush. Ambush.

AS: They ambushed them. They ambushed them, sure. Also they was, they have to, they prevent the German to come to the farmers and collect the food for them. And this was the partisan movement. Also destroy a bridge, destroyed telephone wires, not to have communication. This was the partisan movement for whom the Jewish, then the Jewish fighters come, this was the job for him too, is, he...

EM: Tell me, now, when you were still in the ghetto, did you know the leaders of these groups that were going into the forest, the leaders of the underground, like, we know about Kovner and some other people. Could you tell me about that?

AS: The first thing the organization, the Jewish partisan group in the ghetto was, was from the, like I say, from the Jewish youth movement.

EM: Right.

AS: Like I say, all the youth movements, Zionist youth, the Bund, Communist, often...

EM: Even *Betar*.

AS: Yeah, yeah, everyone, yeah, everyone. Everyone. And in Vilna, we were lucky what we can right in the beginning, this, to bring everybody under one roof. And the, we know the leaders; not everyone know the members. Why? Members work in the fifths, a group from fifths.

EM: Oh, yeah.

AS: And, from time to time they have more, a few groups together. Then we start practicing on guns, or other thing. Otherwise was it...

EM: So what were you doing, when you were meeting you are mostly practicing to shoot, how to shoot?

AS: Yeah, how to shoot, or regulation from the organization.

EM: The regulations?

AS: Yeah, regulations. They got regulations from them, instruction. There is also like I say the last time news, bulletin every day, for everybody to know what's going on on the front. Is, this was, the group was working fives.

EM: How many people were leaving? How large were the groups that were leaving...

AS: They...

EM: ... into the for-, to the forest?

AS: They, like I say, there was about two, well the, most of the groups there was about 20 people, to, and they also was picking out from people what the high command. The high command was also, let's say...

EM: Do you mean the high command of the partisans?

AS: From ghetto.

EM: From the ghetto.

AS: From the ghetto. The partisan in the forest had nothing to do with the structure from the organization in the ghetto.

EM: Oh, you mean the structure of the underground?

AS: Was no, yeah.

EM: Or the structure like the *Judenrat*?

AS: No, no.

EM: No, no, the structure...

AS: I'm talking about the structure from the Jewish partisan movement in the ghetto.

EM: The partisans.

AS: The *Fareyngte Partizaner Organizatsye*, the United Partisans Organization. They decided to command, who it was the command. This was like I say, the high commander was a Wittenberg [Yitzhak Wittenberg].

EM: Wittenberg.

AS: Wittenberg. He was a Communist before the war. Why he was the leader when the Zionist movement have the ma-, youth have the majority, well he have the connection...

EM: With the Communist Party?

AS: With the Communist from the underground in Vilna with the Communist Party. And they had the connection before us.

EM: The Communist, not Jewish.

AS: No, not Jewish, no.

EM: [unclear], the gentile Communist...

AS: The gentile what in...

EM: ...Party in Vilna, in Vilna.

AS: In Vilna. And they, for this he was the guy what can have the connection. Then was it, like I say from every group was one...

EM: Leader.

AS: ...leader. And let's say [unclear] *HaShomer Hatzair* was Abba Kovner.

EM: Abba Kovner.

AS: Abba Kovner. He was the leader. Then later when, you want me to talk about Wittenberg's, when he, I don't know if I was talking, I was talking about Wittenberg too?

EM: No, not yet.

AS: Oh.

EM: You didn't talk.

AS: Later we going talk with Wittenberg, when is changing the leadership. What happened to Wittenberg later I am going talk. If the group was going, some was going with, like they're going in forest to cut trees. It was a lot of groups for the German...

EM: Labor groups?

AS: Labor groups, sent in, you know.

EM: And what were they...

AS: They're supposed to be, they was wearing ax, that ax, saw, like they're going...

EM: Axes.

AS: Yeah.

EM: Axes and saws.
AS: Yeah, and...
EM: And they, were they pretending that they were...
AS: They pretended. No, no this is a...
EM: A partisan.
AS: Yeah.
EM: And they were pretending...
AS: Yeah.
EM: ...that they were going to...
AS: They're going some, yeah. They have to find the excuse to go in there too.
EM: And then they would join, go into the forest.
AS: Yeah, yeah. They also, this was difficult. And the difficulty is whether 20 people never can arrive. Why? One, they have to go 200 kilometers. And they have to come to the villages, bridges, railroads tracks, with the German patrolling on them, well you know, not to make what we was doing on the railroads. We blew up the railroads, the tracks. Is, you have to come through this. Is not a easy job. And from the 20, if we're lucky was a half arriving. And sometimes the whole group was...
EM: Annihilated.
AS: Annihilated, positively.
EM: Was there always...
AS: For this reason I did want to mention, this is mine. I have no proof.
EM: Was there a, with each group, was there a leader that was going and coming or a guide?
AS: There was, yeah, is come a guide.
EM: There was a guide.
AS: What know the area, that know the [unclear].
EM: And this guide would come back and take another group out?
AS: Or, later when, this was already a few from us, groups in the forest, was going...
EM: Back?
AS: Leaders from the partisan movement, especially girls.
EM: Girls who...
AS: Girls from the movement, from the *HaShomer Hatzair*.
EM: There were girls that were already in the forest...
AS: Already in forest for...
EM: ...and went back to the...
AS: What no, what look like a Gentile...
EM: Yeah?
AS: ...speak perfectly German, or speak good Polish, they come like they have come from farm. Sometime they're carrying eggs or something.

EM: Oh, from a farm, like farm girls.
AS: A farm or something, [unclear] something. And they was pulling, they was doing this.
EM: And so they would go back into the ghetto?
AS: Yeah, from there.
EM: And take a group out...
AS: That's right.
EM: ...and take them through the forest.
AS: Yes, right. Also, when they left the ghetto they left only two person for one time not in a group.
EM: Oh. But you said sometimes they would go and pretend to be labor groups.
AS: Yeah when they left the ghetto, they left only two. And they have a place where they meet in the outskirts...
EM: Outskirts.
AS: Outskirts from the city. And they meet there and they're waiting and when they have the complete, they was going to the forest. And they have to watch what, it's difficult. And they come and they start organize. They...
EM: Tell me something. Were there Jews in the ghetto had the yellow star. Now when they were, for instance, leaving, going as a group, pretending that they're going into the forest, did they still wear their stars...
AS: They have...
EM: ...or did they pretend, did they take it off?
AS: They no, in a special time they still have to wear it. In the limit from the city they have to wear it.
EM: And then they would leave and...
AS: And then they have to...
EM: ...take it off.
AS: They have to do it. Well, you know there is a, they no have to have no papers.
EM: Right.
AS: Not identification from their family.
EM: Tell me, in the meantime, the general population in the ghetto, not the ones...
AS: They don't know nothing.
EM: They didn't know anything?
AS: They don't know about this.
EM: Tell me something about the structure of the *Judenrat*, and the role of the *Judenrat*. They must have known about the partisans and about the underground.
AS: Even Gens, and we're talking about Gens...
EM: Gens was the leader...

AS: He, the leader, the Jewish sheikh from the ghetto. What he...
EM: All right, can you spell the name of Gens?
AS: G-E-N-...
EM: S.
AS: S.
EM: Right. G-E-N-S.
AS: Yeah. And he was representing the Jewish...
EM: Community.
AS: Community within the, let's say if the Gestapo have with him, there is also a person what is in charge with the Jewish police.
EM: And his name was?
AS: His name is Desler.
EM: D-...
AS: D-E-S-L-E-R. [Salek Dessler].
EM: E-R.
AS: I believe, if I'm not mistaken. But basically this is the name. He was a different type. He was, he have, his is to save his own life. He don't care.
EM: And Gens?
AS: Gens have his, has his, he think. He work with the German when the German come and ask him for 2,000 people, he have to send them to work, to Ponary. Well Ponary mean work but Ponary was death.
EM: Yeah.
AS: So, but he know it. He figure he give the 2,000 he'll still have 25,000. We have to work. So with this system he going to the end.
EM: He tried to cooperate?
AS: Yeah, to cooperate, to save how many Jewish lives. But we will never know when the war will be finished.
EM: Right.
AS: So he, to the end he [unclear] and he said "Look, I saved 12,000 Jewish people." Why, he give 40,000 [unclear]. This is a, is a war, in a war is, you know, certain to soldiers...
EM: So what happened?
AS: Is, the ghetto, the *Judenrat*, was the administration for the ghetto. They have to provide security, police. They have to have the, they have to divide it, the food for the ghetto what the German give them. The German have the food cards for every person. And they give, and they have to, they be in charge of this. Health, the health department, the labor department, they sent you, if you need, to send, they had a labor [unclear].
EM: What was the attitude of Gens for instance, or Dessler, towards the Jewish underground, towards the youth movement?

AS: They have to divide. Dessler was not involved in any connection, when the underground know he is a Jewish Gestapo.

EM: Oh, he was a Jewish informer?

AS: For instance all, everything what you want. And Gens was afraid for him too. The same with him but he is all right. He is come from a background, with a Jewish background, from *Betar*, you know, and other things. This...

EM: Well was he originally from Vilna?

AS: Yeah, yeah.

EM: He was from Vilna.

AS: Usually the bad guys coming from different towns. This is...

EM: From different what?

AS: From different towns, not from the same. But he was a Vilna. And Gens was in 1933, in late '93 [he probably means '43] he have connection with the underground, and they meet with him.

EM: Not, not-- in '43.

AS: In '43.

EM: Okay.

AS: They start having connection with him. They start connection with him. Well why, they really know their leaders. Gens know their leaders.

EM: [unclear] okay.

AS: Yeah. He don't know the members.

EM: Yeah. But he knew...

AS: But he knew the leaders. And they have connection with him. And he tell them, "Look," the conversation he had with them the first time, he said, "I am with you."

EM: He said he was with...

AS: "I am a fighter."

EM: Yeah.

AS: "I am a..."

EM: But he just...

AS: "I am a general in the Lith-, I know everything. I know the arms to find. I know how to fight. But wait when I give you the signal. And I'm going to help you, not to destroy you. Oh, but don't destroy the ghetto. I'll give you the signal."

EM: He was afraid that the underground is going to destroy the ghetto.

AS: Yeah, the thing is this, they're going do what they want. This is what they--the ghetto, the underground is not for the police. See, they got two different ways. Is, they tell him right in there, "Mmm nn. No deal. If this, if we feel the right time and if we have to go, we'll go."

EM: Yeah.

AS: And so there is no and this is no respect. But they still have the contact with him. And later is a interesting, how they...

EM: Okay so...

AS: ...sent a...

EM: ...tell me what happened later.

AS: Is, going back [tape off then on] am I going, I, just I want to illustrate to you, about a episode what happened in ghetto and what's changed the...

EM: Attitude?

AS: Attitude, not the attitude, the plans from the underground in ghetto. There was like I say a Communist underground, a gentile Polish underground in Vilna. And they, it looked like the Gestapo was getting an eye on them. They know, they find out where they are and they arrest two leaders from the Communist Party. And look, they ask him, "Who is the connection what you have in the ghetto?" Look, maybe he, you know a, anybody what is in the underground is not talking voluntarily. Maybe they...

EM: They tortured him?

AS: They torture him and they give Wittenberg's name. Now, the Gestapo come to Gens and say, "Look, you know Wittenberg. We want Wittenberg. We know he is in the underground in Vilna. He is a Communist in the ghetto, and we want him. And we'll give you 24 hours. Or him or the ghetto." And then this come to the ghetto and this come to the [unclear].

EM: To the...

AS: From the under-, partisan, the Jewish partisans tried to-- to Abba Kovner.

EM: I mean to the leaders of [unclear].

AS: To the leadership [unclear].

EM: Okay.

AS: Yeah. And they come and say, "You have a choice."

EM: Who came? Gens or there's a...

AS: Gens, Gens, yeah.

EM: Gens came to try...

AS: He had the connection with the...

EM: Yeah, but all Gens...

AS: There's no telephones, you know.

EM: Yeah.

AS: There's no telephones. The connection, and tell him, "Look, this is the story. Ten o'clock tomorrow morning you have to, not dead, alive. The condition is alive. Gens have to surrender..."

EM: Oh, you mean Wittenberg has...

AS: Yeah, Witten-, Gens personally tell the underground leadership that Wittenberg have to surrender, not dead, just alive. Otherwise in the ghetto, the end will be the ghetto. Showing the FPO, the United Partisan Organization, have a difficult choice. Why they know if they give the leader they're destroying the organization. This is a, you know, this is not, and tomorrow you're going to ask another one. Tomorrow we're

going to ask 10, 15 people, and they are destroyed. And decided not this time, no.

EM: They wouldn't give up Wittenberg.

AS: No give, no give. The answer was saying, "No." Is, the underground was *mobilizeit* [phonetic].

EM: Was what?

AS: Was calling a mobilization.

EM: Oh mobilizing.

AS: Yeah. Mobilization, from the underground. And they take in a few places, everybody have to, they know if Lisa *ruft* [Yiddish: called], it was mentioned, I believe, the one from the girls. I don't know what I mention or not.

EM: What?

AS: There is a [unclear] from the young ones, they have the underground in the ghetto, have a lot of girls what look like a, like...

EM: Girls.

AS: Girls. And they was traveling from one city to the other.

EM: Right.

AS: To learn what's going on in Warsaw, and then what's going on in Bialystok, and also they have to know what's going on.

EM: Right.

AS: They have to know if they say to work, is death. Ponary is death. And this what is, bring literature to them.

EM: You what?

AS: Literature. For a, to resistance, to carry literature.

EM: Oh, literature.

AS: Literature. And they was doing a very important job, these girls. One from the girls was caught by the Gestapo. They were border, what is calling Merkin. This is between Vilna and Bialystok.

EM: Merkin?

AS: Merkin. And there's a lot of, we lost a lot of people there. And they, when they...

EM: They caught the...

AS: And they caught there on the...

EM: ...one of those...

AS: But she was fighting. They bring her to the Gestapo in Vilna. She was not giving...

EM: Any information.

AS: No information.

EM: Do you by any chance remember her name?

AS: Lisa Magun.

EM: Lisa?

AS: Yeah, Lisa Magun.

EM: Magun.

AS: -gun. After her death, well there was a people what work in the Gestapo for, not, just for labor. And they know.

EM: Yeah.

AS: And they know what's going on. And they tell us, "Today they find, they take her to Ponary." And they, after her death, if there was a mobilization, this was the, was, when they call you up in the morning, any time to your home, to the five people, they were saying, "Lisa *ruft*." Lisa is, Lisa is calling. Then you know...

EM: Oh, that was the signal.

AS: Where to go. This is the *paral* [Yiddish: password].

EM: They said Lisa is calling.

AS: Yeah. This was the *paral*. And in the morning, early morning, was every member from the underground receive the *paral* before we go to work. Any trick what the-- you see the people what live in the same house, the 25 people, 30 people, they no have to know what's going on. Is, let's say when she [unclear] towards the door, to call you, the person what's my connection, everybody was sleeping. I...

