

Tape nine, side one:

HS: ...traveling with our *echelon*, the destination to Belobozhnitsa Oblast. I remember once we stopped in Moscow, in the outskirts of Moscow. And they gave us permission to go to Moscow to see the Red Square and to see the mausoleum. And it was for us a very big experience. The first time we saw the Moscow underground, the metro, very, very beautiful, everything from marble, all kind of extreme beautiful, with mechanical stairs going up and down. And we was going over there. And from there we went to the Red Square, seeing Lenin's mausoleum. I have to say we did everything without knowing the Russian language. Now the average Russian person was very sympathetic to us. And people was asking us, "Where are we going and how are we going?" They recognize in our dressing that we are not Russians, because we was very dressed in western style and not [tape off then on; music]. And our clothing was not for the very cold winter climate. I remember I froze my ear, because I had no good hat. Being on the train, being in the subway, and meeting I remember a Russian couple, probably one was Jewish, teachers. And they gave us their address we should write them when we come to the destination. It's clear that we didn't understood what they mean and how they mean and we lost contact. Accidentally, some, in that time they told me that Kaganovich was the main builder from the subway in Moscow, that Jewish man what was Stalin's second hand, was building that subway. And they have maybe a few hundred thousand people died over there, prisoners that was building that subway.

So we continue our traveling north and north. And the picture was changing. It's getting very nordic. We was believing that we are in Siberia. Not knowing...

HR: Lots of snow?

HS: What?

HR: Lots of snow?

HS: Lots of snow. Tremendous amounts of snow we never saw. And the tracks have to be constantly cleaned with the special trains, keeping the track clean. And the sides from the tracks was built such special branches to keep away the snow. And hundreds of thousands of peasants was constantly working on the sides from the train and keeping it in working order.

So we continued traveling until we come to a station, Cherepovetz. This was the end station where it was our destination. It was a shattering experience. We was sure that we are on the end of the world. We looked down from the train. We saw only a waste of snow, small houses. Snow we was believing until the top of the roof. And from every chimney was going out a smoke. And it was so shattering for us to see. And we was thinking how people can live over there. We didn't know that this is just the beginning. We will go much, much deeper in the snows in the forest. So we went down from the trains. And we was, I don't remember we was, yeah, we was walking on this. We was walking on the streets. Not on the sidewalks, only the middle of the street. And the whole walking in

that city, in that town was not, the sidewalks was filled with snow and everything was just going in the middle of the street. And no cars, no trucks, nothing, only sleighs and horses. And it was very, very amazing.

They took us to such a hostel for farmers. They call it *dom krestianina*. This means where the farmer come to the town he can stay a day or two over there. We was sleeping over there a night. And they was feeding us over there. And they was giving us soap. And they was giving us candies. We was very surprised that people from the streets come to us and we want to sell them the soap and the candies. We didn't know that there's such a scarcity that they couldn't get it. And they make us a dinner. This should be a very famous dinner with the chicken. And every chicken looked like a average bird, a small, small thing. You know, they went out of themselves just to show us how friendly they are to us. And that time the first time I saw a big Russian river. We went to that river, and it was very, very wide and snow and ice and very big wooden barges was covered in that ice. And it was so amazing for us for people what we never see such things. You couldn't see that the end of the expanse, the end from the second side from the river. And on the barges people was living, because we saw smoke going out from the chimneys. And this was very unusual, very strange for us. And that--being in that *dom krestianina*, and that means in that farmer's hostel, they start to give us out clothing, special Russian clothing, winter clothing for the work in the forest. Is a clothing what is made inside with cotton, like a Chinese style. Cotton pants and cotton jackets. They call it *fufaika*. And they give us the *valenkis*. The *valenkis* means boots made out from...

HR: Wool.

HS: Felt. And right away there we saw the terrible disorganization from the Russians. A half of people was getting that stuff, and a half a people was saying they will get it on the place of destination. I didn't like that idea and I say to my father, "Father, I believe is something wrong. If we're not getting here in a big town where it should be the headquarter from that *Trust Cherepovetz Les*-" this means a *trust* what is responsible for the all work in the forest- "If we are not getting here that merchandise, where you will getting in the forest?" And to my not so pleasant surprise it wasn't so. We didn't get it either. We didn't get it in the back. When we come to the forest we didn't get that clothing. Being over there two nights in that town of Cherepovetz, they put us on a sleighs and we was traveling a whole week, day and night on sleighs on that river what I say before, that wide Shecksna' River. And we was sleeping at night in villages. And the first time I saw a Russian village, the houses are made from trees, from whole trees, cut up trees. And between the tree, and nothing maked fancy inside, only the same wood what is outside is inside. And between the trees is put in *mech*. How would I call this, what grows on the forest, to keep warm?

HR: Moss?

HS: Yes. And they covered with moss the--it was looking very wild and very unusual. And a half of that room was a big oven. They call it a *Ruskya Petchka*. And people are sleeping on that oven. They're cooking in that oven.

HR: Like a *pripichick*?

HS: *Pripichik*.

HR: Same thing?

HS: Yeah, no, I believe a *pripichik* was smaller. And this was a really, this was using a half a room was such a oven. In that oven they was cooking, was baking. And they said on Sunday they're taking baths inside, inside in the oven. And on top they are sleeping. We have like a bed. And we was sleeping.

HR: And you could stand up inside the oven?

HS: You not can stand up. You can sit up.

HR: Sit up.

HS: Sit up. And there was...

HR: They took the basins in...

HS: Right, in the oven was washing. It was such a style. I had a, from this a, I had a once a surprise. When I was already much more Russian I was going around in the villages looking for food. I come to one village and I opened the door and I see two legs stretching out from the...

HR: From the oven.

HS: From that hole. I was very scared. I didn't know what it is. In that time the *Holyaikah*, he took a bath in that oven. Because, they have no, on the doors they have no...

HR: Locks?

HS: They have no locks. They have only just such wooden pieces of wood that you put in a piece of wood from the outside and you open this. There is not locks on these homes. So we was in that, we slept in such rooms. The people was very unfriendly, because we was imposed on them. The Russian people are like, the Russian, the average person is like in prison and that government is always imposing on him his will. Is like a occupational force. And the farmer, the peasants already used to this. No, I wouldn't say that he is happy. Because there comes the Commissar or the *Politbureau* what was the leader from our slave trade come in and say, "Four people here and four people there," and they're just sending. The peasants are grumbling and they have to accept us. And they're putting up a *samovar* and making hot tea. It means hot water. There is no tea over there. I never saw tea over there.

HR: But they call it tea.

HS: They call it tea. And they're making something from tea, growing some from that forest, some dried berries, herbs you know. And they're cooking, they call it tea. We call it *Kipiatok*. *Kipiatok* means boiled water. So they have to by order of them to make that *kpiatok* and they get a little more friendly when we put up the candies what we get in that Cherepovetz. And we invite them to share with us so they start to be more friendly.

And it's amazing too that in that, you come in to such a room. You see from one side the all the Russian *ikonas*, icons how you call them here?

HR: Mmm hmm, icons.

HS: Icons.

HR: Icons.

HS: With lights. Very old idol. In the other side you see posters, propaganda posters, from the Soviet regime.

HR: So that these Russians were still carrying on their religion?

HS: Every Russian farmer...

HR: Had an idol.

HS: Carrying on the religion. How he can, how he is involved with that Soviet regime, he's carrying on with the religion, carrying on with the holidays, celebrating the holidays. And not only this, the seasons of his work, he is still calling the old names. Let's see even cutting he's doing *spaskoye* and sowing he's doing in this holi-, every holiday, every work in the farm is involved with some *pravoslavnyi* [Orthodox] holiday. You know this?

HR: Like with the Jewish calendar.

HS: Yeah, you see the calendar, they are not accepting the modern Soviet calendar.

HR: [unclear].

HS: And not only the calendar. This is like a church calendar. And every big thing in the village is involved with a special religious festival. You see in that festival we're doing this. In that festival we're doing this. And how the official propaganda, they have in the villages still the people are doing the, what they're doing before. And they have special official propaganda rooms. They call it *Krasnyi Ugolok*. It means the Red Corner. And the special people what are making the propaganda, only I no believe they have too much impression on the Russian peasants. And so you can find in the houses from the Russian peasants one wall with official Soviet propaganda banners, that, "Work Better," and do this better, and how strong we are. And you see ships and you see guns. And the other side you see the holy idols. And the woman before they're going to sleep, I saw they're making the sign of a cross. And they're not sleeping on beds. They have beds, nice covers and nice pillows. Pillows to the ceiling. No, they're sleeping on the floor. They're sleeping on the floor on *puluks* [phonetic] the fur, the sheeps...

HR: Sheepskin.

HS: Sheepskin, very big one. They are putting on and they're sleeping on the floor, in their old clothing. They don't take off the clothing. Just they're taking off the shoes. They're keeping the shoes near the door. When you're coming in to a farmer in winter time, they have such a basin, how do they call it?

HR: [unclear].

HS: No, to clean the snow.

HR: Oh, a shovel?

HS: Not a shovel.

HR: Or a brush?

HS: A brush.

HR: Brooms?

HS: Such a special broom made from the weeds. You clean your *valenki*. You take out the shoes and you go in without shoes to the farmer's house. The floors are made from wood, very beautiful, clean. And they're washing with sand. It's a whole celebration. Every Friday they're washing with sand. They force us to do this too. And our women wasn't too happy to do that work. So this was the, I just give example how was my first impression from the Russian farmer in a Russian village.

We continue how I say a few days and nights traveling. And we was going constantly in wilder and wilder country. And this was over there a canal system what was coming from the White Sea to the Volga. Is a part from the system is summertime in the canal, like Panama Canal, you know? Panama Canal?

HR: Panama.

HS: Yes. And they come in. And they have such a system of canals where the ships goes in, changing the level of the water and can go on to the Volga River and the Caspian Sea. This was a made canals what comes from the White Sea to the Sheksna to the Volga to the Caspian Sea. And this is a very old canal system made too by Katarina the Great. And it was made later by Polish prisoners of war was continuing making this. And they was dying over there. When we was traveling later I was a sailor later. I will explain this later. I saw graves of Polish soldiers with a Catholic cross. Because the Pravoslav they have a different cross. The old buildings they have a different cross, with Polish names. And I ask questions. They explain to me that Polish prisoners of war was doing that part of that canal work. So we was going with that canal system. I have to say that whole winter traveling goes everything on the river. The river is the highway. The river is the life system. For winter time there is no ways that something can go. And the tractors and cars and trucks, and everything was going with the rivers. In summertime the whole supply to the far country in the forest, everything comes with the river. When the river gets frozen you have to have all the reserves already for the whole winter. And if there's something missing, you have such a Russian proverb, "*Kogda parokhody poydut, vsya budet.*" This means, "When the winter will be over, the ships will come; everything will be. Now you have to suffer."

So, we continued to go through that canal system until we come to a small town. They call Bielozhersk, on the lake, on the White Lake. Bielozhersk means white lake. This is a very old historical time still from Ivan Groznyi. Ivan the...

HR: Great.

HS: The, Ivan the...

HR: The Terrible.

HS: From Ivan the Terrible. And there is over there a *kreml* still from this time. And there is nothing change from this time. When we come in over there, they put us in again in such a hostel, a farmer's hostel. And we went out outside to look in that a *kreml*, surrounded with old stores, everything made from stones. We have the impression we are five, six hundred years before. The lifestyle is not changed. The people wearing the same clothes like they was wearing. They're carrying the water from the well the same way. And they're using the sleighs, the small *chanashkas*, the same way. They're talking the same dialect. Later they explain us. The same way how it was from that time. We saw in that *kreml* stores with doors like a *crepost'*. A *crepost'* means like a fortress. They have keys, metal keys, to open this. The sides...

HR: You're talking now about, what is the *kreml*? The...

HS: The, every such a fortification is the name a *kreml*. They say Moscow have a *kreml*. Yaroslavl have a *kreml*. Volograd a *kreml*. The same where you put some churches and houses, fortified with a wall around. They call it a *kreml*.

HR: And outside of this though is the other houses outside.

HS: Outside is the town what was existing under protection from the *kreml*.

HR: Oh yes, I understand.

HS: Because if was coming in the enemy, the Tartars or somebody is coming, the people was running in...

HR: In behind that wall.

HS: In that, yeah, and fighting back. And they was under protection from that *kreml*. And outside from that *kreml* are stores where the *kupiec*, the dealers was, to them was supplied the merchandise from Siberia or from Asia with the river. And they was selling over there the furs, you know, from the forest, from everything. And it's everything was so kept up over there, because it's not progress. And it was very shattering if you want to study this. Most people was involved in their misery. They was in a terrible misery. Imagine traveling day and night on sleighs. And we was cold maybe forty below zero. Every few miles we have to go out from the sleigh and run after this because we can...

HR: Freeze.

HS: We can freeze. The Russians know already, a Russian doesn't sit on the sleigh. He runs after the sleigh.

HR: But your mother couldn't.

HS: She couldn't? She did.

HR: She did?

HS: Sure.

HR: Oh!

HS: My mother and other mothers and children. Children was dying. We buried maybe ten small children in Cherepovetz.

HR: Oh.

HS: They didn't make it right. Our friends Ackerman, right away their twins [unclear]. Plenty of people was dying. They couldn't make it. No, the Russian, if you, Russia, in Russia dying is a daily occurrence. You don't make a big deal of this. And we was so traveling to that town. And again in that town they make second distribution. Where we will go to the *lesopunkt*. *Lesopunkt* means point in the forest where people should go. And they make a little selection. Weaker people they send in bigger *posiolkis*. A *posiolkis* means a small settlement what exists only for that forest business. Everything in that small town is involved with the forest. Let's see--they're cutting the trees, and supplying, and a hospital and accounting. This is just made small settlements they call *posiolki* where they do this. And the weaker people and the single people, they kepted closer in the *posiolkis* because they was afraid they will not be able to do the work. I have to say we wasn't a too big bargain for the Russians. The Russians didn't expect such a element what I never saw a real forest. Not only talking the living in such conditions in temperature forty below zero. It was official policy, we have to work in the forest until it's fifty below zero. If it's more than fifty below zero we can stay home. So the youth, how much was the youth, the youth...

HR: Mr. Skorr...

HS: Yeah?

HR: How many people were involved? How many Jews?

HS: In our *echelon* was about maybe 4,000 people.

HR: 4,000.

HS: Yeah. This is *echelons*, maybe 40 trains or some 40 wagons. Later they make distributions. And they're putting away here, here, and here. And it's a big, a tremendous territory. The territory tremendous distances. So, like for the Czar, if they send away something to Siberia, they don't have to watch him either. Because in winter time you can't...

HR: Run.

HS: Run away. You just will freeze if you run away. If they give you a sentence, six hundred miles from a river, from a train, from a road, then that's it. You no have to be arrested. And I had the impression that we are in the same conditions because was no way, nothing to do. And we are, we was sent, and I have to say that there are people from us was making a very good judgment. They saw the trouble what they are in and they start to claim they are sick. And they, right away they left them in the bigger towns where they had a chance to take, to do bigger jobs. We wasn't, I don't know, we wasn't involved in this or we wasn't so cunning, or we was enough strong. We didn't use nothing excuses to go where they sent us. Only we could because our sister was still unwell with her legs. And my mother was a sick woman. No, for some reason we didn't do it. And we, they choose us to send to Pokrovski mekh Lesopunkt. I know the names there because Pokrovski Mekh Lesopunkt, Potchtovayah Otdelenie Konevo. Potchtovayah Nyielena means the, the post department is Konevo. And Pokrovski Mekh Lesopunkt means this is a *mechanaziet*, mechanized forest point. No, the all mechanization is only on paper. We didn't see nothing

in that whole lie what I was saying that we live in towns and travel to the forest and go back. Was a terrible life.

From that Bielozhersk we still was traveling on sleigh six days and six nights, with a canal, Kozhevski Canal, to that Pokrovski Mekh Lesopunkt. Pokrovski Mekh Lesopunkt was only two barracks in that, a forest, a virgin forest, of hundreds of hundreds of miles...

HR: Covered with nothing but snow!

HS: Covered with nothing but pines, beautiful, terrible beautiful pines. It's a breathtaking beauty, breathtaking cold. And only two barracks in the forest, and a road for tractors. They did only one thing to us. The mother, and other women, and small children, they keep them in villages. And the working people like the men and the youth, they send to the two barracks. My mother was in a village they call this Siemenchevo. It was 25 miles from that...

HR: Barrack?

HS: From that barrack. We originally come to that village, Siemenchevo. The village is like a *kolkhoz*, a fish catcher *kolkhoz*. The main occupation from that *kolkhoz*, a *kolkhoz* is a collective...

HR: Farm.

HS: Farm. And the people are forced to go in that farm. They don't believe that somebody want to belong to this. *Kolkhozes* are slavery. It was like before, it's a really slavery like was 100 years ago, for the Czar, or like the slavery in United States before. Only they're using now a much more modern language in Russia and they say they're not slaves, they're a collective. How, why they are slaves either? A farmer had no either a passport what every citizen had. Every Russian citizen had a internal passport what enable him to move from city to city with special permission. A farmer have no passport either that he can move out from his village. He can go only to do some errands to a city and he have to come back in two, three nights. Because he's a, if no he would be arrested.

HR: Well, who, what is his background? They were prisoners there? Or they were...

HS: No, they was originally...

HR: Criminals that...

HS: No.

HR: Originally peasants?

HS: Originally peasants, farmers, until Stalin decide to collectivize.

HR: Originally from that part.

HS: From that part.

HR: Oh.

HS: Right? And who didn't want to go was sent away. He was [unclear] sent away further and he was destroyed. I was later in such a village where it was living the woman from the sent away people, from the exiled people what was a richer farmer. A richer farmer was if you have two cows and two horses and if you employ a few, two

people, you're already a rich farmer. You're already a enemy from the class and you have to be destroyed. So in the '30s, Stalin collectivized everything and everything, everybody have to go to that *kolkhoz*, willing or not willing. And we come to that, how long you have time?

HR: Another five minutes.

HS: Let's finish it in five minutes, yeah. I will remember if we are in Siemenchevo.

Tape nine, side two:

HS: After we come to our destination to a village, Siemenchevo, and that, I believe there was a *politruk* and Yastrivov was his name, put us in to one, to the peasant that we should sleep over there, we should live over there. They accept us with a certain hostility. And it's logically, like strange people coming in to a house not invited, only by force of the power that somebody comes in and say, "People will live with you." It's clearly that that *Hoziaikah*, this means the, that woman from the household, was hostile to us. [tape off then on; music] When we come in to, that woman was hostile to us. First of all we didn't speak her language and we didn't understood what she is talking. And she expect from us that we know the rituals in the house, their behavior. But we wasn't used to this kind of behavior. Let's see, they have nice beds with the all kind of pillows. And they demand from us that we sleep on the floor. And they were sleeping too on the floor. This is their way. The beds are very nice covered; everything is very nice but nobody is sleeping on that. They're just putting their fur coats, the *shubas* made from sheepskin, on the floor, and they're sleeping so without taking off the clothes.

HR: Well what do they do with the beds?

HS: The bed just is like a representation. They look nice like here a sofa in the living room. And they expect from us that we should do the same way. And we have to do it. Now, we was very uncomfortable. Second thing, they wasn't talking to each other, that couple. This was a old couple. How I understand, they had a son in the army, in the army when they occupied the western Ukraine. They was in Lvov. And when she find out that we are from that part, she say that her son is very lonesome in that big city in Lvov because he is not used to so many people. He's more used to the forest and the fields. And she start a little, be a little more friendly to us. And we wasn't used to the language. They didn't talk to each other nice and gentle. They just was yelling, such a very rough language between the husband and wife, not like in a normal talking like people talk nice. They just was [unclear], like dog would barking. And this was their way of communication. And how we understand later, he was a brigadier from a brigade what was catching fish in the White Lake what I explained before, a tremendous White Lake. And his business in the *kolkhoz* was taking out his people and go to the lake and catching fish. Even in the winter time, they make big holes in the ice and they're catching so the fish. And he was a sick person. He was always complaining about his stomach. Probably he had a ulcer.