EM: You heard it. She knocked on the door, the connection?

AS: Yeah. If something goes wrong but nobody could see.

EM: That's right. Nobody else, yeah.

AS: You have to have so many people. It's a couple times...

EM: Yeah.

AS: ...they never heard it. And this, you have to sleep even with-- anyhow, Lisa *ruft*, you know where to go. Anyhow, when you wake up how you going when you have going to work? I'll give you example what I was doing.

EM: They was what?

AS: I, let's say you have to, I'm not going to work. You have to have a excuse for the people what I live.

EM: Yeah, right.

AS: I can't just to say, oy...

EM: Right.

AS: Even with the family. You're living with a mother and with a father and so, what you going to say? You're not going to work? You're going to fight with the Germans? And so everybody find a excuse.

EM: So what work were you officially doing in the...

AS: I was working in, by the German in town.

EM: Oh, so...

AS: Yeah, yeah.

EM: Okay, so you had a...

AS: Working...

EM: All right.

AS: I have 30, 40 people, and they go, every day I was working there. And [unclear] have a job also there something in the forest. And is then I, what I was using, I take, I when I have a tooth pain.

EM: A toothache?

AS: Toothache. I put on a, you know, in here...

EM: You put...

AS: You're putting something warm, you know. And I, when they wake up...

EM: You put a scarf on...

AS: And I, yeah, the scarf. And they wake up, they say, "What happened to you?" "Oy, I was not sleeping all night," and then that's all. You see...

EM: To, pretend you had to...

AS: You see, everything to find a excuse just. Or a stomach or something. You have to have a excuse. Otherwise you have to report.

EM: To work.

AS: The woman from the house which is in charge of the 20 people, and the one woman, she have to report to the police, you know. And so you have to be careful. Is, anyhow, what happened? The most underground was blockading between two big yards.

EM: Was what?

AS: Yard, yard. You know, in Europe...

EM: Yeah, that's it...

AS: ...is the houses...

EM: Yeah, right

AS: Yeah. And we blocked the entrance, and we have a few, we had arms, a few guns, not many. We have other things. Like I say, electric bulbs. And...

EM: Did you have any Molotov cocktails?

AS: Yeah, this was the Molotov cocktails.

EM: Cocktails, okay.

AS: They, with the yes. That's what we produced in the ghetto. And some with ax or iron or something...

EM: Axes?

AS: Ax or something. And, this was with this we fight...

EM: The Germans.

AS: ...the German not to give up Wittenberg. Okay?

EM: So, were you, so was there an uprising where you fight, started to...

AS: Yeah, fight. This was, this was [unclear]. So, Gens, from the start was not in the same place, because Wittenberg was not with us. And the Gens come to the...

EM: Leaders?

AS: Called to the people, in this white house, in the ghetto *Judenrat*, this is a big, a big school was there with a yard. They called the population. And he say, "Look,

they're asking for one bandit, Wittenberg. And if he's not coming out ten o'clock, you're dead."

EM: Right.

AS: "And you have to decide it what you want. We want to save Wittenberg or you want to save your family?" Is, everybody was running to us. And they have some arms.

EM: The people themselves had this?

AS: They have arms, the police have arms, some from the high officers have arms. Is, then they have to use their arms.

EM: To fight...

AS: To fight, the first couple hours not a German. The German are not in ghetto. You see this was the difficulty in the ghetto, in a small ghetto where this is a few streets, you know. And the leaders from the Communist group in ghetto have to decide it the fate from the Wittenberg. And they're calling him for a surrender. They tell him, "You have no choice."

EM: Right.

AS: And he refused to go. He was hiding. He change for a woman. And is very hard to find him.

EM: Right.

AS: He come in a dress.

EM: He dressed up as a woman.

AS: He dressed up like a woman. Only the-- in the end, he give up.

EM: He did give up?

AS: Yeah. He say, "Okay, I'm going to save the ghetto."

EM: And he w-...

AS: And he walk out from the ghetto. He walk out from the ghetto and, by the door, by the entrance to the ghetto. [unclear] Gestapo. And then this was a [unclear].

EM: Uh huh.

Tape three, side one:

EM: This is tape three, side one, interview with Mr. Abe Shnaper, Edith Millman interviewing. Today is December 7, 1994. We're talking about Wittenberg giving up.

AS: And I want to add something. My part in this *alamonig* [phonetic] till noontime was, there was a Jewish girl--sure, everything was Jewish in ghetto--a nice-looking. She was working really for the Gestapo. She was working with Dessler. And her job was it to look for Jewish people who was hiding in hiding places, not in the ghetto, no, in the city, discover them. That's her job. And she come with us; she was coming with the partisans, *Fareynegte*⁸. And sure, you know...

EM: Well did you know that she was a spy?

AS: I don't know. But the people, some people know, and the leadership don't know from her. And they arrest her. And so my job was to watch her all day.

EM: Oh. Your job was to watch her.

AS: To watch her. She was a, this was a interesting job. Why? She would start talking. And I have to watch her all day. And she say, and the first thing, I am, what happen if and we're going go out, I don't know the solution, if we're going to die or we give up. We don't know if we're going to get back this is not for us to decide. If we die, I don't care. If I'm alive, she know me. You understand? She know me and she can...

EM: And she...

AS: And she can do with me, well a lot of things you know. She can put me, I don't have no choice. It's my job. And she would, but she was afraid too. And she don't know the end. But if you start shooting she can be killed like I can be killed. She's part. And she start talking to me. She say, "Look." I say, "Why they arrest you?"

EM: Why they what?

AS: "Why they arrest you what I have to watch you?"

EM: Oh who arrested her?

AS: The FPO.

EM: The *partisan*.

AS: The part-, yeah.

EM: The part-, uh huh.

AS: Yeah.

EM: They caught her.

AS: They caught her and then...

EM: Oh they caught her and you were supposed to watch her.

AS: And I, and they give, my job is to take care of her. Is not so many arms anyhow. But...

⁸Fareynegte Partizaner Organizatsye; FPO.

EM: Yeah.

AS: [unclear]. Was about 300, 400 people, in different places, not in one place. Anyhow, so she tell me, I say, "Why do I have to watch you? There is a reason?" And she start talking. She know, the leaders know her, I don't know her. She say, "Look, I'm really not a bad girl. I have a family in the ghetto. I have a brother. I have a mother. I want to protect them. And they tell me if I find some Jewish hiding, you know, they're gonna save me with the family. And this I was doing." See? And this what they every policeman had the same...

EM: Excuse.

AS: There was not so bad guys.

EM: Yeah.

AS: They promise them...

EM: But they thought...

AS: That they save them all the years. Oh I tell, "You know, what happened to you? You think you will survive?" Anyhow, she say, "Look, I'm gambling. Maybe I'll go hide somewhere. I have no opportunity to hide with you in the ghetto, right?" And I'm playing that the last minute I'm gonna hide. [unclear]. Anyhow, and then she say, "Look, I know what's going on today. I know what Gens receive, ultimatum." From her I know, even though she doesn't know me from anybody. She say, "Look, if you're not giving up him..."

EM: If what?

AS: "If you're not giving Wittenberg, the ghetto is destroyed."

EM: They're going to? Talk louder.

AS: The ghetto, "If you're not giving up Wittenberg," but the way she told me, "Look, I have nothing, maybe I'll die with you. Only I'm just telling you why I'm doing this. But I'm telling you now, maybe I'll die with you. If you're not giving him up you're going to die, with your couple of guns what you have. It's not gonna help nothing." That's all.

EM: Mmm hmm, yeah.

AS: Now mine job is to-- that's what I wanted to tell you, this episode.

EM: Yeah.

AS: That was, some people can do it for to save a life, to save themselves.

EM: To save...

AS: [mumbling]

EM: Do you know what happened to her?

AS: Not exactly. I know from Yoshef, from her boss.

EM: What?

AS: Yeah, we'll come to this.

EM: Okay.

AS: By the liquidation from the ghetto. Now I going talk to you about, what do

you want to...

EM: We were talking about Wittenberg. He gave himself up.

AS: Yeah then is the command changed and Abba Kovner...

EM: Became the leader.

AS: The leader. And this was preparing, after these, this changed, what I say changed, why, a lot of people from, was open already, so they can't hide. See it, before...

EM: What do you mean were open?

AS: The police know us already.

EM: Oh, okay.

AS: The-- they are no dumb no more. They are not, no more...

EM: You had no secrets.

AS: No secret no more. They say is very hard not to-- I'll give you example. After this, [unclear] from the evening somehow is going in the ghetto, and she going me right in my face no...

EM: What?

AS: She, I meet her on the pavement.

EM: Yeah.

AS: In the ghetto.

EM: What...

AS: This the same girl. And I start to, I saw right away, you know. I tell you now, she say, "How you doing?" See, she knew. "*Vos Machs tu?*" [Yiddish: How are you?] I saw her before. She would not [unclear], you understand? She came to me right away, "Here's a, he was doing to me."

EM: Yeah.

AS: See? This, to give you example, is, what is now you start the groups going faster...

EM: Outside.

AS: Outside.

EM: Leaving the ghetto.

AS: Not all of it.

EM: What...

AS: Well let me tell you. Faster tempo why we saw...

EM: You saw the...

AS: We saw the situation. We can fight, but the ghetto is not supporting us. The Jewish population are not supporting us. We are the bandits. We are the bad guys, and Gens is the savior, and they're never gonna support...

EM: So they are...

AS: ...but who you gonna protect?

EM: Okay, and so you...

AS: It then started, but you can't do it in any one day, start going groups or

groups or groups in the forest. And...

EM: Do you have any idea how many people left, approximately?

AS: I would say around three, 400 people.

EM: Three or 400 people.

AS: Yeah. And I tell you why. Till the-- with the groups left, and this what come, and not everybody come alive. And they were coming two different places. They come 200 miles, 200 kilometer. And later was the opportunity closer only 80 kilometer. It was difficult, but it was 80 kilometer. Was open up a new partisan...

EM: Group?

AS: Group in the forest, where they was ready to take us. Is this was already, until this was like this and, let's say the groups were coming, and these groups what's coming they take their arms from all. They just, they come with arms. And they come in the forest. And they come in some places they come in the Russian partisan was waiting for them. They take all the, from him the clothes. They take away the arms from him.

EM: Took away?

AS: Take away the arms and, "You go." See? They can't even defend themselves in the forest with no arms. How you can supply food for yourself if you didn't have a gun? Then the farmer know you're a Jew, and you didn't have a gun. See, you didn't...

EM: You couldn't get any food.

AS: Not food, they'll kill you.

EM: But what do you mean? So they were there, some Russian partisans who just...

AS: Yeah, that's all. They take away the guns. They say, "You come, why you not come so late? Why you, where you was hiding? You work with the German. You work for the Germans. Give to me the arms!" And he take away the arms. And you know, you have to give away and that's all. This what, you know, to find a arm in the ghetto, how many people die to bring the arm? You can't bring a potato in the ghetto. You can't an arm. How you can bring a machine gun or a gun, or anything. There are many people die, how many people pay the price for this.

EM: And...

AS: And here comes the partisans and they take away from you.

EM: Were these Russian partisans or the AK?

AS: No, they were in the partisans, you know, it's...

EM: What, what...

AS: The group, the leader from the group puts you in the commands, "Stand over here, come over here." You come.

EM: But what...

AS: They come the partisans, stand up with the arms, with the...

EM: But were these Russians or were they...

AS: Yeah, the Russians.

EM: They were Russians.
AS: Yeah, Russians, yeah. And they take away the arms, that's all. Take away a nice gun, you know.
EM: But in the beginning...
AS: Is not, a gun is not...
EM: ...you said...
AS: ...not a big deal in the forest, you know.
EM: Yeah.
AS: It's good to protect with. You go and take to a farmer to get potatoes, yeah, but not to fight Germans. And they have a nice gun. They have a souvenir, you know. So, and they take away. Take away anything. They think no...
EM: Because in the beginning you said that the partisans...
AS: Yeah...
EM: ...were helping.
AS: Well, yeah, yeah. Yeah, was they're helping and then later when there start to come in more groups, you know...
EM: More groups, oh.
AS: Much later.
EM: So later they were...
AS: And they see the arms with the people start coming with boots, you know, and they see Jewish, and there come a lot of the antisemitic was good by them too. But these prisoners what the Russian prisoner escaped from the German camps...
EM: Yeah.
AS: They was already poisoned from the German, you understand? They talk like a German already.
EM: Okay.
AS: And they, what, when was closer they're going to the end of the war, come a lot of Lithuanian what work for the Gestapo, in fact he help the German come in the forest, like a ghetto fighter. He was Lithuanian, they was killing us! And they are the see? And we have to be a Lithuanian *partisana*, I mean, to who you partisan movement? It was Jewish. They take any German what any Lithuanian would say he is, and he come with a gun too. He have the gun! He killed the Jewish and killed, who knows who he's killed. He come...
EM: Okay. Now what happened to you?
AS: Is this is the situation in the movement. Now come, like I say, the ghetto, the Gestapo know there is a group. But they know Wittenberg. They come the first of September.
EM: Of what year?
AS: 1943. But they come and they ask 2,000 people. And the same thing, the, by this time the German come in the ghetto. They was not trusting girls. They come in

the ghetto and they say, "Give us. Otherwise in a couple hours we will find them." And the, we have there again, Lisa *ruft*, and they have a mobilization in two places. One battalion, there was two battalions. One battalion was located, the bigger battalion was located in...

EM: Two battalions or...

AS: Two battalions, two battalions. And the battalions make up the fifths, you know? The one battalion was, first battalion was in other part from the ghetto. And this battalion, the second, where I was...

EM: How many people were in a battalion?

AS: There was about, in this time was, I mean these two what was they was divided between a few places. And in one place they have a fire and they kill them. It was three or four places. And in this place where I was was about 90 people, 100 people-- girls and boys together. And the yard where we was was a very small one; is not a big where you can have a fight.

EM: Right.

AS: The arms what supposed to come to us was not arriving. We have to dig up and bring it. Is not, anyhow, it was not ready. And the-- we saw on the roof is coming Estonia SS.

EM: Estonian SS.

AS: Estonian, see. And I'm gonna tell you why there is Estonian. And they come on the roofs with...

EM: Machine guns?

AS: With machine guns, with kind of, the guns, it's and they was not saying nothing. And we're staying like soldiers, come and, what they was need, they need 2,000 people to go to the Estonian concentration camps what they was building. And they was there. This was a concentration-- and is come Gens' brother, is come a guy is the what he's in charge with the Jewish in camp there, from Estonia. And the Gestapo with him come over. And he have a speech for me, the Gestapo. He say, "Look, I know who you are. I give you my German honor nothing gonna happen to you. You're going to Estonia. And if you're going voluntarily, nobody touch you. If you're not going, look what's going to happen."

EM: You'll be shot.

AS: You'll be shot. That's right. We saw what's going on there on the top, on the roofs, from all the four sides. Anyhow, the, what happened? Gens, again, was walking on two sides. He can't give up the whole partisan movement. And what is, one, he was hiding. He tell them they was not bringing him.

EM: Yes.

AS: And here they bring to us, and say, "Here are the partisans." But they don't know 100, 1,000 or something. When he come he say, "The girls can go. I'm not going to touch the girls, only the men." Only they have us [unclear].

EM: So you went with, to a...

AS: Yeah, what we decided [unclear] the guy what is in charge of the battalions, say, "Look, I have no choice." Only one thing. See, we was thinking no German is in the ghetto. I don't know, when he come it was early in the morning, four o'clock in the morning they was already in the place. So we figure we go too. The ghetto may no escape. Who can escape? We have iron, we have this, we have iron pieces. But that's all. They have no gun anymore. Who can escape is escape, that's all. They go out, they're going out. There is a...

EM: Line?

AS: A line, both side, from German soldiers. So he...

EM: For the...

AS: For the way to the ghetto, through the gates. It was about two blocks and you...

EM: You were surrounded by the [unclear].

AS: We were surrounded by the [unclear]. They're going through the gate. And the Gestapo was there. And this was, let's see, military...

EM: Police?

AS: Military autos.

EM: What?

AS: Automobiles.

EM: Oh, cars?

AS: Cars. Not cars...

EM: Trucks?

AS: Trucks. Trucks, and the trucks was open. They was not closed.

EM: Yeah.

AS: And they, no, no, this was closed with what is called a [unclear], a...

EM: Oh, were not closed with, the covers on it?

AS: With covers, yeah, when they came.

EM: Okay.

AS: And, by the end was two Germans with machine guns. And it was about 40 men, 40 boys, from the group, together, yeah almost 40 maybe was from some other place. Was about 40 or 60 people in the truck. When I come in the truck I right away say I know I am going to Ponary. And I wasn't going to trust him, see? Is, what I was doing, I have a razor blade [unclear]. And I cut out like a window. And I says to my cousin...

EM: You were with your cousin?

AS: Yeah, all the, yeah, I say, "I'm jumping. You jump after me. And later everybody jump, how many we can, how many can. We're killed, we'll be killed." I was sure I was not killed. If he see me jumping with them, I'm going [to be] killed anyhow. What do I have to lose? I have to take a chance. Anyhow in Vilna was not like here, the highways, smooth. In Vilna was stones.

ABRAM SHNAPER [3-1-50]

EM: So they were bumpy.

AS: Stone. When I jumped from the window, that's [unclear] I was running high speed. Usually I [unclear] you when they jump, I mean, I was young and I escaped. I escaped and I was going in my, I have my yellow star and my Jewish face you can't hide. And so I was going, it was about seven o'clock in the morning. And I was going home from the yards. Vilna is the most people is surrounding in a yard, not like here in United States blocks. And I was going in them. And they have, you see the heating system is not like here. They use ovens. And the oven was with wood. And every tenant have a...

EM: Pile of wood?

AS: A closet, where he keep his wood and what he buy from the farmer and the farmer bring him. And I go to, and there's a closet. I closed the door. I find...

EM: What do you mean a closet? Was it a little house? A little...

AS: No, no, the, the...

EM: Shack?

AS: A shack, like there...

EM: Oh. A shack.

AS: Was 10 shacks, yeah, 10, 15 shacks I think for the neighbors everybody have to hold wood or something. Otherwise I think when you put a locker. I come in and I see a mattress standing on the wall. Nothing there, no wood. I cover myself with the mattress and lay down. It was about a couple hours maybe.

EM: That was on the gentile section of Vilna. That was already [unclear] from the...

AS: Yeah. I escaped from when we was running. Yeah, we was running from the truck. And I don't know what's behind me or I don't know nothing. A couple hours a farmer with a janitor, a Lithuanian janitor with this man, they bring wood to the neighbor and they pick up the mattress and they find me. "Zhid!? A Jew!?" Oh no, oy. And I know I'm dead. I know. And what is it? They bring me to the police station, to the Lithuanian police station. And the Lithuanian police chief ask me, "What are you doing there?" I say, "Look, I was going with a group from work and I lost them. And I am not allowed to go by myself. And so I'm waiting in the evening, when they return from work I'll go and join them." [unclear] good story. And he looked, usually when they find a Jew, they take to the Gestapo, not to the ghetto. And he say to the policeman, "Take him. Take him to the ghetto. Take him to the ghetto." And I know when he bring me to the ghetto, or I'm killed right on the spot or I'm going back to Ponary in a second. And I start talking to the policeman. I say, "Bring me to the ghetto." So it was about, maybe it's 10 blocks. Well you, see that for me. "What you gonna have if you kill another Jew?" He say, I start talking to him, "I have a wife, you know?" Anyhow, he said, "Do you have something to give me? A watch? A ring?" And I had nothing. He said, "What do you have, why do you have to risk his life? To save a Jew?" "Are you going into the, to the ghetto again," and they know from where I come. And I tell them from where I go. They ask me from where

I come. And they start beating me up. I didn't know how I am still alive today. And they...

EM: Who was beating you?

AS: Me, the Gestapo.

EM: The Gestapo.

AS: Right by the door by the [unclear], they find out. And one guy from the truck was waiting. He tell me he is a mechanic or something. When they bring him to the railroad he was waiting for another transport. He figured maybe he will be safe. Anyhow, from him I find out that what is, they put me in the other truck. The truck was not covered no more, like this. And then you can't even move.

EM: What do you mean? It was covered...

AS: No covered. Before it was covered.

EM: Oh.

AS: They take away. Why? Well he, later I find out. When I escaped, after me it was not my cousin. It was another guy. And they catch him. And then they stopped. They stopped and they reported one was escaped. I was coming to, and I'm telling the story but, my group they were the group going for death. And they, and that's what was the end. And they catch him, and they bring him there. Nobody was doing anything. And I'm the only one what escaped from this group.

EM: What happened to your cousin?

AS: The cousin was in the group. And he was also, how come I was together with him. And I was in the couple of, a couple hours later he tell also he is a mechanic or something and they...

EM: They released him?

AS: And they, no, they said to him, "Wait." They take him up and they're not putting him in the trains, what is called in the, where you put on the trains to, from the, the transport trains. Is not a regular train but they were [for] horses or something.

EM: Yeah.

AS: A freight train?

EM: A freight train.

AS: Freight train. And he was waiting for-- to decide if they give him a break to go back to, in the ghetto. And I come back maybe a couple hours later. They put him in the same freight with me together. This was a miracle, really. And I was with him together and he tell me the story.

EM: Yeah.

AS: See he told me the story. His, then when we come together in the camp. They bring us in camp, in Estonia, to go to, on the way they have to pass Ponary. In Ponary they start going maybe a mile an hour, so slow. And I mean, are we, now are we going to death or they want to scare us? They wanted to scare us in this way. And they bring us after six days, closed everything, no water, nothing, six days in the freight

wagon maybe about 100 people. And you can't escape, you can't nothing. You can't, nothing to do. And they bring us in Estonia. In Estonia...

EM: Which town was it? Where was it?

AS: This is in '43, five days later from the sixth, the seventh of September.

EM: No, but I mean what town? Where was...

AS: This is a concentration camp, not a town. And this is called Vaivara.

EM: Vaivar-...

AS: Vaivara.

EM: Do you know how to spell it?

AS: Later maybe I can find that for you. Then I was, then I was...

EM: Vaivara.

AS: I was not, I forgot my pencil there when I was in camp. I have it everything written down. I have written down. [unclear]. And they bring us to 2,000 people to the camp. And with no nothing. I was wearing a shirt. I think it was, not a jacket, not a, not nothing. And Estonia is very cold. It is the coldest part from Europe. And in September in the day was hot; in night you can freeze to death, with nothing. And they bring us in camp and we have a good welcome committee. They put machine guns from all over. And they say, "Give everything what you have: watches, rings, money, gold. Otherwise [unclear] going to find," they say it, "You'll be killed on the spot." And I'm not a hero again. Again I was doing my trick. I have, I was hiding a watch. I no have the watch, [unclear], my cousin, had the watch.

EM: Yeah.

AS: So he had the watch. And I say to him, "You know what? Give me the watch." He say, "Why you? I don't care. So give me the watch." I want to risk. And what I was hiding? You see this? In Europe you have it about two inches, covered.

EM: Oh.

AS: Not a single...

EM: The top of, the top of...

AS: Yeah, not a, yeah, and it's about two inches, three inches.

EM: Oh, on the pants, the part...

AS: Yeah. The loops.

EM: The loops on the...

AS: The loops is not like a single loop for a half a inch. No this, there is about three...

EM: Oh, the loops of the pants are...

AS: About three, four inches. I was hiding with no-- only the watch. When we come over to different people, they just ask him he take right away his socks. He tell him right away to come to me, this *Lagerältester* there, the commander from the...

EM: The *Lager*, the commander [phone; tape off then on]...

AS: Yeah, he come over to me and he say, "Give me your watch." Right in the

face. And I figure, I have nothing. If I give him the watch I will die from hunger. Maybe with this can save my life. But now I have it, and I have this, I, we never was in Estonia maybe. When the Germ-, when the Lithuanian asked me if I have a watch, and I figure I better let him kill me. What is difference? And I [unclear]...

EM: What?

AS: And I say to him [unclear] watch. [unclear].

EM: That you don't have.

AS: I no have a watch. And he left me. And the watch later, from the time we have, for the watch we have maybe about six, seven pounds of Zweiback, from bread, with [unclear].

EM: Garlic?

AS: Garlic. And this can save you. And this after, in the camp, with a watchman I exchange it.

EM: You exchanged this for...

AS: And he give me the...

EM: ...Zweiback.

AS: And I risked my life, you know, that's a ver-

Tape three, side two:

EM: This is a interview with Mr. Abram Shnaper, tape three, side two.

AS: Yeah.

EM: So tell me about the camp.

AS: Yeah. We come in this camp. This camp have maybe about 5000 people, 2000 what we come from Vilna. And the camp was really one from the worst concentration camps what I later find out. And this was a place where they send later, in different places, and the, I was, three months was no water, not much food, not to wash myself, nothing, no where to make a shower, nothing. If they give you the tea, you wash your eyes, that's all. There is nothing to do with...

EM: There was no water to wash...

AS: No water, no water to wash.

EM: Where did you stay, in barracks?

AS: In barracks what the other groups build, in wooden barracks.

EM: Okay.

AS: That's all.

EM: Did you, who were the guards? Estonians or...

AS: Estonian and the German.

EM: And the German?

AS: Yeah.

EM: What work did you have to do there?

AS: What kind of work? There is two kind of work. There is work-- well this is not too far from the Russian border. Not too far but you're closer to Leningrad. And they was making, the first thing, where they put us is not towns and not villages. They put us in a jungle.

EM: What do you mean?

AS: A jungle where this is, no more...

EM: A forest?

AS: The forest what is a lot of [unclear]. And, what you never dry there. That's...

EM: Oh.

AS: You put the foot, you're sinking.

EM: A lot of mud?

AS: Mud. Mud deep into it. And on this mud they wanted to put a small railroad, to bring closer to the front or something. And what we have to do is to cut trees and put in these places and then put a small train, not a heavy one, as a transit, that's all so maybe to bigger trains later. So they put different transportation. And this was a very hard work. Not used to this, with no food, and with no clothing. No clothing, it was cold!

EM: You still had only your shirt on?

AS: I still have my shirt. And the shirt start, and then I find another one when the shirt start falling apart from washing. I was washing every night there. I, the lice was eating you up. Is, you're falling apart. When the food was water. And once they give you a piece of bread what you can squeeze with the hand. This is not any, they give you the bread four o'clock or five o'clock in the morning. If you can't control yourself you eat them up right away you have to wait till tomorrow morning. So...

EM: Did they give you any soup?

AS: They give you a water soup. And they divide it with a spoon from a bucket. You divide it five for you and five for me, you know, just so they wouldn't-- you can't, if you're not organizing, you're swollen and you die.

EM: Oh well where, how can you...

AS: You, if you...

EM: Organize?

AS: Work...

EM: Organize means like steal or...

AS: Anything...

EM: ...exchange.

AS: Anything what you can is smarter for them. This is the thing what you can survive.

EM: So...

AS: You can't be a good boy.

EM: No.

AS: Wait until you're swollen. And what...

EM: So what, how were you organizing?

AS: They, let's say, I was lucky I work outside from the camp.

EM: You worked outside, uh huh.

AS: Work. I work, before I was working in the woods...

EM: Yeah?

AS: With the trees no we can do nothing. We can't [unclear] eating nothing. Is no houses, nothing. Later, I have a job to supply for the barracks. The, clean the...

EM: The what?

AS: Clean...

EM: Cleaning stuff?

AS: Yeah, cleaning stuff for, in the barracks where we're sleeping, or even for the, for the SS, for the Estonian SS.

EM: For the SS.

AS: Yeah. I make roofs, I made with you know the roofs, like with the, I catch it a little bit.

EM: Roof?

AS: Roof, yeah, a roof.

EM: Roofing paper?

AS: Roofing paper, yeah. The other thing is, [unclear] you finish this they put you to work digging, just to digging. They put 200 people and they dig and dig and...

EM: What were they digging?

AS: Nothing.

EM: Just, just...

AS: Just a ditch. And if you're not holding good and they're watching you, they beat you up. All day, no food, with nothing, not, just the one thing. They tell the one thing they have to save stones, carry the stones from one place to the other. So you're going, to give you example you're going with the stones and you ask the watchman the SS, the Estonian SS, the German SS, you have to go to the forest, you have to do something. He say, "Go. You're going out. You people are carrying stone and you're going." If you no have the stone he beat you to death. "Where is your stone?" So he no remember who is getting out. Is a, is, you have a difficulty. This is people falling apart, falling apart. Is, I have a chance from time to time, let's say, if somebody is a shoemaker, somebody is a tailor, he have a better chance to survive.

EM: Why?

AS: Why? Well he was stealing a pair of shoes. He was stealing a piece of material.

EM: Okay, well, what do you mean shoemaker? Were they making shoes or repairing shoes for the Germans?

AS: For the Germans, for the Germans, yes.

EM: So there was a...

AS: Yeah.

EM: So were there little shops where they can make...

AS: Yes, yeah.

EM: These...

AS: They are there. They make for them, yeah, for them, no not for us. For us they...

EM: Did they make any uniforms there too?

AS: Yes, they have, yeah, they make uniforms. And what they are doing, they steal a piece of material, you know, make hats, you know, what is good for the...

EM: For ears, to cover...

AS: For the army.

EM: Oh, for the army.

AS: And they needed extra if somebody steal it, they I mean, the army want, if somebody lose it, they steal, one steal from the other, he didn't so they was ready to buy from you. You see and I know, some I know already. And let's say I have to buy from the guy for, promise him a half a bread, the German half a bread, not these, this...

EM: Yeah.

AS: To give you example, when I can sell them for a bread, he might have to give a half a bread. And I can steal for a bread. Is a half a bread. A half a bread I have for, for, not for a [unclear].