How, I was talking already about how it looks a Russian peasant house. Now this was shocking us more, because we was a little in that house, in the same, well, in the same house, one side was living the cows and the chickens and a pig. And only a corridor divided from the living quarters. And they didn't have toilets, nothing, just we have to go over there where the cows were. And for us it was such a traumatic experience, was so shocking, and so scary there at night to go somewhere. And you feel the smell from the cows and everything. And on top there was pieces of meat, pigs, half pigs was being frozen over

there. And they was keeping this during the winter. And outside the whole all sides of the walls was covered with, prepared with cutted wood, because they was using that wood to heat up the *ruskya pietchka*. *Ruskya pietchka*, this means a very big oven which takes over a half of a kitchen. And you do all cooking, the all baking, and on top of there when it is very cold you sleep over there.

HR: Yeah, I asked you before...

HS: Yeah.

HR: It's like a *pripichik*.

HS: A *pripichik*.

HR: But it's bigger.

HS: Much bigger.

HR: Much, but the same idea.

HS: Correct. How she explain to us later, she was working *doyarka*. This means she was taking milk from the cows. And she say she prepared the whole meal in the morning, put in the *ruskya pietchka*, in that oven. And when she come back at night, the meal is ready. This was the function from that...

HR: Like a crock pot. [chuckles]

HS: Yeah. This was the function from that *ruskya pietchka*. And she told us, it's a other function. They are taking baths inside. Well they're going in inside with a pail of water and they're washing themselves, on place from going to a *banya*, means to a Finish sauna.

HR: And then they put the food in there.

HS: Yeah, they're living very primitive and very dirty. And their whole entertainment is when women coming together they're singing and they're, how do you call it?

HR: [unclear].

HS: No, they're making clothes.

HR: Oh, knitting?

HS: Knitting clothes. Not...

HR: Weaving?

HS: Yes.

HR: Weaving.

HS: And they're taking knives and looking for louses in their head. This is their entertainment. It's clear that we couldn't adjust ourself to this. This wasn't the end of our problem with that *Hoziaikah*. Later find out that we have to go to the forest, to the deep in the forest to work. And the mother and the children should be left with the *Hoziaikah*. The *Hoziaikah* was resenting this, because I understand now that it's a very imposing thing that you put four people, strange people what they no understand the language, they don't know the behavior how to do, they should be always constantly over there. And my mother tried to help her, you know? I no believe that she was able to help her, because it's a whole

enterprise. Their floors are clear like a mirror. They are taking a special sand and they're taking a special bricks and knocking this to pieces. And every Friday they're just rubbing that floor a whole day. And the floor is so clean and so white, you know, it's made from beautiful wood. And when you come in to that house you had to take off your shoes outside. You're just walking in in the socks. Now they are not wearing socks. They're just wearing such a *shmatas* they're covering the legs. So just they're taking this everything off and walking around in the house without shoes. It's clear we wasn't used to this. Now, we have to do it how they say.

When she was getting used to us a little, she saw our clothing and she saw our pillows made from feathers. She say, she put her head on that pillow like it is so nice and soft and she say, "Maybe 100 years ago by the Czar we have such things. No, no more now." And she told us, "Don't go in the forest with this clothing. That clothing will be destroyed in a few weeks. And never, never in your life will you get back such clothings here." Later in the practice we saw how she was very right.

So, it comes a Monday, and that Yastrebov, means that *politruk*, that political leader from that *Trest cha politles*. Took all men and all single people. The women and the children what they was in that village in different houses, and they took us to the forest. The name was Zilonyi Bor. Zilonyi Bor was green forest. And we was walking to that forest maybe 30 miles. This is the procedure of doing things. We was walking. We come to that forest.

HR: Thirty miles?

HS: Thirty miles in snow.

HR: How long did it take you?

HS: We was walking a whole day. They say they are doing this in a few hours. Basically they are doing this on skis. And we wasn't used to skis. The whole transportation in that northern part of Russia, if you have no sleighs with horses, you're using skis. Even children, small children going to school--there is not a school in every village, there is a school for a few villages--they're taking skis. They're taking a ax, and they're taking a flint. It means such a stone, to make fire if the wolves are attacking them in the forest. And the small children are prepared so. They're going with skis with a small ax to cut down a tree to make a fire. And they have that stone like they do 100 years ago. They're making a fire in protection from the wolves. It's clear that we wasn't used to this. We have to walk, we was walking to that forest. Means all men and all single youth, boys and girls. We come to that, our point in Zilonyi Bor. This was only one barrack. One barrack and in that barrack, the barrack was divided for men and for women. And that barrack had a space like a small stove, and a kitchen where it is like a canteen, and a small restaurant.

HR: So wait, Mr. Skorr, did everybody make that trip all right?

HS: Oh yeah.

HR: Your mother was able to walk?

HS: We have to. In Russia is not a question. If you're not able, you have to die.

HR: Did anybody fall down?

HS: Oh yeah.

HR: But you picked them up and you...

HS: Fall down. We picked them up. They're falling down later. I will explain what's happening later when we was working in that forest. There the law of life is very severe and very cruel. Not talking either about the Soviet system. Just talking about the Russian system living so up north. Or you're able to live, or you're able to survive; if no, you have to die. And when we start to complain in the beginning to them, they say, "*Privyknesh*", you'll get used to this. "*Esline privyknesh*", to *sdokhnesh*." This means, "If you no get used, you will drop dead." And they mean it in the full sense of word, without sentiment. Just a few statements.

So, in that part from that barrack, where it was the men, was divi-, it was maybe 50 beds. And everybody from us get a bed. And we was living over there. And in the beginning was a few girls with us. And they was living in the other side where the women's apartment, where the women are living. Because Russian women are too working in the forest, in winter time exactly like men. How I say about that modern slavery what the Russian system put up on the old peasants, on their own people, they're forcing them in the winter time when there is not enough work in the *kolkhozen*, they're forcing them to go to the forest and to cut tree for that *Trest cha politles*. And everybody have to make his [unclear]. And the farmers are, the peasants are used to this. They're accepting, and they're living a whole week over there in that barrack, cutting trees and doing the other things what I will explain later. And the weekend they're going home to the villages. When they're coming back from the village for Monday they're bringing all their own food. And they're living very well. And they are used to this.

HR: So their attitude is good. They're not depressed. They're not depressed.

HS: They are not depressed. This is their way of life. They're accepting. And they are rebellious. They are bitter. No, this is what it is. Who didn't accept this in the beginning was physically destroyed. In every village was a terrible fight between the poor and the richer farmers. Who didn't want to accept this was physically destroyed. Later was put up a system, let's see how I say that Yastrebov, what I say that *politruk*, he was the overlord on the, in the village. He dictate whatever have to be done and the peasants have to do. They was rebellious. They was cursing him. No, only they was doing what have to be done. If no, they would be arrested and sent away to other locations.

So we come in over there and they have for us a whole speech. And they say that we will do the work in the forest. Not understanding that we have never saw either a forest in our life. Never, most people didn't have either a ax in their hands. You know, they don't understand this. Because Russian people, the original from the Russian people is the village. Every Russian person can take a ax, take a saw. It can be too their professor. Tomorrow take him to the forest and he is working. They didn't understood that we don't know this. And they start to have very bad relation with us. They say that we are *lodyris*.

That means we are people what no want to work. They didn't understand that we are not used to this. So, and they was a little bitter to us. Analyzing that whole situation, when they're taking, analyzing this everything, I see that we have to work. It's not enough to go around and to complain and to cry, because nothing will come out from this. And if we will not get used to this we really will disappear over there. So, they make from us brigades. There was over there a master Oshikov. His name was Oshikov. He took us to a storage place where the people are cutting, let's say people are cutting the trees in the forest. With horses they're taking out the trees, the cut trees. They call it *triulovka*. They, and they are taking the trees to a big storage place where these have to be put up like *shtadles*. Later come big tractors with big sleds like trains. And that wood have to be loaded. And that wood is going on a big truck far away to a river. And over there in winter time when the river is frozen the wood is banded. They make such a *plotz*, how do you call it?

HR: Bundles.

HS: Bundles. Big tremendous bundles. And when the summer comes, the wood is already banded. Come ships and they're taking that wood to, with the river, with the canals, with the Sheksna, to the Volga, to the Caspian Sea, everywhere and to export to Great Britain for the railroad. So, they give us a job to load the wood on the big sleds from the tractors. It's clear that we didn't know how to work. And what else? To their eternal shame, they give us the worstest work. What the Russian didn't want to do, they give to us. What means the worstest work? If that, the sleigh is far away from that wood, they put us to work over there. If there is very small pieces of wood that we, a whole day we're just waiting and we can't fill up a sleigh, they give it to us. And there was over there a small boy, a young boy, Mitia. He was measuring this everything. He was the guard. Dead and alive, he decided what you will have and what you're not going to have. And what he was doing, what already we was doing with our inability to work, he give, wrote our work to the Russians. So, he later at night, they was always drinking vodka with them and laughing from us, and showing that we are not good workers. He, our work he wrote over to them.

And how I say in the beginning, they didn't give us that clothing what they promise us, in Cherepovetz. They promise us they will give us clothing in the forest. We come to the forest, they didn't give us the clothing. And we started to work in our clothing. Our European clothing is not used how they work in a forest, because it's too long and too clumsy. The how do you call it, the sleeves are too long, and when the sleeve get frozen, when you work in snow, start to tear everything apart. So when my sleeve get frozen on my shirt I just tear it off. In two weeks I have no more shirts left. We have no shoes because they didn't give us. So they took away from the women what wasn't working, from our women, what accidentally was getting the *valenkis*. They took away from them the *valenkis* and they brought it to us in the forest. And let's see, they give me a pair of *valenkis*. I explain already what this means. Is made from felt. So, they give me *valenkis* that are a little too small. In the morning you can put them on. Now when they're getting wet, they were getting tight, you can't take them off. So I was working a whole day in the forest and

then at night I come home, I have to lay down on my bed. And maybe ten people start to tear my legs--the boots from my legs, and you couldn't take off. And sometimes whole night I was sleeping in the *valenkis* because I couldn't take them off.