EM: But what can you sell?

AS: The hats.

EM: Oh, the hats.

AS: The hats.

EM: Oh, the-- he gave you the hat and [unclear]...

AS: He give me the hat, yeah.

EM: To whom do you sell the hats? To...

AS: To the SS, to the Estonian SS the most.

EM: So the Estonian SS would...

AS: Yeah, yeah.

EM: ...buy it from you.

AS: Well yeah they need it. And they, but see a tailor can steal yarn.

EM: So you could steal yarn and...

AS: And they need the yarn is, [unclear] some was honest guys. The, okay? You want a bread? I'll bring it to, I'll bring you, I'll give you a bread. Good. Some give you the bread. Some put on the hat on the head and I'll tell you *dziekuje* [Polish: Thank you]

EM: And this is...

AS: And said *a dank* [Yiddish: Thank you].

EM: Thank you and...

AS: Thanking you.

EM: ... then go away without giving you...

AS: And then you had to give it back a half a bread the guy. Otherwise you are out from the business. You have to hunger, all week you have to hunger to find a way how to buy some bread and that's all. See? Is a...

EM: So how long were you in that camp there?

AS: Is...

EM: Were you beaten ever?

AS: No, I was changing from, I left from this camp. They asked for volunteers from the big camp. They need 250 people. This was the smartest move. Oh but you never know. When we ask you 150 volunteers you're never aware, you know, where you're going.

EM: Right.

AS: But the camp was so bad, and no water. To give you example, we have to take a couple minute. One day, and it was cold, cold to have already, I have already something to wear. See you're not allowed to do from the blankets what they give you. You're not allowed to make blankets and your socks, with a the handkerchief. No not to

do it, but otherwise they killed you. And so is they say this day they're going, they give, going take you for a shower.

EM: For a shower?

AS: Showers. They take us eight kilometers. They drag us from the shower and they-- we have no shoes. We have wooden shoes. And the snow was sticking. I was not tall, but you can't walk the snow is accumulating. This is wood. And they drag you, bang the door. And we come there about, I would say about, like about 700 people maybe. And they say the shower can take only 50 people. Is 50 people coming and 50 people going. If you was the first one, you're dead.

EM: Why?

AS: Well you have to wait seven hours in the cold and the snow with nothing. You can pneumonia.

EM: What do you mean?

AS: You get pneumopnia.

EM: What do you mean if you were the first one...

AS: Let's say the-- every 50, yeah?

EM: Uh huh.

AS: If you was in the first 50...

EM: Yeah?

AS: ... you go in in the shower...

EM: Yeah.

AS: ... into a hot shower.

EM: Yeah.

AS: And you have to wait until the other come going home.

EM: Oh, oh.

AS: You stand till four o'clock in the afternoon.

EM: Oh, so you, after the shower you had to wait.

AS: Even it was a hot shower. And then you have pneumonia, that's all. You can't, [unclear]. You lay down with the, on the field. Then this was the, a selection. A half, from over a half die. Like in two days they died from the cold. And I, when I went myself, I'm not going the first. The first thing I didn't know what, if they're coming back from the shower. I didn't know if the shower had gas.

EM: Yeah, yeah.

AS: But I'm not, I'm very, very careful. I never trust nothing. Maybe in the nature of mine is still a little like this, and I was almost in, I would say the fourth to the end. I'm with my cousin. See, and we was planning everything not to be standing in the first not to go, let me check.

EM: Yeah.

AS: So, and this is what help us is this is the camp where they give you a break and this is a selection in the camp. And...

EM: And that was the camp? Was Vaivara?
AS: No, no...
EM: Which camp was it?
AS: Yeah, yeah, this is the camp, with no water. No water.
EM: So how long were you there?
AS: I was there about, I would say about four months.
EM: Four months. But that wasn't the same camp where you...
AS: No, no.
EM: ... were working?
AS: I was in eight camps.
EM: Oh. Okay, so let's go...
AS: Later I was...
EM: Now tell me where you went from there.
AS: Yeah. Later I was in the eight camps, in the small camps, the 150 what I volunteered. And this was good for these 150.
EM: Okay.
AS: The people die a little but basically these 150 people was already like a *Zonder* group. You understand? Like a special group. And they send us from one camp to the other.
EM: Oh, so where...
AS: All with the...
EM: Can you, do you know the names of the camps?
AS: Yeah, I can give you the name. I got, I promise you I'll give you the name. I'm [unclear].
EM: Okay. Because I have to know the names.
AS: Yeah, I'll give you⁹. I have the names, positively. Yeah, is all the names. And they later they send us in one camp. And the Russian was going closer to the Estonians. They come on the Estonian soil. And they want to evacuate us. They didn't want the Jewish people to liberated. And they drag us till the other side, till we...
EM: To where?
AS: When we come to Klooga. Klooga is the capital from 30 miles from Tallinn, from...
EM: Klooga?
AS: Klooga, is the capital from Estonia, 30 miles. And this is, the other way, the other part from Estonia. With death marches.
EM: Death marches?
AS: Death, death, the marches is death. They take you for 200 kilometers,

⁹Mr. Shnaper never has a chance to review all the camps in his interview. His personal history sheet indicates that he was in these labor camps in Estonia: Goldfields (Kohtla), Aseri, Viivikonna, Putki, Lagedi, Narva, Klooga.

again with no food. Again if you're not going, you're going a little slow, they have a order to drop you, if you're exhausted, to drop you. No, no, they shoot you. No mercy. I was taking a few items and I make like a *shlitten* [Yiddish: sled] we used to say.

EM: Sled?

AS: Sled with no wheels and I carry with me what we have, a [unclear] what we find an old one what we're using for the different things, other things, maybe [unclear]. And I [unclear] a German come to me after I was walking maybe about 10 miles, 10 kilometer. He say to me, "You are a young guy. If you want to make the march, drop this."

EM: The German told you?

AS: Yeah he told me I have a future. He want to save my life. This time I believe him. And I dropped everything. And I know what, where to he give us really what's going to happen to you. And they come and they make the march. They make the march.

EM: So where did you go? So that's when you went...

AS: Then we come to Klooga...

EM: So when...

AS: To the last...

EM: When was that?

AS: This was, we come there in April.

EM: '44? '45?

AS: '44.

EM: April, '44.

AS: Yeah, from 19-, from September, 1943 then we come there in April. And we come in April there. The camp was a paradise, really a paradise. They have sleeping, a kitchen even. They have a blanket. They have everything. They have a-- to wash it. If you're a [unclear] you have to go every week. The facility was modern. There was good [unclear].

EM: Well was it also barracks? Or...

AS: All barracks, yeah. No, this was in a building.

EM: A building?

AS: In a building, yeah. But they have it special for them. And the-- why they have everything? When they liquidate the ghetto-- and I don't talk what they liquidated the ghetto-- when they liquidate the ghetto, to us we can take only nothing. They tell them take anything you wanted. And everything come in this...

EM: In this building? This area?

AS: In this, yeah, in this camp. Not in the building, in this camp. Is, they have everything. For this they have...

EM: Which ghetto were they liquidating? From Tallinn? Which...

AS: No, the ghetto from Vilna.

EM: Oh.
AS: They, when they, yeah.
EM: When they took...
AS: When they take me, let's go a little bit. Let's...
EM: Okay, they took you in September.
AS: They take me the 1st of September.
EM: All right then later they took you into...
AS: Yeah, let me just talk. They, the 1st of September they take only 2,000 people. The 24th of September they liquidate the Vilna Ghetto. And they take the rest in Klooga.
EM: Klooga.
AS: Or they take, or they put them to death somewhere. They lost them. This what they are doing. If it's too many people, they lost them when there is too many. In Klooga was only 3,500. From the ghetto was more. They lost them somewhere. Who know where? Maybe it's in Ponary, everything. You know, [unclear]. Three, about 3,000 3,500 were going in Klooga.
EM: To Estonia.
AS: To Estonia. And they liquidated all the ghettos, all in Estonia, all the eight camps. Where I was, okay liquidated, and this Klooga was the last...
EM: Last camp.
AS: ... the last camp in Estonia. Everybody they killed in [unclear] later we find out. And but the liquidation from the ghetto, if I talk by them, they, the underground people what still was in the ghetto, they was about 150. They was going in the last minute to the sewers.
EM: To where?
AS: To the sewer.
EM: To the sewers.
AS: Sewer system. But this was prepared even anytime.
EM: Yeah.
AS: And they was waiting especially in Tallinn was waiting for him to bring him to the forest, the 150 people. And they survived.
EM: Was Kovner with them?
AS: Kovner was with them, yeah.
EM: Yeah.
AS: They have to come, through the sewer is not a pleasure. Well you have to go...
EM: Yeah.
AS: If it's not too high you have to go in the sewer, two guys but they was lucky. And I was not lucky. I supposed to be in the forest and I was in concentration camp. This, but you can't help. You're in war. And the-- what happened to the police,

and what happened to the, to everybody from the fort helped the German, they put them they make a *Appell* from them. And...

EM: They what?

AS: They make a *Appell*. *Appell*. They call them, yeah, they call them, stand up and...

EM: Oh, *Appell*.

AS: *Appell*.

EM: Okay.

AS: They make *Appell*, when they stand up, they count them, like in a milit-...

EM: Yeah.

AS: Go through all them, *achtung*, *achtung*, *achtung*. And they put them, and they send them in different places. Some a few in Estonia come. And some like in Ponary. Dessler, this Dessler...

EM: That's the Chief of Police.

AS: Chief of Police, he know, he no trust the German. He escaped, and he hide in a place what he make a, in town. He make a place where...

EM: To hide.

AS: To hide. But they find him.

EM: And what happened to him?

AS: They kill him.

EM: They killed him.

AS: Yeah.

EM: What...

AS: And Gens was not going. You know this is also interesting. He was in the ghetto. A, let's say, the 11th of September they come and they take him. They kill him.

EM: They killed Gens.

AS: Yeah. This was the end from the ghetto.

EM: Tell me, but now you were in this camp in Estonia, right? And...

AS: Until the last days.

EM: Okay.

AS: And this is in the end [unclear] for me. Okay. The-- but I was in camp like I say, in Klooga. The-- if you have something, to find something to eat, it was a little better even when somebody do something. Anything can find somebody, people what work in camp for also some reason, they people what are, understand you have to survive. And you don't give up. And not, the other thing, don't smoke.

EM: Don't smoke.

AS: If you smoke, you die. What they was selling a piece of bread and the watery soup for a cigarette. And this was the end for them.

EM: Tell me something, did you have to work in the camp? Was there work there?

AS: Yeah, like I say, I worked in the camp. I worked in the camp in the, over again the, in this for the 150 this help me. I worked outside from the camp.

EM: Outside?

AS: Yeah, and this was also outside from different kind of work. One time is bad, one time I throw stones. I was sick. I had the diarrhea.

EM: Diarrhea?

AS: Diarrhea. And I was going mine end. And then was it and I was going 10 times and I fall from the feet. And I figure, this is mine end. Is a, you have, if you can't, if you're sick, and you want to take a chance, you go to the German doctor. Early morning, four o'clock in the morning. And they told me, when the German doctor see you, in two seconds you start running. You're no more sick. And I feel this is mine end. I can't eat anything what they give me to eat. The bread what was this I think is dead. And I was going fall from the feet and I feel this is mine end. I just to, and I decided to go in the morning to the German doctor. When I come there was about 10, 12 people. And here come the doctor a big guy, with a big dog, with a big stick. And he say, "What is loose? What are you doing here?" But I'm not crying to him. I am the only one what left.

EM: You left?

AS: The only one what stayed. And the other left. All these left in a second. They was running like *mishugoyim* [Yiddish: crazy people].

EM: They were running away from the doctor.

AS: From the room where you sit down and wait for the doctor. And I, the little David...

EM: What? Yeah...

AS: Goliath and the David.

EM: Goliath and...

AS: Goliath.

EM: Yeah.

AS: Goliath. And he look at me. "[unclear]with the stick." He look at me. He knew [unclear]...

EM: Right.

AS: This little guy had the guts? Everybody left? And he's staying? Look at him! And I say to him, "Look, sir, you can kill me. You can kill me. I'm sick. And I'm a young guy. I want to work for you. So give me a chance." What? Well I asked him what my sickness is. I have more guts. I say to him, "What is it?" He say he called the Jewish doctor. "Take him to the hospital. Don't give him no food. And let me see if he start running."

EM: And he what? Say it again.

AS: Well yeah, if I go and I'm not eating. If I going every five minutes in the...

EM: The bathroom?

AS: In bathroom. Bathroom, in the forest. Anyhow, and I was not believing

mine eyes. And the doctor take me from there and bring me in the small, not the hospital. This is called the...

EM: Lazarette¹⁰?

AS: Yeah, a small one. And he told me, "Go in to the Jewish doctor." "Well you heard the order. I no have to give you eat." I start hollering [unclear].

EM: What? Talk louder.

AS: "This German, not human, saved my life. And you tell me you're going to hunger me? What I gonna ask you, to give me a steak?" Anyhow, I go there, but why is it, I take another chance. You never know in this hospital, in the small room, from two rooms, if you survive even when you're give your medicine. Why? There is time when they come and clean up the sick people and take them for dead. And if you're lucky, you're out from there. And I was five days in the hospital. Nobody come and pick me up. They give me something to stop my stomach. And I come a healthy guy. This is the end with [unclear] camp. And in, and I risk again my life. And this is a picture from here I still remember. Allow me to give you my, the last day from the camp. And then is finished. I, like I say I was, I followed the German. I was looking at them. They was, they supposed to watch me. I watched them. I watch them any move, any say what they're talking between them. And this help me, honest to God. This is not a guarantee for life, but this is a guarantee to understand what's going on. And two-- a mother, with a daughter, escaped from camp. And they looked like they know very good German. Or maybe they know Estonian too. I don't know. And they was, for the time I find out they're working in a restaurant like waitress. See they have no hair, the women, they cut off the hair. And they're wearing something with a hat. And is come a German SS from *Lager*, from camp, and to eat in the restaurant. He was not looking for nobody. And he saw two women. And he know two women escape and they are not with, have hair. He bring them back in camp. He bring them back in camp and they called the all camp for a *Appell*.

EM: *Appell*.

AS: *Appell*. And they have a sign, "I am escaped and they have to kill me." And they take up the guy, the head from the camp. I was, my luck was what I was not knowing, not closer, but is not-- to listen to what he was talking. And he take out the gun and want to kill, want to shoot her. And he say like this, in German, "*Sowieso warden Ihre alle erschossen*." You anyhow, you will be killed. Why you have to waste the thing when you put back [unclear]?" And I say to my cousin, "Now you heard what he said?" And take a listen. This give us a idea we are close. Close. I worked with a German before they was talking about *Krieg* [Ger: war], about the war, what the women send them packages. And he send them packages. And this you know, the families have something from the war. And then they start talking between them, *zeisa* [phonetic] *Krieg*, against

¹⁰Small contagious disease ward.