I just want to give a little how it was, that work, how, in what atmosphere we was acting. I saw that this is not a resort. This is not a way going around always bitter and not doing nothing. And I talked to the people, "Let's see what the works mean. And let's not only to go around complaining. Let's start to do something. Because they're laughing from us." They're giving us five *ruble* a day. And the five *ruble* a day we can only buy in the morning one cereal and 200 gram of bread, and coming back to get again a soup full of water, made from oats that horses was in Poland eating. And I say, "If we will not start to work and we will not start to earn a little more money, we will die here from lack of nourishment. So I organized a brigade. And seeing that the system of work, I organized that whole system of work. We wasn't, I devised a plan we shouldn't carry the wood in our hand because it's too heavy. I made sleds, boards. And we was shifting that wood on the boards. And two people was standing constantly on the...

HR: Platform?

HS: On the platform, on that sleigh, and loading this up. In this way we was working much faster than the Russians. And they start to recognize that we are better workers. And they call us the brigade of Skorrupa. This was our name. And I was with my father and two more people. And we started to earn a little more money. And they're putting up a, over there is always propaganda. There come that Yastrebov, that *politruk*. He put up a newspaper and they put us up on the wall newspaper that we are good workers. Now still from that whole thing we couldn't make a living, because we was getting ten *rubles* a day. And we have to send the money to our mother because she have to buy the stuff in the village. And we was demanding clothing. They didn't want to give it. They say they have no clothing, and the clothing have to come in from Konevo, from the headquarter. You know, "Now is winter time, and the clothing will come only when the river will..."

HR: Melt?

HS: Melt and everything will come. And we decided to make a strike. Not having the clothing, and not earning the money, we told them that we will not work until we will now get the clothing. They was very petrified with this because there wasn't such a thing like a strike in Russia. And I told them very clear that we will not go out to work until we will get the clothing what we have to have that everybody have to have.

HR: Weren't you afraid that they would just shoot you?

HS: Yes. We was afraid. No, we was very desperate. And I saw that the work what we are doing, we start to work harder, we start to do more. No we didn't get more. We just, they put us on there just on paper that we are good workers. But we didn't get nothing for this. And I tear all my shirts and I tear my jacket. And it's like that woman in the village told us, "In a few weeks you will need out clothing." So, and we decided to make a strike. We decided to make that strike. Right away come from the *NKVD*, from the

police it means, from the *NKVD*, on sleighs with horses. And they had a whole speech to us. We didn't understand a half from that speeches because we didn't speak so very well Russian. Only we explain to that man--there was one man who speak a little better Russian--we explain to that *nachalnik* from the *NKVD* that we have no clothing. And we had no where to buy clothing. And they're mistreating us. And we're entitled to clothing. Because I know a half a people was getting in Cherepovetz clothing. And we didn't get nothing is a sign that something is wrong. So we don't want to strike and we no want to be killed. We don't want to die from the hunger. We not want to die from cold. Because it was so cold we have to work until forty degrees below zero. This was the norm. If it's more than forty below, we no have to go out to the forest. And don't forget to go out to that storage place where we was to the loading zone. We have to walk maybe five miles in one direction and snow in the half and walking back. And until you come over there, you come with that piece of bread, that piece of bread was so frozen that you can cut this with a knife. So we had to make a fire and throw in that bread on a spear on, from the wood, and warm up that bread. And we was eating so that burned bread. So we, and the Russians aren't exposed to such things. They have their own food from the villages. Only we didn't have nothing. We have only two or three hundred gram of bread, one cereal in the morning, and one soup when we come home. So, or we will die this way or we will do a action. So we explained this to that *nachalnik* from the *NKVD* that we are not rebels. We just no want to die. We need all the merchandise. I believe that he saw the justice in our talking, and I believe he saw that something goes around of things. They was stealing from us everything, that *Mitia*, that master, what he was getting for us stuff, they were selling, not giving to us. They're selling to the Russians or taking to their home. There is no mercy over there, because they are used dying, you die and that's all. This is what they say, "*Ne privyknesh, to sdokhnesh.*"¹⁵ And probably that man from the *NKVD* saw what's going on and he probably wrote to Moscow because in a week come a commission from Moscow, from that *Trest Chapotitles*, from that ministerium of forests, to investigate what happened. And when they come they make a *sobranie*. This means a meeting in that *stolofkas*. This is where we was eating. And he started to say why are we striking in Russia? There is no striking there. And later we have to say, I say, "We are not striking." And so we just tell him the whole story. And finally I say, "We are not slaves here. We're coming here with our goodwill. We come here to live and to work in Russia. We shouldn't be so mistreated."

I had the impression that one man from them was a Jewish guy. I saw in his eyes that he is a Jewish guy. And after that meeting I took a chance and I have with him a talk. And I explain to him, in mine way how I can, what is going on here. And I show him our documents. And they say that we are here prisoners. The local management from that forest say that we are here prisoners. We can't do nothing. And I told him, "I no understand why we should be prisoners. We come voluntarily," I say, "to Russia. We come voluntarily to

¹⁵"If you don't get used to it, you will die.

the Belobozhnitsa Oblast. They promise us that we will live in a village,” and the whole thing. And I explain to him, “Our mother is thirty miles away and we are not in contact nothing. Why we should suffer so much?” He look over my papers and he said, “You know, they’re lying to you. You are not slaves here. You can live in the whole Belobozhnitsa Oblast. You can, it means live in the whole Belobozhnitsa province. You are, they are just misleading you. You just have to do your job. If you no like it you’re entitled to go away.” This I already took it in mine ears, you know? And what else? They right away brought with them clothing for us, real Russian clothing with the *fufaikah* and the cotton pants. And the *valenkis* and everything. And I explain to him how we organized that work. And I say, “If we would have hooks to carry the trees not with our hands, just with hooks, it would be much more efficient.” And they make for us hooks. And it was everything okay.

Only, this was not our future. We, a few people was working. Now, who had a profession start not to work in the forest. If somebody was a shoemaker, somebody was a tailor, somebody was a barber he already didn’t go out to the forest. He just was start to go around in the villages working for the farmers and earning bread. So it right away divided the people what was working and people what was not working. And it’s amazing you know in that forest we get up in the morning was one a religious Jew and we make a *minyán*. And you know and it was so wild to hear, you know, the Jewish praying in our primitive virgin *tyga*¹⁶, you know, what they didn’t see people over there at all.

Now, how I say that season, cutting the trees is only in winter time, when the tree is frozen. When it start to get warm, we stop cutting trees because the tree is alive, and the juices all run.

¹⁶ Forest of high and dense trees.

Tape ten, side one:

HR: ...is with Mr. Henry Skorr. It's being taped on the 14th of June, Harriet Richman interviewer. This is side two [side one].

HS: So when it started to get, this was the winter till 1940 when, the winter 1940 it started to go to the spring, they took us to a other part. We didn't want to be already divided with the mother. And they took us to, all together to a different part. And they call it Novoe Selo. It means new village. They took us, it was still snow there, and with a big sleigh, with a tractor. And we come to a, what, how I explained before to a place like a homestead where it was once a property from a rich peasant. This was a *khutor*, a small island surrounded by the river Kovzha . And he was living over there. And later they sent him away. Only his wife with the children was living over there. And they took the all, they call us *byezhinitzes*, and we was working over there on the, preparing the wood for transportation on the river. There was no more cutting the trees, only to preparing that wood what we sent with the Kovzha River to the canal. It was a beautiful *khutor*, this means a homestead. The houses was made still in old Russian style with all the kind of beautiful things cut from wood. And that woman was going around always unhappy. And she was afraid to talk to us. And this was a very big house. And every family was getting one room separate. And we was eating all, we was eating together in a, again in a *stolofka*, in *stolofkas*, means like a canteen where we was cooking for us. It's clear the living conditions wasn't better. It was the same. Only it was already going to spring. We was already more happy.

I have to mention too in the 1939-1940 was the Finnish Campaign. The Russian was fighting the Finnish, and the atmosphere in the village was very, very tight because many young people was dying. And the supposed so strong Red Army that should be so invincible, so strong, was a very, was showing very poor in the fight with the small Finnish Army.

When it comes to the Spring, we young people decided to run away. Why we decide to run away? Because we was afraid that come a summer already and we will be stuck later a winter and we will be again over there stuck. We decided all young people will run away. We will leave the families. And see, because it was no way to run with the mother, with the children, with older people what was around with us. Was older families, was a few families what they was saved by the Red Army when the Red Army retreated from the Polish territory. There was whole families. So, we decided if we run away we will be successful we later without our parents.

HR: Well how did you figure you would be able to get them out?

HS: We didn't figure.

HR: You just thought you're running...

HS: We just thought we have to do because we saw that we can't stay over there. There is no life. What kind of future? What kind, what will be with the children? What will

be with us? We was just in a wild part from a country what was always a exile part--by the Czar and by the Soviet regime. People always, people was sent away over there.

HR: Did you have a plan about where you were gonna live?

HS: No, we had no plans. We have only one plan. How I say before, the whole communication goes with the river. In winter time is no way to go. Now soon the summer time comes or the spring time, the whole highways is the river. And soon the river is start to, this ice goes away, start to come the ships. They call it the *Parok hod*. And the whole life start, the whole province start to come alive when the ships are coming, bringing merchandise, bringing people and taking away people. It's a whole different life. And we decided to go back to that headquarter from that *Trest cha politles konyovov* where are the ships. And there to try to board a ship. Either that the local people, the local management say that we shouldn't go away. We have already on that paper, that temporary, we have temporary internal passports what say that we can stay in Belobozhnitsa Oblast, not like they say, only like the person what explained me from Moscow what was coming.