ABRAM SHNAPER [3-2-65]

the war. And they say to him, "*Hat di becumin di cigaretten?*" No, they have no delivery. No cigarette. They're all, they're eating old bread, these watchmen. And I start to figure, uh oh. And we start looking for a hiding place, at sites when we're walking. And we find a really nice place to hide, a place what-- if it's going to happen, it can take two months, can take a month, who knows? It's going to end, this is positively. And we have to look for a place where we can have something to eat. Otherwise we will die. And we find a German kitchen. There was a German kitchen there. What they throwing out, in the road, we can eat.

EM: You mean what they're throwing out?

AS: What they're throwing out. And there we had a place what it's building something, in a hiding place. And we decided tomorrow we are going from camp to work.

Tape four, side one:

EM: This is tape four, side one, interview with Mr. Abram Shnaper, Edith Millman interviewing. Today is December 7, 1994. Mr. Shnaper, now you had a feeling that it's coming to an end. And you decided to hide. Could you tell me where you, what happened next?

AS: Yes when we finish working in the day, one day, was about, coming, we decided we're no-- tomorrow morning we're not going no more. We're going hide in this place and we're taking this guarantee, [unclear]. We're going to have food from the Germans even if we stay longer, while this, the camp is going, this is the end. And early in the morning...

EM: But where the food was, this was inside the camp, right?

AS: No, no, everything is outside.

EM: It was outside? Okay.

AS: Outside, yeah. I was working outside.

EM: Oh, okay.

AS: And so I decided tomorrow we're not going no more from camp. We're going from camp...

EM: Yeah?

AS: And we will not return.

EM: Yeah.

AS: We will not return.

EM: And the food that you found, that you...

AS: The German, the German's camp, the German's kitchen was outside.

EM: Outside. Oh, okay.

AS: Outside. And they are throwing out packages what they receive from home sometime what's is a, not still a little bit bread or everything, you know.

EM: Yeah, okay.

AS: So you can...

EM: So you knew...

AS: You can...

EM: ...where to go.

AS: Where we can, yeah, yeah. Is a, we know. We passed by a couple times. And they had, 25 people was running in the road to catch at something. They hit us with, anyhow, and we decided four o'clock, five o'clock, four o'clock or what time I don't know, it's not important, a couple minute before we go home I have to go and ask the German for a permission to go in the forest. I have to do something, to go in toilet. And he say, "Go." I go inside.

EM: What do you mean inside?

AS: In the forest.

EM: In the forest, okay, okay.
AS: To do, yeah. And I see a German bread, a big pile.
EM: Of German bread.
AS: A big German, but there is not first class, the bread.
EM: Yeah.
AS: Some was stillet or, stilled?
EM: Stale?
AS: Stale. Some was stale, so half of it is good. And this is a million is not enough. This is a dream what is. And I have, we have both a wooden shoe. We figure, I figure, okay, I saw a miracle. But I never find nothing. And I start piling up. I have already, I have something I-- this is the only one, private I'm going tell you, why I have a jacket. And I pile up it. I pile up...
EM: You had the jacket?
AS: I pile up it everything. I pile up how many bread I can. And I told my cousin, "Go there. Ask the same thing." And he pile himself up, from all the [unclear]. And we figure we'll go in the camp. And we go in.
EM: But you decided not to return to the camp. Was...
AS: No, with this, yeah, and decided no more to go in camp.
EM: No, not to go in the camp.
AS: But the bread what we find.
EM: Oh, okay, so that was the last day.
AS: And we have wooden shoes and we have not clothes and that's it.
EM: Right, okay.
AS: [unclear] something. And we go in in the camp and always the tomorrow never come. And we go in the camp. We go, we come in the camp. And we bought shoes.
EM: With the bread?
AS: With the bread. We bought a, something, a other thing, you know? We eat and we give to friends. And four o'clock in the morning the camp is surrounded with the *Zonderkommando*, with special *Kommando*. No more. You know?
EM: I don't understand. You said when you went out to work for, the day before, you said you're not going, you decided to escape and not go back to the camp.
AS: Yeah, exactly what I say to you. We decided in the morning we're going to work...
EM: And not come back.
AS: ... and not return.
EM: Right.
AS: But when I find the bread...
EM: Oh, you decided...
AS: ...with my cousin, then we decided we have the shoe and we can't walk with them. See these wooden shoes always get wet, you know, and they are no good.

EM: Yeah.

AS: We're going buy a pair of shoes and we buy a few extra thing to wear. And a day later we're going...

EM: Going out, okay.

AS: ...to the-- and in the morning it never come. In the morning the camp was surrounded. And this was started to the...

EM: Last action?

AS: The last action. And then...

EM: So what happened to you?

AS: Then they put us, there is a big place where the camp's surrounding...

EM: Surrounding.

AS: Surrounding with the watch, watching towers.

EM: Watchtowers?

AS: And the people have to sit down, like Chinese with the, like this, with the...

EM: Cross-legged?

AS: Cross the legs, where you can't stand up. If you stand up, you're finished. You see what I mean? You're and there's no, there is, the building where they're staying is staying is the SS, not the Estonians.

EM: Not the Estonians?

AS: No, they're staying with them only you can't move. You can't go to the building. And you can even stand up even. And you see this is everybody is dying, yeah? So what I am better if I am a hero? Well I have the freedom. I have already, that's why I come back to the camp. This eats you and you know, and you feel like surrendering. You know...

EM: The last...

AS: The last, you, why you was doing this? What he was doing this? Anyhow, you can't talk to, and they start like I say the [phone], "Now mister, sit down." And they come and they ask like I said before, 300 strong men.

EM: Who? What did you say? I...

AS: 300 strong men.

EM: Yeah.

AS: Right, we have to take the wood to, on the ship. The ship need the wood. It's a war. They needed wood. And they yeah. Oh, yeah I mixed up a little.

EM: Being, okay, well...

AS: Anyhow, let's forget the wood. And anyhow, I think I was talking about that. Let's say, on twelve o'clock they start, we heard shooting. We sit down like everybody was going to...

EM: You were sitting down.

AS: Yeah, everybody want to-- people start crying, you know. They start

shooting. Is, what they was doing, they killed the 300 people. They killed the 300 people what make ready the they destroyed the wood.

EM: Okay, but you didn't tell me about the 300 people. Now you have to, let's go back and...

AS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. They, before they tell us to sit down, they ask...

EM: Before they told you...

AS: Yeah.

EM: ... to sit down...

AS: They asked 300 people. They need 300 strong people what can do carry the wood to the ship. And they're going to Germany. From Estonia they bring us to Germany. And they assure everybody what was a *Kapo*, what was a policeman or a, maybe a *Kapo* is like worse than a policeman. Everybody was running the first. And also people was strong. I with my cousin was also in the middle from the 300.

EM: So you also volunteered?

AS: Yeah, yeah.

EM: You volunteered.

AS: Yeah. But later, again, my attitude is a, change the mind. And I start going back from there and again, the same thing. This is the second time. And I'm not...

EM: You didn't go to the...

AS: I'm not-- we never went. I change the mind.

EM: You changed your mind.

AS: And then start twelve o'clock the shooting. And everybody was, they just...

EM: So the 300 people walked out.

AS: They walked out from camp. We saw from the fence where they're carrying the wood. Right?

EM: They were carrying wood.

AS: Carrying wood. But this is no make sense, you know. It didn't make sense. Even then when we was looking. We was looking every [unclear]. And they start shooting, I with my cousin [unclear], "They're killing them."

EM: And you were in...

AS: Oh but the rest did...

EM: The mean-, the rest were sitting down.

AS: We sit down, all the 3,000 3,500 we sit down.

EM: Was sit down.

AS: So I, then what people say the, everybody want to run, not to talk about that. There is a lot of soldiers there with camps. They're shooting, and the maneuvers, you know, their exercises. Anyhow, this is also another [unclear] was it. What a person from camp was dreaming is to, not to, the lice, lice you say?

EM: Lice?

ABRAM SHNAPER [4-1-70]

AS: Lice?

EM: Yeah.

AS: Not to bite him. And I think I going, all my life I going be shaking. Have bread, 10 breads for one time. And not be hungry. This is the main thing. [unclear]. And is, here the soup what they give us is water. Until they bring the soup, well yeah, and we dream of the soup that can put a spoon.

EM: A spoon, and that it would stand up.

AS: Yeah, it would stand up. And here bring, they bring you a, sometimes you sit down and they bring you the soup. And you can put this, the spoon stand up, a soup what I never saw in ghetto and I never see in the camp. And wait a minute. I with him, remember when we get butter in the ghetto, they ask for 2,000 people. You see you have to have, I no want to make myself a hero, God forbid. You know, but this can be is no you can be smart in, with this here. It didn't make any difference how hungry I was. I was not touching the soup. He was not touching the soup. The people was [unclear]. You know, you were...

EM: Yeah.

AS: I am not lying. And I was not, I didn't [unclear].

EM: They brought you the soup? They [unclear]

AS: Right on the spot, yeah. You can't move. You can't stand up, you know. Just [unclear] when you stand up. And they bring the soup. I don't know if people eat or not. My--I'm surrounded with people what was eating.

EM: Were eating the soup, but you weren't.

AS: Yeah. Not to even touch, not taste it. [whispering]

EM: What? Talk louder.

AS: We die. We're dying! We're dying a death what's yesterday when they came in the camp, we're not supposed to do this. Anyhow this what they, about four o'clock, five o'clock, four o'clock in the evening, before they asked volunteers. The *Zonderkommando* with the German with the Estonian, they come, drunk, *fadruded* [phonetic]. They come and they start chasing everybody. Ah! We said, "God, help!" They were, "Go! Go! Go! Go! *Jude! Jude! Jude!*" And they start chasing everybody from the camp.

EM: To where?

AS: From the...

EM: Outside?

AS: Outside, yeah.

EM: You were going out?

AS: It's only 200 foot. They killed the people and that was 200 foot. And they start, and this instance, I don't know how I come in the building. I can't, I can't, yet I and not my cousin. I, many a times with a I don't know how I come in the building.

EM: You went back to the building.

AS: Yeah.

EM: Instead of, mmm hmm.

AS: I did. Sure, I mean in this thing. You know?

EM: The confusion of it?

AS: The confusion, we was running to the building both, instinctive. So then, and I was in the building. How? I can't understand. And only I, that's all. Two persons.

EM: Only the two of you.

AS: Me, that's right. That's what we saw. And we was hiding on, there is two floors. The whole building is two floors. We're hiding on the second floor, hiding between *schmatas*, you know, things, junk. If they have time they will find us already. This is only two floors. So we thought maybe, this was-- anyhow, they chase off the whole camp. And the fire...

EM: And the, then what happened? What did you see next?

AS: And I saw the next from the second floor, we saw fire, with smoke. That's all. Fire was, big, well this is only 200 foot. And we didn't know what happened, what is it. And we, I can't even tell the time, since twelve o'clock or one o'clock, midnight, until they finish. They come in the German and they start hollering to each other, "Take your things! Take the things! *Schnell! Schnell! Schnell!*" Rush, rush, rush. And I understand they are running away. See the Russian Army was behind them, and they're running away. And they no have a chance to look for us. Well the-- in the picture what I was showing you...

EM: I want to interrupt here. Mr. Shnaper has several snapshots that were taken a day after by the Russians. And these photos show the wooden construction, apparently that, and a tank for gasoline. And apparently the...

AS: It's wood...

EM: Wood that the peop-, the first 300 were carrying out and were told to go to a ship supposedly were shipped to Germany. They constructed this wooden pile next to some gasoline. And the 3,000 or so people that were chased out in the evening from the camp were chased until this pile of wood and there burned. And this is the fire that Mr. Shnaper saw at night, that happened just before the Russians marched in. Now let's continue.

AS: Yes, then in a short time was quiet, nothing [unclear]. They were start coming early mornings and the camp was dead, no German, no people, no nobody. And I don't be, I can't understand they run away or they not run away. Or, anyhow, we have to watch. Why? Well the civilian, Estonians, they are dangerous. Well they didn't, they are neighbors. They was not helping us. They was doing a good job, a lot of bad things. And they going be afraid we'll not tell the Russian what, if somebody come to liberate us, they're going kill us. And we have to watch it. Anyhow, we was what we going do is sit down? I was afraid to sit down in camp. Maybe they're going to start looking for someone. Who know what? Maybe they'll come.

ABRAM SHNAPER [4-1-72]

EM: So you were still hiding or was there...

AS: Was still hiding on the same place. Then we decided to go back to the place where we're supposed to hide. On the way we find a boy and a girl. We take them. We was there five days, hiding.

EM: You found a boy and a girl?

AS: Yeah, yeah, but they was there.

EM: Oh, okay.

AS: Yeah.

EM: Also Jewish, from the...

AS: Was from the camp.

EM: ... from the camp.

AS: Yeah, yeah. And they later they tell us approximately the same story. And we was hiding for five days. And it was really very good food. We go in the night when we didn't was afraid. We bring food. We can't even eat so much food. This was a good place.

EM: So the Russians weren't there yet?

AS: Later, later, I don't know.

EM: You don't know.

AS: No, no. Only we never saw nobody. On the fifth days, every time is one from us was not sleeping. Was...

EM: Were watching.

AS: Were watching. And we was, this is a small place to come to. And I say, I was there the, where the guy what's supposed to the main camp. And I see soldiers, a group of with guns, soldiers, not too far, maybe 100, 200 yards. And they are not German. The Russian Army, before the war they never wear the, what's this called?

EM: Epaulets?

AS: Epaulets. And here they have epaulets. Even it's not the Russian Army. To who is this there? They start talking. They are not I start to listen; they're not talking German. And I think I'm crazy. I think I'm just to dreaming something. You can't [unclear]. They're talking Russian. I see they're wearing a star. Anyhow, they change it for the time they change uniform. Anyhow, they, now we have to go to him. We are afraid, you know, but they're going to search. If you're going out they don't know who is it, Germans or-- anyhow, we had maybe a few, 50 foot to walk to them. Because it was like 10 miles. We can't even walk on the feet. "From where you come?" "Camp. We are escaped from this camp." My God! They liberate the camp in five days before. And there was about 80 people escaped. And we were hiding five days. So the...

EM: And you were hiding. You didn't know that they had liberated the camp five days before.

AS: Yeah. That's it. This is...

EM: Now tell me about...

AS: Is what...

EM: ...the pictures that you were showing me here. Who gave you the pictures?

AS: Yeah. These pictures this was the first camp from killing people what the Russian Army...

EM: Liberated?

AS: Liberated. They never saw this. When they saw this, they were really crying with us. And...

EM: They cried with you?

AS: They cried, yeah, from this thing. And the, armies after armies was coming through to show him...

EM: The what? The...

AS: One army after another. And they come to show what the German can do to people. Anyhow, they make the pictures. They make about 50 pictures where the people are just thrown, half dead, half burning, some...

EM: Burning.

AS: Some have only the faces, some and crying even you can see in the picture. And they make all this, these thing, you know. And this is the thing you know what is. And later we're burying them in the one...