And I have to say being that winter time, I start to learn Russian. I have nothing what to do. The Russians was just playing with the harmonicas and dancing. And our other people were just gossiping around, you know, telling the stories what and how. And I was sitting by the oven. We have no light, just by the light from that oven. And I was studying Russian papers to adjust the Russian alphabet to the Polish alphabet, to get adjusted. And when once the *politruk* come, I demand from him books, that I want to learn. And he brought me books from the elementary school. And I was start to study the alphabet, the Russian alphabet. So I know already a little what and how. I know a little how to read.

So we decided to go with that, the river Kovzha, to Konevo. This was 40 miles to walk. Now by the river there is no, this is a virgin forest. Now the end from the river the Russians made like a sidewalk. On the river they put boards, for 30 or miles.

HR: Where you could walk?

HS: People was walking this. They're so ingenious, because you can't walk in the forest. You can walk in the river. So they made floating sidewalks. And I have to say too when they start a little this thing before we ran away, I was going out with the Russian people catching fish in that Kovzha river. They have a special way of catching fish. You're going out at night on small boats and you make a fire on a special piece of wood. And you see tremendous size of the fish, sturgeons, sleeping in the water. At night they're sleeping. So you have such big irons. They call it like a *jida* [phonetic]. I don't know how they...

HR: Like a spear?

HS: Like a spear. And we was spearing the fish. And I learned one stays there, one is showing with that fire the water, the...

HR: Fish.

HS: The fish is sleeping like a piece of big wood. Big sturgeons and *osetrs*, beautiful fish. And you spear them. You have to know how to spear them, because they're not dying so easy. And they're very strong. If you don't catch them right they can bite off

your hand. So they taught us this and I was very willing to learn. It was a nice adventure to go over there. And we was catching fish and we was no more hungry. My mother was cooking soup already at home with the fish and we was changing for clothing potatoes in the village so we make such a fish soups. And it was very pleasant.

So, deciding to go out, to run away on that floating boards, we make a meeting in a small church at night. There was over there a abandoned, semi-destroyed church, a beautiful wooden church like a picture, surrounded with birch trees. It was looking so beautiful, you know, so that it's hard to describe. You know, around wild tiger and a beautiful sky. And that small, half-destroyed wooden church with the, made from wood, and beautiful painted. You can see that man was a big artist what was doing this. And the Soviets when they were come to it, they make the collectivization, when they forced the people go to the *kolkhozen*, they destroyed the churches and fight against the religion. So we make at night all boys and all single, what would want to run with us. We say we will meet at night because the management, nobody is around, they will not see us. This was Saturday night. Next day is Sunday; we are not working. So we have a day ahead of them.

They can run after us. In the morning everything was ready. As soon as there was a little shine everybody have such a, they call it a *ruksak*, from a sack made a...

HR: Like a knapsack.

HS: Knapsack, and we was starting to go. It's clear my mother and my father, everybody was crying. And I said, "Don't worry. God help us until now, we come out in a such a fire. I feel now with my instinct we have to do this. And I will go out, see how the world looks, and I will come back and take you out." So we decided and we went. We walked the 30 miles.

HR: How many?

HS: Maybe forty...

HR: Forty?

HS: Forty people. Young boys and single men, what had nothing what to lose. If they take us to prison we'll be in prison. We will cut the same trees. In prison we'll cut the trees and in freedom we cut the trees. And we come to that Konevo. We come to that Konevo to the *pristan*; this means the seaport. In the *pristan* was already a ship they called "*Chaikah*." A "*Chaikah*" means seagull. I remember the sea, I was still now on that wide, nice ship. It was very, you know, my eyes [unclear]. And I saw over there people from the management, from the NKVD. Now they didn't touch us. They didn't touch us. We went to there, we bought tickets.

HR: You had money?

HS: We had money. We was earning five *rubles* and, or we was selling, everybody had maybe a hundred or two hundred *rubles* put away, you know? And we went on that ship. This was my first experience to go on a boat. You know, it's very romantical and it's very, very strange. And with the all Russian peoples, you know? And we was sleeping on the board, on the deck, you know? And this is a ship what had wheels. And it

was heated and the steam was made with wood. And we sailed and nobody stopped us. Probably that man from Moscow was right, they didn't have a right to stop us. We have a right to be in the whole Belobozhnitsa province. And the Belobozhnitsa province is maybe two times bigger than Poland--tremendous. Now mostly virgin forest. And we go out with that boat until we come to Belozersk, what I say by the first beginning. And in Belozersk we change for a bigger ship. Over there we was going with a canal what had smaller ships. In Belozersk we change for the Sheksna River. It's a big river and we change for a big ship. Still I remember the name. The name was *Pushkin*.

HR: *Pushkin*.

HS: *Pushkin*. And we come with that boat, again sleeping on this, eating our bread. We didn't want to spend. It was a buffet, you could eat, but we didn't have enough money. So, and we come to the city, to the town of Cherepovetz. The first town what we come in. We come in in that Cherepovetz and we go out from that boat to the city. We saw a beautiful nice building. It was a school for nurses. And we come to the main street, *Sovietski Prospekt*, on Lenina Street. And we come to that dom Krestianina, that peasants' house where you come in if you, if a peasant come to the city can stay a, it's such a small hostel. We come over there. We're entitled to be two, three nights over there, by law. So we registered, and we was sleeping over there--two, three people in one bed. And we was looking over there around and I was starting to look around, and everybody from the boys, what we should do further. We was walking around and everybody start to call us, "The *Polaki* are here." They call us *Polaki*. And I was looking around what should I do? The boys saw a different world and they didn't want to stay in Cherepovetz. Everybody want to run further to Ukraina. I didn't want to go back. I, because I had my parents. I intend to--there was over there two boys from Lodz. And one was a shoemaker, not a shoemaker, he makes some, the upper parts from the shoes. And he got a job in a *artel* [Russian association of collective laborers.]. And he took a apartment on the outskirts from the town. And I left over there the, my clothing. And I was looking around what to do in the city, how, what is the possibility from bringing my parents. And they start to be very tired. They, the *khozyayki* where the people was living, they say, "I no want that a strange person come in to us." They was very suspicious. The Russians are very chauvinistic and very suspicious to strange people. Any strange person is not welcome to them, and they're very, to other, not only strange. They no like Ukrainas, they no like Uzbeki, they no like Belorussians. They're very chauvinistic, great Russians. And they hear about us, the *Polaki*, the *byezhinitzes*, not knowing that we are Jews. They was very hostile and reserved to us. And I really didn't know what to do. Everybody runs away. The boys ran away to, back to Ukraina. I didn't want to run away because I want to take out the parents. Somebody told me that if I go to work on the river, on a ship, I can get apartment in that management from the port authority. The port authority was a whole city with their own hospitals, with their own remote--where they're fixing the ships, and with their own schools and hospitals and everything. And I was figuring that I can, if so is, if I can get a apartment for my parents

over there, I will go over there. I went over there and I ask about a job. And that man from that *kad*, from the personnel, you know, they're like horse thieves. They need--when it was spring time--they need staff for the ships, the crew for the ships. He promised me gold, everything. "Take a job. We will give for your parents a apartment." I was sure that I am in a paradise. He promised me everything. "You will be a sailor." I said, "Oh my God, okay." I sign it. And I went to work, a sailor on a ship, on a boat for the *kolkhozen* there. And my troubles start now.

When I come on that ship, I never saw a ship, right? I just was on a ship only when I come and now I am already a sailor. Can you imagine? And I did it always with the condition that I will get apartment. I wrote to mine parents a letter in Polish. "Everybody runs away from the city. It's hard to adjust in the city to get a apartment. They no want to rent apartments. I am, I will work a sailor on a ship and he promised me that he will give us a apartment. Wait for a answer from me." And I went to the ship. The ship was somewhere, this is a navigation. You know, the navigation means that year from the spring to the fall is a navigation year. My ship was very near Rybinsk, you know, a thousand miles near the Volga. So they give me a ticket to go with a ship to find the other ship. I didn't even speak Russian. I don't know nothing, you know? Only okay, they give me food. They give me everything. And he was so happy. And I didn't know I should be a little suspicious with this happiness. You know I was so happy they promised me. I, they promised me everything, so I can take out my parents. I figure I will go to that ship and I will come back. I will take vacation and I will bring them in. I didn't know the Russian reality. I didn't know that come out a law in that time when I was talking with him that you can't leave a job. This was the law, Molotov's law from 1940 that you are, if you had a job, you can't get away. If you go away you go in prison. And this, he was so, you know, and you have to have a workbook. In the workbook is written down where you work, or you are released. Nobody will accept you without that little *knishkah*, *knishkah*, *tylavayik knishkah* [internal passport]. And I come to that ship, you know, imagine. I didn't know this. And come to that, I come to a *shluz*. You know what a *shluz* is? A canal, how that Panama canal have what divide this, the water goes up and down?

HR: Yeah. I can't think of the name.

HS: You see the river is divided with such *shluzes*. The a ship come in that canal, they let in water, and they change the level. So, and when I was going from, with that ship, and I show it to that captain he say, "That ship will be in that *shluz*, *Shluz Derenyevkah*." I don't know what [unclear]. "And at night when we come to that *shluz* you get off and wait for the ship." And the ship was over there, that *kolkhozen* ship was over there and I come in and I show them the papers I am working. And they accept me to work and I don't know even what I have to do, what is to do and how is to do and where is to do. And they put me in [unclear] at night. They call me up. I have to go to work to carry the wood. I didn't know what I have to do. You see, the Russian ships working on wood, cut wood. You loaded that wood in special stations, and with that wood, you put in that wood in the...

HR: Furnace.

HS: In the furnace, and this makes the steam. So, I was a part from the top. I have to carry that wood, get it down, and do that whole work what have to be done on the ship. And loading that wood from the shore. And when we come with the *shluzes* what I say, to change this, and we was carrying that wood from the forest, you know? The wood? How do you call it what they say, the blocks? What we was cutting in the...

HR: The bundles?

HS: The bundles. But you know what a bundle is? Like a half a street. Three, four bundles. And on that bundle, on the bundles lives a person. And he have such a thing.

HR: Like a hut.