EM: Who was burying them?

AS: The prisoner, the German prisoners.

EM: So they caught them, some were...

AS: And they would dig up, they dig up, yeah, they have right in the, you see them.

EM: Yeah. Okay, so we...

AS: They, they did...

EM: On the picture we see some...

AS: Yeah, the...

EM: German soldiers that were burying the...

AS: Picking up the...

EM: Picking up the dead bodies.

AS: Bodies, yeah. And...

EM: The Russians made them, made the Germans take these bodies and bury them. We have to interrupt.

AS: No, no, no. Let me finish. Is, and this was the mass grave, mass grave, yeah?

EM: Mass grave.

AS: Mass grave. And they put something what we, before we left, and we was there two months. They made a gate. And, what I want to say is [pause] by the grave I was promising. [pause]

ABRAM SHNAPER [4-1-74]

EM: We have to interrupt. Mr. Shnaper is overcome by emotion. [tape off then on]

AS: I want to add a few words. But, by the mass grave they pick me up like their leader from the 80 people what survived.

EM: They made you the leader of the people?

AS: Yeah. And I my few words what I said good-bye to them, I promise all my life I will dedicate it to them, to tell the...

EM: Mr. Shnaper...

AS: To tell the story about them. And I believe I was keeping my promise. For the last 45 years in Philadelphia I help to bring close the Jewish community in Philadelphia, showing the public through the tragedy from the Holocaust, with erecting a, and when they erected a monument in Philadelphia, to teaching the Holocaust. And I all my story I want to say one word. This is not a story from a hero. I was the lucky one. Why? I don't know. I'm not smarter maybe but, I don't know how.

EM: I want to add that Mr. Shnaper was the driving force in the Jewish Holocaust Association, people who organized themselves and built the first monument in Philadelphia to the memory of those who perished. He is the president of the Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and extremely active in communal affairs. [tape off then on] And today is December 26, 1994. I am continuing the interview with Mr. Abram Shnaper. Edith Millman interviewing. Mr. Shnaper, when we last talked, you were telling me about your liberation. I would like to talk a little bit about what happened to you after the liberation. The war was still going on. You were liberated by the Russians. And that was in what month and year?

AS: In 1944, in September.

EM: In September of 1944 you were, and the last camp that you were in?

AS: Is in Klooga.

EM: That was Klooga, in Estonia.

AS: That's correct.

EM: What happened to you afterward?

AS: After then they bring me in, back in Vilna, from where I'm born, a citizen. You know, they bring me in Vilna. And Vilna was, I find everything destroyed in Jewish life. No Jewish people. Only a few that survived in different camps, in different hiding places. They come up. And all the Jewish synagogues, mostly, 99 percent was destroyed, with the Jewish people. And...

EM: Did you find any relatives?

AS: No. When I, this it was really sad, when you come in a city from-- in the time from the German occupation was about 60,000 Jewish people living in Vilna. Before was 30,000. And you go in, I was going from the train, from the freight train when they bring me. And I go out in the morning on the street and I don't know where to go. Where I go? Is no Jewish, no family, nothing. And I was wondering, this is my city

what I come home. And that was such a sad thing, you know.

EM: Was the city also destroyed by bombs or artillery?

AS: Yeah, I would say yes. It was destroyed, 30 percent was destroyed, especially the center city and the Jewish neighborhoods was destroyed. And there was a river near [unclear] street what, when I was walking out, just one, two blocks, a block, from the train station, I meet my friend, who was a Jew. And she was also, she was in the partisan movement. She come in Vilna and we meet, like is coming somebody like a angel is coming, in my city. And she told me who is it, where is there. Anyhow, I know there was, but I know about 10 families. And this was it, from my family nobody survived. I know a cousin was, yeah, a cousin. I meet a cousin was coming from Estonia. This is the only relative what survive. And that's all. And from then I come in Vilna. And I say, "What I have to do?" I'm not going to stay in Vilna. Is nothing for me. This is not a place for anybody, for any Jewish to live, especial for me. And I have to make a, another decision what I going do next. Not personal. I can't talk about the Holocaust with them. The Holocaust is, in Vilna you can't talk to nobody there. I mean the population, the Lithuanian, and there are the *Polaks* some, was helping them. To who you gonna talk about the Holocaust? The main thing is to run away from there. And I was when I was old, I think I was telling you, I don't remember...

EM: You were what?

AS: When I was 10 years, 11 years old, I joined the Youth, Zionist Youth movement.

EM: Yes.

AS: And I was talking about there were no, all *mein* [Yiddish: mine] youths-

Tape four, side two:

EM: This is tape four, side two, interview with Mr. Abram Shnaper. Now, did you meet any people from your youth movement in Vilna?

AS: Yes. This was really my family what I say. They was come from the forest, from the partisan area. And they liberate Vilna even. They were the first what liberate Vilna together with the army. And they was, I would say the...

EM: How many people do you think, approximately were...

AS: Well, from my friends was about, sure, about 15 families.

EM: How many? 50?

AS: Fifteen. Ten, fifteen.

EM: Families.

AS: Was there from the different cities from Poland, from *Shomer Hatzair*, the youth movement.

EM: And they met in Vilna. They came to Vilna.

AS: They, in Vilna, yeah. Is, the, is...

EM: So how long did you stay in Vilna?

AS: I stayed about seven, eight months.

EM: What did you do there?

AS: Well this what I want to talk. I change it my priority if you can say. Like I was a Zionist all my years. And I help together with the group to organize illegal emigration from Vilna to go. Vilna was the capital from Lithuania. And what we, what they want to go is to go in Poland. Now Poland was a independent. From Poland you can emigrate. You can do anything you wanted. And this was back, is, my job it was it, together, Abba Kovner, like I mentioned, he was a new...

EM: [unclear] Kovner. He was the...

AS: He was, he organized. When I come he organized. I come and I meet with him and he told me, I tell him about the story in camp something. It is not important now. The way I come in camp [that] I tell you.

EM: The what?

AS: The way I come in camp. I was never supposed to be in camp.

EM: Yeah.

AS: And, anyhow, and we was trying, every Polish citizen from Vilna can go legally to Poland; Lithuanian or Russian...

EM: Could not.

AS: Could not. And we have a lot of, in the same movement we have a lot of Lithuanian. And we have to help them to find a way to go to Israel later. And this was the job from us, even what I was not involved in this, was sending couriers in, deep in Russia...

EM: Deep into Russia?

AS: Into Russia, with money to find *Shomerim* from the youth movement, and bring them in Vilna.

EM: And so you were trying to bring the people from...

AS: I-- this was the project what they started before. You know, I was not involved in it. Or...

EM: Where, you said to send some money, where did this money come from?

AS: The money was coming from the Jewish institutions, the Joint.

EM: From the Joint.

AS: The Joint, yes. They regularly put the money in working for these, is, *mein* job was only technically in this respect. I am from *mein* trade a book binder. And I put in a Russian book, in the cover, split the cover, and put \$5,000. And then bind them back and this girl was deep in Russia. I meet her in Israel lately. And she find some people and she helped me this way. *Mein* job later was it-- they left-- and I with a few other was in Vilna and they, my job is to help the Lithuanian, Jewish Lithuanian groups, group what we have, not too many, I would say about 10 people. Was very, this was very difficult. Why? They supposed to go like *Polaks*. And they don't know the language. They say, is, and this was a job. My job was it to make passports, forge passports, to make, to put them on a transport. It's a transport you have to wait six weeks, six weeks to register for a transport to go on these trains. I have to make for them 24 hours and then nobody can check. Maybe NKVD, the, would be [unclear]...

EM: What do you mean? You had to make them so they would go immediately?

AS: Yeah and the NKVD, the security, the Russian security, have no chance to check...

EM: The list?

AS: Check their name for this takes the five, six weeks. And this was important, is to find passport, find the transportation. So I have already people what I know in Lithuania. I pay him money and they was doing for me overnight.

EM: Well, how did these people-- you made by a transport, or transportation-- would they go by train?

AS: Yeah, this was...

EM: The, oh...

AS: They're going on transport. They was going on transport from 50, 60, 70. Jewish, *Polaks*, not only Jewish.

EM: Poles and...

AS: In this repatriation, this was the, this was...

EM: The repatriation from...

AS: Repatriation from...

EM: From...

AS: From Vilna...

EM: Vilna.

AS: Or then from Russia. Any Russian citizen, Polish citizen, he can't legally leave Poland, oh, leave Russia.

EM: Can't leave for Poland, right.

AS: And, from Russia too. Oh, but not from Lithuania. If he's a citizen from Lithuania...

EM: He couldn't leave.

AS: If he's a citizen from Russia he can't leave. Only a Polish citizen from any place. And this was a job.

EM: Now, how were you able to arrange for these passports or...

AS: Yeah, the passports, say when you work, you find your connection. Some you have to pay money. Some you have to false them.

EM: Mmm hmm [affirmative], so you have false passports...

AS: No, no.

EM: Were all false passports?

AS: No, I was not falsing passports. I falsed everything. Let's say, if he is in the age from the, because the war was going on. If he's in the age from the, from draft...

EM: For drafting, okay.

AS: Drafting, you have to, he is not permit to leave, regardless he is a citizen or not a citizen. You have to make a false...

EM: Date of birth?

AS: No, I have to make a false...

EM: For, birth certificate?

AS: You have to make a, he is they give him a permission.

EM: Oh.

AS: The military give him a permission to leave.

EM: Uh huh, to leave.

AS: And this I was doing false, papers, I was doing falsing. So you risked your life. What happened, how I was lucky with the passports and this I was doing in my time I was making four passports like this.

EM: Four?

AS: Four.

EM: Mmm hmm.

AS: For my cousin.

EM: Yeah?

AS: For my cousin I have to make a passport.

EM: Yeah, the...

AS: Fast. And he have a lot of problem. And well, so, I find in the place where I live was about five, six rooms. And one from the rooms was living a girl what work in the police station. And you look for a Jewish girl. And you offer her a break. They had a

commission, the commission, the...

EM: A Commissioner?

AS: No, the commission, the chief from the police...

EM: Yeah?

AS: ... in the station was a Russian.

EM: So...

AS: Naturally. And I look, and they fall in love with her, maybe he fall in love with her. And she was doing anything what I ask her.

EM: Oh, so she...

AS: For nothing.

EM: Was helping you through the, from...

AS: For nothing. It's a risk for her too. And this way I was taking some intelligent...

EM: Some what?

AS: Let's say a person what is intelligent and he don't know too much Polish, he have more chance. He can talk a broken Russian, you know. So he, Russian is legal there I mean. You see? So he can know how to act. But let's say when you have a person what is not so bright...

EM: You had...

AS: Yeah, you have to make him like he don't know how to talk.

EM: Like he what?

AS: He's deaf.

EM: Oh, like he is deaf, like he can't...

AS: Yeah, he can't talk. They have from there, he can't talk. This sometime is working. Sometime, you don't know, you take a chance, see.

EM: So tell me...

AS: And...

EM: So you did this for several months.

AS: Yeah, I do it for the first couple of months. It was...

EM: And how did...

AS: About three, four, let's say for four months, I believe.

EM: And then how did you, you left?

AS: When I left, this is interesting. They give me, I have to take two sisters. She was in the high leadership before the war, from...

EM: In what leadership?

AS: In *Hashomer Hatzair*.

EM: *Hashomer Hatzair*.

AS: The leadership from Lithuanian *Hashomer Hatzair*, in the youth movement. And she have a sister. She was a intelligent girl. The sister was not so bright, like I say and she looked bigger, but they don't know Polish.

ABRAM SHNAPER [4-2-80]

EM: She didn't know Polish.

AS: No the other one, she was smart. She knew Russian very good. She can catch a few words and she can smile. The other sister, I make, don't say a word.

EM: Don't say a word.

AS: Don't talk, don't-- play dumb. And this was my, usually they was not talking to you too much. See? And now this what happened. In *mein* [unclear], when I saw right away 10, 15 years in Siberia, they take us over the...

EM: Who was in Siberia in this?

AS: I, this, when they catch me.

EM: Yeah?

AS: I will have 15 years in Siberia.

EM: Oh.

AS: For doing this.

EM: If they caught you.

AS: They'd take me.

EM: Yeah, if they caught you.

AS: Yeah, because, and what happened? After when they bring us the border from, on the...

EM: Polish border?

AS: On the border, before you leave Lithuania, the last small border, they need the train. [unclear].

EM: They what?

AS: They need this, the wagons.

EM: They needed...

AS: They needed the train.

EM: They needed the train.

AS: Yeah, train. And they take the 60 people, 60, 70 people...

EM: Out of...

AS: Polish and then they tell them, in a small village, "Stay there. In a couple days we're going take you." And I saw danger is in this, you know? And the guy what he was in charge for the station was a Lithuanian, a Jew hater. And he was smelling something spooky. He take the papers from them. He look at the papers. And he say, "This is a good job, but it's a false." And I have no connection with him. I'm staying not close to them. And he's going, and the other is not talking. And then she smiles and says, "Hey--" says a few words. Anyhow, and we're staying a day, staying a second day. And he's coming to them constantly.

EM: The two girls? He's going to...

AS: The two girls.

EM: Yeah.

AS: She was, let me see, was about, she was already let me say twenties. That

was all the, and I see that there was a real panic. These two girls was in panic. Is, they say to me, "I have vodka. I have this. Let's give him something." I say, "No, no. I don't want you do nothing. If you give him..."

EM: Then he will know.

AS: "You're finished. He'll take your vodka. He'll take your rings or what you have, and you're going right for the camp, you'll land in jail for 10 years. Leave it to me. Don't do nothing." So you have to think fast, you know. And I come up to the *Polaks*, [unclear] people. And I say, "You know what? How long we going stay here?" I start talking to them, agitating.

EM: Agitating the Poles.

AS: I agitate them, see, I say, "You know, if you're not giving him something, you're gonna stay here forever." [unclear] *Zhid*, [unclear] *Zhid*. And he says, [unclear]. He says, "These Jews [unclear]" Let me just [unclear]. He say, "Well, I have vodka. I have [unclear] you know.

EM: Yeah, [unclear].

AS: [unclear], everything what. So he, one say, "And I have a bottle of vodka too." [unclear]. So I say, "No, no. You do it."

EM: Yeah, you go.

AS: See? "You go. You're a Gentile. [unclear] interrogation [unclear]."

EM: Talk...

AS: They give him they bring him presents. They say, "Look, we want to go. We want to go. I want to reach my homeland. I want to go to Poland. Why do I have to stay here? Take the goods and--" In a couple hours he bring us, he bring a, in Poland was it the old fashioned trains was not only the...

EM: Steam engine.

AS: The steam engine was separate. And they bring us on the coals-- would be the 60 people, you know, how many. And they bring us over the border. And this what [unclear].

EM: Oh.

AS: I give you a episode. And this was my coming in Poland with them.

EM: Now where did you go in Poland?

AS: In Poland I was going to the capital from Poland, Warsaw. And then I find the leadership there. And they say to me, right in the beginning, "You're not going nowhere. You have to stay in Warsaw. You have to stay in Poland, to organize the..."

EM: Illegal immigration, right?

AS: Yeah. "With any work what you can help us in Warsaw, not directly with the illegal, but, and that, to organize everything this is, what is going on in the capital." And I come in a city what I don't know too much. The language, Vilna, Polish was not the main language for Jewish people. When they live together, even the janitors start speaking Yiddish. And there I was three years I was in Warsaw.

EM: You were in Warsaw...

AS: Three years, and I was working.

EM: So this was, when you got, went to Warsaw that must have been 1945 already.

AS: I come in the end of '45. And I was till '48. And I organized a lot of things in Warsaw.

EM: For the illegal emigration?

AS: For the illegal and for the legal. But in Poland was the Zionist movement legal. And we used all the channels for legal work. We organized the youth...

EM: Youth movement?

AS: The youth movement. The, and the *kibbutzim*. From where come the people? They're coming from the towns, from the immigration transport from Russia. They come a lot of, from families. They was the couple years in Russia they was. They come with children. And the children was hiding in cloisters, in churches.

EM: In monasteries.

AS: In monasteries. And when they come they have special people what come to every transport. They agitate them.

EM: They what?

AS: They agitate them to come to the *kibbutz* and go to Israel.

EM: Oh.

AS: And the parents was going deeper in Poland and they give the children to teenage, 16, 14, 12 they give us. This, and they, is, every, let's say this was my job. I was not involved in, directly to do with this kind work. I was not directly favored to be a leader between...

EM: You what?

AS: I was not managing later the 60, 50 people.

EM: Yeah.

AS: And then come a special person that I can do, organize other activities. And after three, four months, five months, they was going illegal to Poland.

EM: To what?

AS: To border.

EM: To where? Where would they go, to Germany?

AS: To Germany. To Germany, sometime to Austral-...

EM: To Austria?

AS: Austria. They was going...

EM: And from there somebody else...

AS: From there they was going with the illegal emigration.

EM: Okay.

AS: And this was in...

EM: They were going mostly to Palestine at the time?

AS: They this was the way for their coming in the *kibbutz*.
EM: All right, okay.
AS: Anything what they're going do later, you know, this is, they're not, well, you know, it made us a contact. But this is also, I organized a sympatic [sympathetic] group.
EM: A what?
AS: A group from all the...
EM: Sympathizers?
AS: *Sympatizir* [Yiddish]. From Polish Jewish intelligentsia.
EM: Intellectuals.
AS: Intellectuals. Retired, later in the years, retired high Jewish army officers of high caliber. High...
EM: High caliber.
AS: And when they went if they wanted, they came, but since the war they was going...
EM: Were they retired Jewish officers...
AS: Officers.
EM: ... of the Polish Army?
AS: Polish Army, but it was the Russian Army.
EM: Oh right.
AS: They was in the, yeah, they was in the Russian...
EM: The Communist Polish Army.
AS: The well there's no other, the other army was [unclear] too. The antisemitism was later, they went to Iran. And also for them this is very interesting, you can work with them only, well they have Polish, they live on Polish document. They survived this way. They never have their real names. The Polish steal the Polish names. I can never, I'm not allowed to mail them letters. Well they no want to have anything Jewish. They have special, every week we have a meeting with them, and they know the time and they come. Was about 40 people. This was a interesting to work with them, they're doctors...
EM: How could they help? How did they help?
AS: The officers can help. They have a choice, later when they start the war, they need a flier or somebody in a tank, they can volunteer to go in the Israel Army. They, for them was open, not, they not have to go illegal. They go legal.
EM: Oh, I see. So...
AS: You know, to Israel, a way, to go legal too. Like I say, I have to go legally. And so...
EM: So tell me how...
AS: I also organized a tailor shop for the people that live...
EM: To work?

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AS: Yeah, just to a little, also, there was a committee, a Jewish committee, with a Communist, a Jewish Communist was the leader in the leadership. But the other Zionist movement was legal. Is, there was members in the committee. We was doing everything we can do to make easy for the population.

EM: Okay, now, did you say that the Zionist movement was legal at that time?

AS: Legal, yeah.

EM: In Poland.

AS: Yeah.

EM: Now, where did you go? You stayed there till 1948. Where did you go from there?

AS: Yeah, let me just to tell before, you know. At, after the pogrom in Kielce, in 1946...

EM: Right.

AS: End of the '46, well what is the pogrom? They massacred 45 survivors...

EM: Massacred. [correcting his pronunciation]

AS: Where they live. Mass-?

EM: Massacred.

AS: Massacred, 45 survivors what survive from different death camps, and any place hiding. And this was not a band what killed them, but from every part from the Polish population. I was at the funeral. I know.

EM: You were what?

AS: At the funeral.

EM: At the funeral.

AS: And after this, they called me in, the high command in the Jewish...

EM: Organization?

AS: Organ-, not the Communist, no, the Zionist. And they tell, "Look, anybody what want to leave Poland can leave." For they feel guilty.

EM: You mean the Poles said this?

AS: The [unclear] feel guilty, [unclear]. This is embarrassing for the Polish, no real, no...

EM: Government.

AS: Government. And they say, "Look, no more illegal *aliyah*."

EM: Everything just...

AS: Emigration. Anybody can apply for a passport, and with this passport he can go. You have to have a visa. Visas you can find.

EM: Visas you could get?

AS: Visas we can find, yeah, just to copy in French, any place, Czechoslovakia. And so this was a little better. Is, again, mind you I was it, I have the connection with the emigration office by the State Department, the Polish State Department. And from my first day when I come in Warsaw, it was to do work with

them. And I have good connection working for the, [unclear] I was telling you. I have good connection with the Polish movement what is the [unclear]. All over the country, not only in Warsaw. And you know there was, sometime I need a passport very fast. It was conferences, say, and you have to come in two weeks. And you can't take eight months, eight weeks, or nine weeks for a passport. This was the usual time. And my job was it to find a way...

EM: To make it fast.

AS: Let's say is come a *shaliach* [Hebrew: emissary].

EM: A what?

AS: A *shaliach*. He come illegal in Poland. He come right in the beginning after the war. He come in in...

EM: That's an emissary.

AS: Emissary. He come in let's say three months, he come in May, in 1944, even bef-, yeah, he come even the first with the [unclear]. He come in 1945, he come illegal from Palestine. He come legal from Palestine but he come illegal to Poland with a different name.

EM: Yeah.

AS: When he have to go, he have to go first. [unclear] say, he have to go...

EM: And so your connection was...

AS: With my connection to make a passport in five days. In five days.

EM: [unclear].

AS: See? When I come to her, well she make for me a passport, in five days. The first time they meet her, and...

EM: She was a Polish woman?

AS: A Polish woman. She [unclear]. And at the second time she say, "Any time when you come," and she give me a special telephone to call her if I have a,-- you can come in in the State Department, in the Polish State, you know, like you walk in the street. She give me a thing and she call up. And so the second time when I come I bring her chocolate. I brought a box of chocolate. She refused to take it. She said, "I'm not, don't bring me nothing. I going to help you with your cause. I'm going to help you to..."

EM: Get the Jews...

AS: "Fight the English in Palestine." And from this my three years was it like, were open, a open thing.

EM: Like what?

AS: Open. Open the door to her and I can do anything, you know.

EM: Okay, so now let's...

AS: Now, with this, this was my job and...

EM: Your job, and where did you...

AS: After three years I was come to live, but, they said they'll give me a...

EM: You came to where?

AS: Well they give me a choice. They give me a choice, or to work in Poland or to work in Germany, in liberated camps. I say, "No, I don't want to go to Germany. I better stay in Poland." But this is also a big choice, from fire to *Wasser*. And I decided to stay in Poland. After the three years, and I had my wife, she is in Poland. She was in Warsaw.

EM: You met your wife in...

AS: In Poland, in Warsaw.

EM: Poland? In Warsaw.

AS: In Warsaw. Her sister come from the same city what I know her. When I was in Vilna she give me a notice to find her younger sister in Pol-- in Warsaw. And I come and I tell her, "Hello." She pay, my wife pay a big price for this. I marry her!

EM: [chuckles] You married her, for the hello, huh?

AS: So and if she'd complain I said, "I talked to your sister." Anyhow and after this I left with my wife. My wife, incidentally, have a hard time to find a passport. Now she work in the office. She was not in the Polish security system UB, through the Polish NKVD. She work in the office for the couple years, she come from camp. She was not a big deal but she work in the office. She, but never have a passport.

EM: Yeah.

AS: It was gave eight months, or six, eight weeks, and we have for her. Give you example, I make for her the same thing, five days...

EM: You made a passport, and...

AS: She can come too.

EM: So where did you go with your wife then?

AS: We come in, yeah, I have, like I say, I have, after so many, I work till two o'clock in the night, day and night. This was my job, all the passport, even from the *kibbutzim* come to me.

EM: Okay.

AS: See, I never deal with nobody. I never deal with a boy. I am afraid, you know. I give him with the paper leader.

EM: Oh.

AS: And the leader was going with him.

EM: Oh, from...

AS: Over the border, the leader...

EM: Oh.

AS: From *kibbutz* is going with him. Is, even when something we find a lot of time was, I make false passports, false names. I take a *Polak* from Warsaw. He was in a home. He worked before the war in a, in a asylum, was a...

EM: In what?

AS: In asylum was, a, people what have no, children what have no parents.

EM: An orphanage?

AS: Orphan, in a orphanage. He working with them in the, throughout the war maybe five, seven years. And he had a, with a few, he was li-, he escaped to Russia. He come, he say, "I no want to be a *Polak*." He want to be a Jew. "I want to go to Palestine." He come in *kibbutz*.

EM: He was a Gentile?

AS: A Gentile, a real Gentile.

EM: He wanted to be...

AS: And he come over. One day he come to me, tell me, "What I going do?" The leader. He want to be a member in the *kibbutz*.

EM: Yeah.

AS: I say, "Go in the Communist committee, register like a Jew." He come, he say, "I'm a Jew." And they give him a piece of paper. When they give him a piece of paper-

Tape five, side one:

EM: This is tape five, interview with Mr. Abram Shnaper. Edith Millman interviewing. Today is December 26, 1994. Mr. Shnaper, you were telling me about the Polish gentile man who wanted to go as a Jew to Israel. Will you please continue about it?

AS: Yeah. After my three years I have a permission to leave Poland. And...

EM: Well, tell me what happened with this Gentile? Did he go to Israel?

AS: After I receive my permission, and I was ready to go to *aliyah*, to go to Israel. *Mein--* I no have to go illegal, after *mein* three years working day and night. And I received, well I have a passport, I with my wife. I have a visa for Czechoslovakia, a visa to French.

EM: To France?

AS: Yeah. And from there I have to go. And I was packed, everything to go, and in two days I have to leave. Two days before I receive an invitation to the Polish security, the UB. This is the Polish NKVD, to come eight o'clock. And I figure, say I was talking out.

EM: You were what?

AS: I was talking public. I was talking about leaving Poland. I was, when the Jewish Communists want something, I was going over their head. I was going to the Polish Communists. And this is about the demonstration. You know you're-- and at the 1st of May or sometime like this when I have a lot of thing, and were many piece of paper, false papers they have, how many passport, who know. And I can pay a big price. [unclear].

EM: Yeah, so...

AS: Anyhow, I was, before I was going I was-- I meet with the leadership, in Lodz, was the leadership. And I ask him, "I want one thing. Tell me, is this the liquidation from the Zionist movement? If this is the end, I'll have to escape over the border." Now still the border was working. Don't think...

EM: Yeah, well, I know...

AS: The illegal emigration was still using it, and not give out the [unclear].

EM: Yeah, but you said you were called to the Polish...

AS: Yeah, but this what I ask the leadership to find out. And we have good connection with the, they're hiding in the [unclear] *Kibbutzim* in Israel, from the army, they, the illegals. And we have good connection. And I say, "You have to find out for me if this is the end." And he said, "Abram, go. Go by the border."

EM: So you didn't go to the police.

AS: I, now wait. I, this what I ask him. If they find out for me this is the end from the Zionist movement, then they going put everything on me.

EM: Yeah.

AS: Like they was doing in Romania when they arrest people what, just to arrest them. Then I'm not a hero. And if it is not the end, I'm covered.

EM: Okay.

AS: But if the, they know me very well in Warsaw. And if they follow me to the border and they catch me, I may pay a awful price. I take a chance. And if they call me and they tell me, they tell you, "Go there over the border," that's it. And then they, I find out and say, "Look, this is not the end from the Zionist movement." And so I decided to go tomorrow morning at eight o'clock. And my wife was pregnant.

EM: Your wife was pregnant.

AS: Pregnant two months. And she is packed.

EM: She what?

AS: Packed, to go.

EM: She was packed.

AS: And here I'm going who know where I'm going. I'm now...

EM: So what happened?

AS: I'm going there. I'm going to the security. I come to gate, eight o'clock in the morning. I'm smiling. And they-- I know the tricks from the, how they're working in Warsaw, the NKVD. They start chasing me from one room to the other. From eight o'clock till eleven o'clock in the night, nobody talked to me. Nobody give me water. Nobody give me nothing to put me down. I know the tricks. Anyhow eleven o'clock this come a, it's, unfortunately it's a Jewish communist what I know him. I know he was from them. He was listening all my speeches, NKVD, in the Polish security. And he come over and call me right by the first name, "I'm sorry what you have to wait so long. You know, we're fighting with the Polish bandits and we are busy. And you will understand." He's talk with me like a comrade. And he start build me up. He's telling me, "You're doing this and you're doing this and you're doing," and I know where he is going. And I, he's going to the thing, you know. What happened to the Polish boy? The Polish boy, he was going with the *kibbutz* with a Polish passport. Five minute before the train from Warsaw have to leave, here come the Polish security and take him out from the train.

EM: You mean the Polish boy that wanted to...

AS: Yeah, with a...

EM: ...go as a Jew?

AS: ...with a passport, with everything. And when they call me, I figure this is also...

EM: Uh huh, that was in...

AS: The, see I have a passport...

EM: Connection...

AS: We have a passport too. And they take him out and I don't know, I never heard from him. That's all. And he start build me up and I know what he want. "Well, Mr. Shnaper, you are in the youth and you're in *kibbutz* and you're in this and you're on

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the committee.” So, and then I have to defend myself not to put me in these categories. And I right away tell him, I make sure I tell him, “Look, the organization working thinks the youth, is a special committee in Lodz what have to do only with youth. There is a political party [unclear]. I am in charge of this, all the activities politically.”

EM: You are in charge of the political...

AS: In the political work, in the committees, in the committee, in the central committee, in Joint, in HIAS, in any, in the Palestinian, everything I’m in charge. And this youth, before they accuse me anything, the youth is a special committee.

EM: The youth movement?

AS: “They received a special instruction for the leader from the *kibbutz*. And I am coordinating the work to find for him food, to find for him jobs, and I have connection. Otherwise I’m not involved in that.” See, to, well I know what he’s want to put me. And he take all the passport, papers, Polish papers. There is a, there was a spying, it’s true, a young boy.