HS: Yeah, and he had fire over there. And at night we have to put on the lights that other ships not going in in this. And we had to take this apart, because only one goes in in a *shluz*. And if that bundle, what this is five, six, and you work at day and night. So, I was started to do that job. And it was very impossible. And they was very hostile to me, because again, I was a stranger. And I didn't know the language. And I didn't understood nothing. And I didn't have clothing. And I was dirty. I have nothing and there they was just, was so abusing me. There was no word. They just want to see that I collapse. They make so the work rules that when I have to rest, have to be done additional work where everybody have to work. They change so the rules that see when we have to carry wood, it's mine eight hours off, I have to work. And what else? That I should earn money for this for carrying the additional. My money they sign off to other.

HR: Somebody else?

HS: Somebody else. And they was so hostile to me. And I was so frustrated, you know, that I had no way out. And I have no to who complain.

HR: So you feel like a slave for sure.

HS: And I have no to who to talk. Everybody is laughing from me. And we was going on that boat to Rybinsk. The whole both sides from that river was prison camps. People was working over there on that wood, because they was creating a sea of Rybinsk, a artificial sea what will connect five real seas. That artificial sea to the Volga will connect the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, the Baltic Sea, and the White Sea. And they was making a tremendous 2,000 mile artificial sea, with big dams where the water will be concentrated. And for this only prisoners was working. In the whole land from the river was only prison camps. And the all villages was around from there was evacuated. All houses taken apart and make bundles and put on the river, with the cows, with the women, you can see on the river thousands of villages swimming to different directions. It's so, you know, it's so amazing. So, it's a different world. The river is a world by itself over there. And so you see when I saw on that, the prison camps near Rybinsk, and I hear that people are yelling over there, Jewish. The prisoners, in Yiddish. And was, we have over there one, the secretary from the *Partin Organizatsia*. Every ship have a Communistic cell. And they have a secretary over there. His name was Knyazov. And we were standing or so. You know, and

my heart was bleeding because I know my people are over there. I hear the Jewish voices, you know? Like I was working in the forest, they arrest him and he was working on the river. And our, and the boys was laughing from them, you know? The *Polaki*. And that Knyazov, you know, that, he say, "This is not Polish people. This is Jews from Poland."

So, and my life was so miserable. I had no connection now with the home, because I was sure this will swim. In one swim from that Cherepovetz to Rybinsk was a month. I didn't know this. I just took a job, you know, just to took it out of desperation. And I really didn't know what to do. I was so terribly abused by them. I was dirty. I have no soap. I was washing my clothes, I took from the furnace the ashes, because I learned that is a no it didn't help. And they was laughing because I don't know, because I don't have, because I am dirty, you know? And I was so desperate. And I was so, and I didn't know what I even, where my parents is. And I was in such a jam and I can't do nothing. I was whole nights, when I was upstairs on the *palma*, you know, on the deck I was sitting and I was crying. What I did? I say, *Guttinu*, ["Dear God," "Oh my God"] what I, why I, why...

HR: Did you leave them?

HS: Yeah. Why I deserve such a punishment? When is the [unclear], you know, I want to kill myself. I couldn't, I say, I did such a terrible thing. I am divided from them. They are now in the forest over there. I am here, not out. I can't go out, because I can be arrested. I can't leave the boat. It's the law, you know. But later it was a whole meeting on the ship where they was reading the decree from Molotov. And we are [clapping], everybody, "Hello! How happy we are. That's how good it is to be disciplined by work," you know? Everybody was laughing at this. You know everybody is saying it's good. And I was sitting so, you know I want to kill myself. I couldn't stand it. I couldn't stand that abuse, that they are so abusing me, you know, without reason. And I was working so hard. I was working more than them. Work doesn't bother me, because I make up my mind work is, I was doing things what they wouldn't do. I was carrying, the most dangerous jobs, I took. I want to be, I want to justify myself in their eyes, you know? And they know this. I was carrying the trees, you know, from the loading to the ship from the on a small boat. You go with a, how do you call this, a wheelbarrow.

HR: Wheelbarrow.

HS: And you fill up a wheelbarrow with wood. And you have to go on a such a small boat from this. And this is just [unclear]. They was, I would say, "The hell with you. I will do it." I was doing this. I will be a specialist. I was doing better than them. Still I wasn't accepted. You know, and I was sitting so one night and was crying, you know? I say, "*Gottinu*, it's time to finish. I can't stand it more." But that I should be so abused and I see no way out. And I was crying so, you know? Come out a man from the *Kochegar*, the man what put in wood in the, how you call such a...

HR: A furnace?

HS: Yeah, how call them, such a special profession. They call it a *Kochegar* in Russian. His name [was] Afanosiev. I saw him so. Now there was, you see on such a ship

is a very big hostility between the bottom, between the top, and in between the leadership, the Russian brotherhood. If we have to do something, if we come loading wood, they will make they have to fix downstairs. If they have to fix they no have to go out to loading the wood. So we have to do the whole work. If they have to do something, we will make we are busy. It's a terrible hostility between the bo-

Tape ten, side two:

HS: ...seems so I'm crying, you know? And sometime I have time to sit and to cry when the ship is loaded with wood, with this, as the first hour is, the first hour is free. Because usually, (it's working, right?) usually you see when you come to a port, we loaded up wood. And it's your *vachtah* [watch]. They call it a *vachtah*. So everything is full with wood. An hour you don't have to carry that wood. That wood is a, you have to carry that wood and put in the special holes and this goes down to the bottom. And he take this and load it in this.

HR: For the furnace.

HS: So the first hour after the wood, when God gives that you have that time, that *vachtah*, you sit. You rest. You take, you drink a little. We have a steamer to make hot water. No tea, no sugar. Just hot water. And this is the paradise, when you sit with a little hot water, with a piece of bread, and you can rest. You no have to do nothing. And just is the paradise. I can't afford that paradise because my heart was, everything was over there, you know. And I don't know what to do. In my personal misery, you see? I can stand everything. No, I can't stand abuse. My nature can't stand abuse. I can't be mentally mistreated. And you see that abusing me was so overwhelming me that my thinking was not clear any more, you know? I was boiling with hate, and I say, "I'm doing the best." I was the best worker. Again, written down I'm good. And they was hating me so because I was a stra-, not knowing yet that I am a Jew. I didn't go around...

HR: Telling them.

HS: ...manifesting that I am a Jew. Yeah I, later I told them. So, I was sitting so and crying, you know, what to do. I would like to die and I will jump to that, and that's all, you know, and finish it. Come that Afanosiev up, typical Russian *kochegar*, you know? Like what Gorky was writing you know, with that [unclear] face, you know, with the, like from the Volga, a boatman from the Volga, typical, and with a--every part in Russia have a different dialect. One said with a "O," one said with a "E," and he said, well, he was from the Volga, with such a wide language, you know? And he say, "I hear you crying." They're not used to that men should cry there.

HR: Yeah.

HS: Who is crying in Russia? There is a proverb in Russia, "Moscow doesn't believe in tears." And I cry more, because I was already in the bottom. And he said, "What happened? What is it?" And I tell him what is happening. He say, "I see you're not a Russian." And there's plenty of things in Russia, everything is mixed up. I told him the whole story because he was like sent from God, you know? That I...

HR: The fact that he showed some interest in you and that he should ask you what's wrong...

HS: Right.

HR: A little kindness breaks the heart.

HS: Yes. And I told him. I told him the whole story. He said, "Listen, I understand you very well. We have no more tears to cry," he say. "Every Russian had a similar tragedy to you. There is no one Russian that wasn't in prison. There is no one Russian what wasn't suffering. And there is no one Russian what will not suffer in the future. I understand you very well. And please don't cry."

HR: Did you tell him you were a Jew?

HS: Yes.

HR: Yes?

HS: And he told me his wife was a Jew. And he was in prison. And he don't know where his wife is. And such a person. And he say, and I say, "Take a look what I wear." And he say, "Listen. It was clothing by us. It was everything by us. We have everything." And this what happened.

HR: He gave you clothing?

HS: No.

HR: No?

HS: No this, he gave me something different. "Don't cry, because you can't afford this. Be like us. Hard and bitter. That you're crying is still you have tears inside. We have no more tears," he say. He was so, you know, he was so like Gorky was saying, you know? Like being from the Russian literature he comes out with such words, you know? "We have everything. Most important we have freedom," he say. "The Czar wasn't God was no good, now we can say it, we can protest, we can fight. We have nothing," he say now, "and we will have nothing, only death. You shouldn't cry more. You should adjust yourself to the situation. And we will see, and I will see what I can help you." You see, to get one friendly soul was already for me a break. I told him now about my father, with my family.

What happened? From time to time comes inspections on the ship, from the management. A big *nachalnik* comes in in a *carter*, how a small ship. How do you call it here, on such a small boat? Carter? *Carpeh*?

HR: A row boat? No...

HS: No, no, no.

HR: On a sailboat?

HS: No, in a very fancy...

HR: A chartered boat?

HS: It's a built especially for the big boss, you know? The name was *Diktatoria Proletariata*, *Dictatorship of the Proletariat* was the name from the ship. He comes to inspect the ship. We have to make a plan, you know? Which everything is lie. If you no make a plan nobody make, just everything write down that is made there. You know, everything is lie. The whole country is just lie. The whole system is lies. The whole doctrine, the whole Communistic theory is lying. They will say, "You have," you know you haven't. They will say, "You're rich," you'll say you're poor. They tell you you are

happy you say you are unhappy. They say we have breads; we have nothing. And they have nothing. Everything is a lie until now. And everybody knows over there, and everybody lies over there, and everybody is divided. And they have private, they have a different world, officially have a different world, starting with the smallest man, ending to Stalin. Everybody knows it's not true and everybody goes through the motions. So that *Nachalnik* come to the ship, checking off everything is okay, how we'll make the plan, how this. And, you know, it's a inspection.

HR: Inspection.

HS: Inspection, right. I believe that man took him away, aside, and told him my story. He say, "We have here a man and he's the best worker. He is abused from them." He was more, he was a educated person. He was too educated a person, that *Kochegar*. He was hiding himself. In this work, he was probably a engineer or something, and he was in prison for this. And later when it come out, he just hide himself. He just drown in a dirty job and that's it that nobody knows his work. This is the Russian strategy--to survive. You can be a genius. You can be a big theoretical. Soon they have the stamp, later on you can run away, take a small job, something in a watchtower or something. I believe that Afanosiev was such a person. He spoke with that man, with that *nachalnik*, with that head from that Sheksninskoe Rechnoye Parokhodstvo, it mean it was from that system. And that man, and he called me, talked to me. And I explain in my broken Russian. "This and this, what is this. They are laughing from me. I have no clothes. I'm dirty. I am dirty," I say. "because I have no soap. If they have a piece of soap they will no give me. And I am working hard, and my family is in the forest. I have no clothing. And I have no, I need a book. I need a newspaper. I have to read something. I need this more than bread," I say. "This I don't have. They no give me this. And there is not none. And everybody is " He called in that Knyazov, that, from the *Partynaya Organizatsia*. He say, "What your responsibility is to help such a person! Why you no helping him? Why you see that he is and you say by yourself he is the best worker in this all." And when we come to the next *shluz*, was already for me prepared clothing. They call this *spetsodezhda*, special clothing, you know? Clothing and soap and a shirt and shoes and socks and everything. So, and they already start to respect me more. You know? I was already a different person. Now I have to do something. One more thing I had to do with them. Every navigation the whole crew have to make such signs.

HR: Tattoos.

HS: Tattoos. It's clear that I wouldn't want to make a tattoo.

HR: Why do they make tattoos?

HS: This is their ritual.

HR: Oh. It's a custom. It's not to ri-...

HS: A custom...

HR: It's not to be able to identify, nothing like this.

HS: It's a custom what is more than a custom. If you are no with them, tomorrow you're working downstairs a piece of iron can fall on your head.

HR: So this makes you like a brotherhood with them?

HS: Correct. Tomorrow if you will fall in the river...

HR: They won't care.

HS: Nobody will see it. No. And I was avoiding this, avoiding this stamp, this. And so in July and August is that ritual from tattooing. And I was avoid, they're making oh, elaborate all kinds of things. Maybe it's a whole macho how can you stand this. Because...

HR: It hurts.

HS: It's very painful, right? And I was avoiding that I no understand. And they was nudging me and nudging me in this, you know? And I have a discussion with that Afanosiev. I say, "This is against my religion. This is against my morals. Why should I do that?" He say, "Gennady," my name is Henry, in Russian, Gennady. "Gennady, go with the river. If you no like it in the future we'll make a operation and take it off. They can kill you. Nobody will know. Nobody will see. It's only for this." And I still resented, resented. And I have to make it. I decide and I make it for, and I was with them.

HR: Why did you choose...

HS: This is the smallest thing what I can do. This was from our ship, from our *kolkhozen*. I could do more elaborate.

HR: This is the symbol?

HS: This is the symbol...

HR: This is the symbol?

HS: From our ship.

HR: On your thumb, between your thumb and your...

HS: Correct, from our ship.

HR: Forefinger.

HS: If I go somewhere and I show this to them they will know this means the *kolkhozen*.

HR: What is this a symbol of? Is this an anchor?

HS: An anchor from our ship.

HR: An anchor.

HS: You know, I have to make it and I made it. And I started to be already there better. And they give me already books. And give me newspapers. And I started to read. And I was already in peace with myself. And I, the next, I come back to my port. And to my big surprise when I come to the port, my family was waiting for me, in Cherepovetz.

HR: Oh my goodness! [unclear].

HS: They come out, my mother told me she figured something is wrong, that they have no mail more from me here. I didn't know that a [unclear] will be a month, you know, and I didn't know that I will be go in such terrible trouble. And the people and

everybody started to go away from over there. And they decide and they will be alone. And they decide, they're not stupid, my mother was very, very bright, very, very. And they hired a boat, not a boat, yeah? They went the same way. No, they have clothings. My mother and the children can't go on...

HR: They can't walk.

HS: Can't walk. They hired a boat, a row boat.

HR: A row boat.

HS: And they was going, and they come to the river. And they know that I am in the, I wrote them that I am working on a ship. And so they went to that personnel to find out where. And I was already a big shot over there, because their from that, the manager from that, give hell to that personnel manager. "Why are you neglecting a person? Why are you just..." You see, over there is always hate. A bigger boss knocks the smaller. He want to look for a chance to say that you're not working well.

HR: Yeah.

HS: He said, "I was on a ship and they complained to me about a *byezhinitzes* from Poland so mistreated and without clothing and without nothing, without this. And you promise him this and promise him this. Why you didn't do this?" You understand?

HR: Sure.

HS: So, and when my family come to looking for me, he was very already, you know, again, "I will give you apartment. I will this," the same *shpiel*, you know? And they was very happy that everything, they were sure that I am a big shot.

HR: But you didn't believe him so much this time about the apartment.

HS: I didn't see them.

HR: Oh.

HS: They was telling before.

HR: They were telling them.

HS: And when I come from the ship and I saw them, you know...

HR: You almost died.

HS: Yes. And I decided not to say nothing. I say, "It's okay." You understand? And she, my mother was so happy. Everybody is happy. They said, "Yes, it's okay." I was already...

HR: Dressed.

HS: In that clothing, you know, and everything was okay and so I went to that Komolov, oh yeah, Komolov is his name, right, from the personnel. It's spelled like your computer.

HR: Yes? Yeah.

HS: Komolov. And I say, "I need a few days vacation to arrange my family." He said, "Well, okay." We went down. About the apartment we didn't talk already more. I went, I took them to that, again to the dom Christianina, to that...

HR: At the hostel?

HS: The hostel, right. Yes, and we started to evaluate what to do. They was again, and my father only will go work with me, you know? I told them, “[unclear],” because I just want to calm them down. I wasn’t [unclear] yet. I say, “No, father. It’s not [unclear]. If you go they will kill you from work. And they will arrest you.” I just tried. “I am here. I am happy,” and all this, “you know, I no like it either. I want to go to school. This was only temporary. Let’s look something more provincial, more normal for people.” I find a few people what still with the boys, you know, what they was working in the *artel*, and a few who didn’t run away. And we, I say, “Let’s look for them an apartment.” And we went back over there where I was once keeping the clothing by the two boys in Lodz. And across the street it was Niekrasova, Ukritsa Niekrasova Diesat.

HR: [unclear], you...

HS: No, it...

HR: Oh, where did you go?

HS: [unclear]?

HR: No.

HS: And over there we come, and we see. And they say that a, one woman have to rent a house--not a house, a apartment. We come over there. I was already like a big shot, you understand? And my mother and father and the children, they look already different. They are afraid, you see, for single people, not stable, they stop. Now they see a family they have already...

HR: A different outlook.

HS: Different outlook. And they say, “Okay, I will rent you.” It’s not a apartment. It’s more. You see, the Russian have, winter time they live in this part, and summer time they live in a different part from the same house. One is more insulated, and one is less. “So I will give you this part,” she say. “And you will pay me so much.” I had already money. “For a month you will pay me at the end of the month.” I said, “No, I will pay you now for three months, in the...”

HR: In advance.

HS: In advance. And she was, this was not a custom over there. You know, I want, you see, I want for them, and especially I want for my mother, that she will be in peace that everything is, that we are on solid ground.

HR: Secure again.

HS: Right, that we start something, stabilize. I say, “I have to be, I can only be two days more.” And my father only he want to be, he only want to go with me. I say, “Okay, father, come with me. I will talk with that guy.” We went to that guy from the personnel, to that Komolov and I say, “My father wants to work with me. Now I want my father try only one week.”

HR: Was he healthy?

HS: Very healthy.

HR: Yeah.

HS: Very healthy.
HR: He was strong then.
HS: Stronger than me.
HR: Really?
HS: Oh, only I was stronger here.
HR: Yeah, he was mentally, he was...
HS: No, no, he was very good, very pleasant.
HR: But he couldn't take the...
HS: Very pleasant, very clean. Yes, and you know, the aggravation and...
HR: He couldn't take the aggravation.
HS: Yes. He was too plain, too noble, you know, to take. My mother, yes. My mother could evaluate them, you know, and have a whole dialectic in her head, yes. And I say to that Komolov, "I want my father to try only for a week. No papers. No signing nothing. Let him go with me for one race." Sometimes we had short races we call it. They use over there English words, race, *navigatsia*.
HR: *Shluz* is an English word.
HS: *Shluz*, and foreign words, you know, and they are using English words. I took him on that to help to work with that Afanosiev.
HR: The nice one.
HS: The nice one. And I say, "Afanosiev, see that he shouldn't work. See that he shouldn't like that job." I didn't want that my father [unclear]. And my father start to work with him and he start to give him a little the business. It was hot in there like hell. You know in the *kochegarka*.
HR: Sure, sure.
HS: And primitive. It's not like now. Everything's iron.
HR: Even so, in the furnace room it's hot.
HS: And not only, everybody's from iron, you touch something, you burned yourself.
HR: Hot, sure.
HS: And in that time was already, was such big flies on the river, they hit you, they make you a hole. And billions of mosquitoes. Not millions, billions. They come like waves. And we was in our *kayuta*. They call it *kayuta*, a cabin, no, *kayuta*, the room where I was living. And we was putting in *shmatas*, make a fire, and it was so, the smoke was...
HR: Keeping the mosquitoes...
HS: Pushing them out. Well we couldn't sleep over there. So my father was a week, you know, and he couldn't, and he was drinking so much. And he was [unclear]. I says, "Father, this isn't for you." The Afanosiev say, and we was friendly with him, with the Afanosiev, you know? They are very, you see, it's such a amazing about the Russians. They are so good souled people on one side, and they're so terrible killers with the other

side. Soon you see the glint in their eyes, the knife, the ax in their eyes, you know they are ready to kill.

HR: The same person?

HS: The same person. They're so, they're, you know, when they're good they give you away the soul. You feel it. They're so *paren rubakha*, that means he give you the shirt from his back. No soon like you're changing a switch, when you see that glint, you know, a glint from a knife? I can see by a *goy* I see that glint I know he is ready. The eyes start to glint like a knife or like a ax. And I saw it later in the war time, where, when he was talking about Jews. Here with the beautiful people, talking nice. Soon we start to talk Jews, boom, he's changed. The eyes get wild. I know already how I have to treat him and how I have to be treated. You know you have to be constantly evaluating. Your brain have to work like a computer, seconds. Never rest. Always up and down, up and down. So we were sitting over there with that *Afanosiev* on the *palma*. *Palma* means the deck. And he was evaluating everything. He said, "You are a butcher," to my father. "Why are you not going to the..."