EM: Mmm hmm, so he was spying in that...

AS: Yeah.

EM: Okay. So...

AS: How is it, but I never deal with nobody. So he began to, the passport, [unclear], passport.

EM: Okay.

AS: “You are, you make the passport.” I say, “Yes. I make the passport. I’m responsible from this...”

EM: You did admit that you were making the false passports?

AS: This is the all the passports come from me.

EM: Yeah, but you...

AS: But they can call up in the, in...

EM: Lodz?

AS: No, they can call up in the passport...

EM: Office?

AS: Office.

EM: Mmm hmm.

AS: Only who is making the passports? They’re going to tell my name. They have to tell my name. They’re giving me the passport. The Palestinians [unclear], the committee, I was doing it. Well who is it? He say to her, “To who is responsible for this thing? Who give this Polish a passport?”

EM: Mmm hmm.

AS: I say, “Look, she give me the *kibbutz*, give me the names. They give me the pieces paper, and these people [unclear] in the Palestinian.

EM: You give to the Palesti-...

AS: [unclear] Palestinian. He, they was making these passports. They were, for

long term. [unclear] six, six week, eight weeks.

EM: Yeah. I don't understand. Were the Palestinian making the passports?

AS: Palestinian and the [unclear]. *Sokhnut* [Hebrew: Jewish Agency of Israel].

EM: Oh the...

AS: The Israel.

EM: Oh they were, they...

AS: The Is-, the Jewish Agency.

EM: Oh, the Israeli...

AS: The Jewish Agency.

EM: The Jews were making...

AS: Yeah, yeah, this is a Palestinian...

EM: [unclear]

AS: And they was making the passports. And when they, they give it. Anyhow, this I have to, I can't say nothing, to tell me who. I say, the *madrich* [Hebrew: leader] from *kibbutz*."

EM: The who?

AS: The *madrich*, the leader from *kibbutz*.

EM: From the *kibbutz*.

AS: What could I? What could I?

EM: Uh huh.

AS: They say, "Give me his name." "Aryeh." "You know, you're sympatic [sympathetic] to us." So, yeah, and I give him the name. "It's nice to work with you." Very easy. I say, "He left with the *kibbutz*." "Where is he?" "Palestine, or he is in Cyprus." That's the risk.

EM: Yeah.

AS: The, the...

EM: And was he really in, has he left for Palestine?

AS: He's working in the *kibbutz*. Yeah, when I come in Israel, it was very funny, he's working. I could put you in jail. I give him the name, exactly the name I tell him. I'm not lying to him. See for this, I never-- they never can touch him. They can, politically, yeah. I was agitating to go, but it's legal. He can leave Poland. The Polish wanted give you a legal passport.

EM: Yeah.

AS: They can't arrest me for that. They say in the [unclear] until one o'clock in the night. And they take [unclear], another episode what I don't want to relive. This can be all day long. And I left tomorrow morning, I left to Czechoslovakia, legally. My wife was thinking I'll never come back.

EM: Well, okay, you left to...

AS: And I left to Czechoslovakia, in the capital, from Prague in 19-...

EM: '48?

AS: Yeah, in '48.
EM: Uh huh.
AS: There is a picture and I can't find.
EM: And, yeah, okay, we'll look at it later.
AS: Yeah. And when I come there, the *Brihah*¹¹, this is the organization what make the illegal emigration in Europe...
EM: Right.
AS: Was called *Brihah*. They helped me...
EM: *Brihah*.
AS: They was doing mein *aliyah*.
EM: Right.
AS: Well *mein* emigration to Israel. And they say, "How is your wife?" I say, "My wife is pregnant two months." "You can't go if she's pregnant." Is already, this is already in April, in '48. Is already, the, almost the war is already going on, starting in Israel. And then they start sending officers, like I say.
EM: Why?
AS: For the...
EM: For the...
AS: Guarantee *aliyah*.
EM: For the what?
AS: For the guarantee *aliyah*. The, all *aliyah* was illegal, just to, for the-- and they told me, "Go in French." In...
EM: To go in France.
AS: In Paris, go in Paris. And so, "Wait until you have the possibility to go legal to Palestine," with certificates or something. Anyhow, I decided if I have to wait a little bit, I have time, I go in Bergen-Belsen. There is my cousin.
EM: Right.
AS: And the second sister from the cousin what I raised together in the home.
EM: A what? A sister of what?
AS: A sister from my cousin. She's my cousin.
EM: Oh, your cousin.
AS: When I raised in one family, when my, like I say, mine father die already.
EM: Yeah, so you were raised with...
AS: I raised with them. And I figure I better go there. And I come there. The *Brihah*, when we were by the German border from Czechoslovakia...
EM: With your wife?
AS: Sure, with everything, you know, coming. And they know me on the, even in the, on the border they know my name. I was working with them from time to time.

¹¹*Brihah* - (also spelled *Berihah* or *Brichah*) Underground movement, 1944 - 1948, both organized and spontaneous, of Jewish Holocaust survivors fleeing Eastern Europe for Palestine.

They...

EM: So you went to Bergen-Belsen.

AS: I go to Bergen-Belsen. My cousin come and picked me up from, because this is in the German, this is in American Zone.

EM: Right.

AS: And I have to go to the English Zone. And I stay in Bergen-Belsen almost a year. Almost a year. They give me a job. I find a job. I have to make a living, you know. I have to support. I work on the committee, in the Bergen-Belsen committee. And I receive some products--cigarettes, coffee or something, and this. And from this you sell and you can support yourself a little bit. I worked there, and I was waiting to go, you know.

EM: To Israel.

AS: Yeah. Then there is the baby born. We [unclear] is my daughter born. Like I said, my daughter was, she was born healthy, everything healthy. And when she start walking she can't walk. She is a...

EM: She couldn't walk.

AS: She can't walk. They find out she can't walk. She has, the hip was dislocated. And if she was growing up she going be walking on one side. Then we find out from a cousin and she was already about more than a half a year in United States, she say in Philadelphia-- she was in Philadelphia--she is, there is a Shriner...

EM: Hospital.

AS: ... Hospital, where they take you with no money, special children, crippled children. And here you're going during the war. And I'm sure nobody going take care of you with your child. Incidentally, I tell you privately I believe I tell, my friend in *kibbutz* in Israel, her daughter, had the same problem. And she was, I saw her, she they refuse her to take in the army. There was a big disappointment for anybody. And she is walking on one side.

EM: She is, oh.

AS: And then I come...

EM: She is walking with a bad limp, right?

AS: Yeah, yeah, and then I come.

EM: So you came to Philadelphia.

AS: Then I come in Philadelphia and I make it very fast, don't ask me how. I make it very fast.

EM: How? Who helped you?

AS: [quiet]

EM: Oh, okay.

AS: Well, I make it fast. I decided, you know, with the...

EM: Okay, so you came to Philadelphia and...

AS: And...

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EM: Your daughter was taken to the Shriner Hospital.

AS: To the Shriner Hospital, yeah. And she was couple months in the hospital. They release her. Another couple months. They, the doctor was one from the, this doctor, Dr. Mohl [phonetic], is he was for the army doctor in the war time. Well he say no operation. He want put her in cast. When he try everything...

EM: In a cast.

AS: And he was doing this, he was doing, yeah doing, so in a year, one year, she is, can walk with crutches. And she start walking normal. For 20 years she was going to check, every year she have to check at this same hospital.

EM: Okay. Now...

AS: Yeah. And now she no...

EM: Now she is okay.

AS: And now she is okay.

EM: Okay, now did, do you have any other children?

AS: Well...

EM: And what did you do...

AS: And the other...

EM: ...in the States?

AS: The other was born here. She was two months.

EM: So it was a daughter, oh, Hannah, right.

AS: Yeah, [unclear]. When she-- we come, and she's born here. She's born here and here my wife have to carry in a cast...

EM: Had to carry...

AS: [unclear] very, very bright. You can't carry [unclear] cast. And I work maybe nine, ten hours a day. And they give me 75 cents an hour. And at the third floor with no fan my wife have a really, a hard time.

EM: You had a hard time.

AS: A hard time, a very hard time. Let me tell...

EM: You working as a what? As a bookbind-...

AS: As a bookbinder, yeah.

EM: Okay.

AS: Seventy-five cents and I, the boss tell me work how long we wanted.

EM: You what?

AS: Work how long, how many hours you wanted, how many days you want. And so I worked Saturdays, Sunday. Anyhow, this is the...

EM: Okay.

AS: ...the work.

EM: Tell me, your two daughters, did they go to a regular school then?

AS: Yeah, they go in a regular school. They were...

EM: They finished high school?

AS: They finish high school. They was going in college. One was going in Temple and Girls'...

EM: Temple.

AS: Girls' High, Temple. The other was going in Germantown, and in Penn State in Main Campus. Graduate but graduate extra year.

EM: They graduated.

AS: Yeah, yeah, and they are teachers.

EM: They both are teachers.

AS: Yeah. One is regular teacher and the other, *oy*, is a Special Education...

EM: Special...

AS: And she have a hard time.

EM: Tell me something...

AS: She wanted to do for the, in English you say for the *mensch*s. She want to do a good thing.

EM: For humanity.

AS: For humanity. She is a, have a hard time with these students, specialist in, special little ones.

EM: Okay, now...

AS: And they are married and they have, I have four grandchildren, two and two, a girl and a boy. And they have very good husbands.

EM: Did they marry survivors?

AS: Eh, almost no.

EM: No. What do you mean almost?

AS: One was married to, he's born here, the family, for a generation born here.

EM: Oh.

AS: And the other, the older was married a German, the parents was German. They escaped in 1938. They was in the English Army and he is born here.

EM: So, oh...

AS: And so they are not...

EM: So he was born here.

AS: ...not survivors [unclear]. And after two years when I finish my problems, my daughter, a little, with a less work, you know, only nine hours, I start working back to my promise about the Holocaust. And this I was doing, like I say, when I work, when I come nine, I work till nine o'clock even. And I organized the organization from the Jewish Holocaust Survivors and I make, the plan is to make a system, to make, to can exist, even 50 and 60 years, not to build only of Holocaust, just to build like a group of people what needed each other, to help each other, to smile at each other, to dance with, to [unclear]. And this organization was really after 42 years, they doing the same thing. The main thing is teaching the Holocaust, and we have all the activities what any member, Jewish culture. Like I say, economically and politically, help for Israel is the

organization there.

EM: Do you...

AS: Work in the Jewish community from the first day? Yes, Jewish Federation. And after many, many years, in 1960, is the, boiling the idea in my mind to put a monument in Philadelphia. This is...

EM: The first monument.

AS: The first monument in the United States. And in the center of city later. And this is, I think, a normal person was not dreaming about I think that this was possible. For two reasons: the first thing, the survivors had no opportunity to put a monument, economically. And the Jewish community was not ready for that sort of thing. They no want to listen, really, the stories from a survivor. They can't take the stories from my very heart. They no want to listen to them. So if they feel a little bit not comfortable I don't want to go and disturb them you know. Is no Jewish group was even sympatic [sympathetic] about erecting a monument in Philadelphia. Not Jewish organization, not even one was...

EM: In favor of the...

AS: In favor to erecting a monument. So how we going to succeed it?

EM: So but you did succeed.

AS: Yeah. Stubbornness succeeded. With no money. With raising pennies by the survivor in the '60s was not-- they can't afford it, to raise money. And the trick was it using, we have to use a lot of tricks, we learned, I learned to, is not to involve the organizations, even not to talk to them. There is nobody who wants to listen. And in, when I was looking for individual. And this was my, [unclear].

EM: So the individuals who fought...

AS: My experience is to work with, like in Warsaw, [unclear] individual. And I was lucky together with other people what help me. I'm not taking all the credit for myself. And when I find the right people, with the help from some other like I say, a few people what helped me, helped us, together, and we find a open door to reach and influence people what was even in any group in Philadelphia affiliated. And they come like individual. And they help us to raise money. They help us to raise money. We find in them the connection. But he was, also, the sculptor, Nathan Rappaport, was a member in the same movement before the war in Warsaw in *Hashomer Hatzair*. This was helping a little bit too, to find connection to him. I find out he is in New York. And...

EM: Was he a survivor?

AS: Yeah! He survive...

EM: He survived.

AS: In Warsaw. He was in Warsaw, he run away from Warsaw, 1940, '39. And he built the first monument in Warsaw. He built the famous monument.

EM: Yes.

AS: What he dreaming in Warsaw, with the faces even by the monument, they

are not Jewish. They are gentile faces. Why he...

EM: For the money.

AS: He have to [unclear] people. Anyhow, and we start doing this. When we have the first couple dollars we have the influence people there, then we start looking, and we have already the plan what we want, then we start looking for some organizations. Then we start approaching. I remember we raised money. The Federation have to give us a clearance to raise money.

EM: They what? A clearance.

AS: A clearance.

EM: Clearance to raise money.

AS: We have the clearance to raise money. And we have to sign a piece of paper with, how I can reach people when I'm not campaigning to them. And they find a piece of paper and they call me for a court-martial. "Here is a paper. You promised to [unclear] it", but this was the fact. Anyhow, my lawyers was the American. They defend me, a few [unclear]. Anyhow, the monument is a fact.

EM: And you were able to...

AS: And then, when we have, the monument cost us about \$50,000. We raised approximately about \$35,000, \$36,000. Then no more. We can't raise no more. And here is three weeks before the monument is arriving from Italy. Is, they cast them there. Then we go, the Federation bail us out, \$12,000, \$13,000. And they, from this day they are partners to the monument. Now on the monument we have inscription.

EM: By the...

AS: Erected by the Jewish Holocaust Survivors [unclear] the different names, and the Federation of Jewish Agencies. Why we was dealing with, otherwise the survivors have to give a gift the city. This is a gift to the city. That, and this was a fact. And from them started to make sure the money. This is too much I'm talking. And from this started the day, and we organized the memorial committee. You see...

EM: Right.

AS: The monument stimulate. What does the monument mean? To stimulate the activities in the community. Nobody is naive, not naive. The monument, the stone is only to stimulate. And this was...

EM: That's the [unclear] center.

AS: And that what's it accomplished. And from this day we establish a memorial committee, survivors from born-American Jewish here. And we started all the activities, memorial services. It's and the [unclear].

EM: And *Yom Hashoah* services.

AS: *Yom Hashoah*, around the monument. We organized the activities, youth symposiums for youth, gentile and Jewish, for, as a, for, two, three days, 1000 children every year come and we have a seminar. The Mordecai Anielewicz contest, with 300 taking part.

ABRAM SHNAPER [5-1-98]

EM: The Mordecai Anielewicz contest.

AS: Anielewicz contest.

EM: Throughout the schools.

AS: The leader from the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. And they receive prizes. And it's going already twelve, fourteen years. This is an accomplishment.

EM: Well I know you did a very great accomplishment. And I thank you very much, Mr. Shnaper, for this enlightening interview. Thank you.