HR: Slaughterhouse.

HS: "Slaughter factory," he said. Over there you no call it house. It's a factory. "They're sending in thousands of cattle, and these have to be made, killed, prepared." They send it away again you know, with plans, with the whole, you know, the Russian terrible system. "Why are you not going to the slaughter factory?" I heard this, I said, "Father, why are you not going to the slaughter factory?" The race, it was a short race. We have different races, and can only take a barge. We go fast. And when you take the wood, how to call, the bundles, the big bundles, you still, you go two miles an hour. Takes you a month or two, one race. And when you take a barge you go very fast. This was a short race. We come back, and we come home, explain this to the mother and to the children. We say, "Let's go to the *boynia*, to the *Yasisavov* [phonetic]." We went to that *Yasisavov*. It was not far, incidentally. On Ulritsa Polsova. And we was on Ulritsa Niekrasova. And we went over there. And they right away took him in, with open hand. "Oh, a *yasnik* [phonetic] from Warsaw, from Poland!" You know? And he knows the business. My father know the business. They don't know. They, over there nobody knows nothing, you know? You just do it. My father, in my presence, they took him in and I say, they took him in to show him. He took the ax and the knife how to [unclear] some. They opened their eyes, you know? I say, "Father!" And you're working, I say, "Father, you're working by food, don't forget." I was already enough Russian. I say, "You're working by food, not by stones and by fire, by water, with bums." And they took him in. And I was already happy, happy. Already my swimming was entire different. You know, I was already not in distress. My sister went to school to learn accounting, *schetorostro*, not accounting. My younger brother went to school. Mine other brother went to school too and he was looking for a job for, with electricians. And...

HR: And you still lived, where did you, did you, and you lived in that apartment still?

HS: Niekrosova, right. And I was on the ship. I was on the ship, and every time when the race comes my, the, where my the brother was working in the factory, "*Krasnaia Zvezda*," ["Red star" - name of factory] he was always waiting for me. I saw already he is, you know? And I already, when we was working we would come to Rybinsk it was sometime times that we have, we're getting white bread. You can get five white breads. They're counting you for so many days and you wait, you're entitled to five white breads. You no see it in no place. When I getting the white breads I didn't five, six days I didn't eat a piece of bread at all. Period. I just, when I come I give him that bag of bread, you know, which was the biggest holiday. And I was, sometime I have a chance to buy a little barley, a little this. Then we come over there in Rybinsk. Rybinsk was a tremendous big city. Rybinsk is not far from Yaroslavl, on the Volga river. We was on the Sheksna river. And over there you know it was more like a European, you know. It wasn't so much provincial, so much close. So, and I was working on the--it was already much better. They was working, yes. Now I have to find a way how to go out from the ship. No way they didn't let me go to the ship.

HR: Get off.

HS: Get off.

HR: Excuse me, Mr. Skorr, did you have news of the war and what's going on now?

HS: Sure.

HR: You knew.

HS: Yeah.

HR: And the Jews? You didn't...

HS: Now, very, very informal news, very disoriented news.

HR: Did you...

HS: The Russian news was...

HR: Censored.

HS: Not only censored. Not telling the truth. The Germans and Hitler was a hero, and the other side was violence.

HR: Did you know anything about the Jews?

HS: No, now, yes, now we will come back. When I start already, you see, I was in a terrible turmoil for a few months. Turmoil that again, with saving my family, you know? I was not so much exposed, my, you know, I, my day and night was only to save that unit, you know, to make it again a working unit, to make it what it was. And I settled this, that problem, you know, that this is okay. I come back, and for two, sometimes you see, when we come back, I, sometimes get a week off, when they're fixing the ship, you know, and something have to be changed, this. And my mother start, you know, "What will be and what we hear from them, from them, from the family." We didn't hear nothing

what we, what I brought them up to the pass what I brought them to Bialystok. The people what I pull out from Kalisz, we didn't know nothing there. You see, when we run on the border, everything was dispersed. I didn't know where my cousins are. I didn't know where mine friends are. I didn't know where my relatives. I took one more family, family Bricktlau, is my mother's cousin. We call him uncle, only he went with us too. Only we know that his wife, is named Soya, he married her in the First World War in Latvia, near Riga, that small town I forgot. Not [unclear], a small town. And we don't know nothing about them. And as I say to the mother, "How about we write a letter to that small town to Latvia? To the family Aaron? Maybe they know something from them." And I know, and we know that he was a *zygermah*. You know what's a *zygermah*? A watchmaker.

HR: A watchmaker.

HS: So we saw, when we stayed...

HR: Aaron the watchmaker.

HS: Aaron the watchmaker, right? And we, and amazing we get, make a letter. They, with the other family that what was from Kalisz, the Bricktlau, they was arrested, and they were sended to Komi A.S.S.R., deported. Like we was deported to Volenton [phonetic], now we wasn't deported really. We volunteered. They didn't volunteer, and they deported them, to Komi A.S.S.R., even higher than we, more to the north. And they was in a prison. Not in a prison, no, in a camp, right. And we wrote them a letter, imagine they get a letter from us. And he broke a leg, Uncle Solomon. And my mother right away what we have, make a package. This is my mother, you know? Right away we send them a package of food to Komi A.S.S.R. I forgot to tell you, when I was in the forest, you know, I had friends in Baranovichi, the family Gilfiks, what I intend to go to Baranovichi, on the Minska 57. And we, my friend, I make a po-

Tape eleven, side one:

HR: Mr. Henry Skorr, side four [side one], June 14th.

HS: So being still in the forest I wrote a letter to my friends in Baranovichi and, to that family Gilfiks what I intend to visit them in the beginning when I ran to the Russians. And I didn't have a chance in connection what, when I was saving my family. I received a letter from her, written half Russian half Polish already, because she was going to a Russian school. That my friends, a few show up over there. And now they decided to go back to Poland to save their families too, and she didn't hear nothing from them. I just find out about one, Motek Leder. He was in the Warsaw Ghetto and he was fighting in the 1943 in Poland he was there. So we know already of our family what was in Komi A.S.S.R. and they know, and they received a letter from my cousins what they ran away, again through the same way. They was writing to Riga to her family. And they are in a, they was in a city Kirov, too in the north. And they intend to go to run to Tashkent. And from them we received a letter that their mother isn't, they have a letter from their mother in Warta Ghetto, in Poland. This is the family what the mother didn't let the daughters go with us. She let only the boys go with us. So, the boys wrote us that the mother, the father, and the four sisters are in the Warta Ghetto. And we right away decided to send them packages. It was very hard to get already all kinds of things on the market.

HR: Which ghetto was this?

HS: The Warta Ghetto.

HR: Where is this?

HS: Warta. This is western Poland, on the river Warta, they're a small town. This is where [unclear] basically originates. And they decided to go back over there. Because when they make Kalisz *Judenrein*, all the, or they send you to Lublin, to that future concentration camp with Majdanek, or you run away when you want to run away. And they ran away to Warta. And in Warta the head from the ghetto was our far relative. And later, well after the war when I come back to claim some real estate what we had over there, their *Burgermeister*, how do you call a *Burgermeister* here?

HR: The mayor?

HS: The mayor from the small town tell us that the Germans forced the Jewish people to hang that head of the Jewish ghetto, our relative.

HR: It was your relative.

HS: Yeah. And he show us the place. We had home a picture where, still a picture from, they sent us a picture from the Warta Ghetto with the yellow bands. And when I was in Warta later, I saw the place where they make the pictures and where they hang that guy. You know, this is what happened. So, we decide, we sent them what we could, a package of barley and soap. I say it was very hard to buy on the market. And we sent them two packages. They received, and they sent us a letter they received with that picture. And this was until 1941. Then 1941 it start the war with the Germans, between

Russia and Germany and this flared out. That we lost a connection with them and they disappeared. Nobody survived. There was only that one daughter was alive to the last of the days and she couldn't make it and she was destroyed.

So, now being on the ship--let's go back to Cherepovetz--being on the ship is already, it was much more normal for me because I know already where my family is and I know already what's going on. No I, clear I didn't intend to stay on the ship, and I, and clear I couldn't go out from the ship, only to go to prison. And I, with Molotov's law. And I was already, they know me already on the ship and they treat me already different because I did already my job. No to tell the truth I didn't like the job. When they find out that I am Jewish, because it was a discussion, and their behavior to me change, especially their behavior from the Knyezov, from that secretary from the *Partin Organizatsia*. He was a big antisemite. And he was trying to needle me about Jewish origin, about the Jews no like to work, and about this and that. And always when we went through the camps near Rybinsk he show me, "You see how your Jews are working." No still I didn't pay attention to him. I did my work. I read my books. And I take my time. So it was until it comes the winter. The end of the navigation, and they still didn't want to let me out from the ship. They didn't no let me out from the work. When, at the end of the navigation is over there a whole ritual again. You run with the ship so long until the river is freezing, because we have to make the plan. And you try to come with the ship through the port and where they're doing the repairing of the ship. And this is what we did. And again they're loosening up their connection. They released everybody from the villages, the old boys what was working here. And they went home. And they decided that I and a few more boys should live on that ship in the winter time, and being a part of the remodeling and fixing. And doing this--our job was that the ship shouldn't be squeezed with the ice--we have to cut the ice constantly every day around the ship. And it's a very hard job, and very primitive by Russian conditions. We get such a iron...

HR: [unclear].

HS: No, you get such a big...

HR: No. Oh, I see.

HS: Iron pick.

HR: To [unclear].

HS: Yeah. And you bind this to your wrist that you shouldn't fall down. And you cut, so everything, you go out and you're just putting it out. Doing this once, you know, it was very slippery. I fall in in the ice water, with that ice pick, with everything, and I almost drowned. But that boy what was near me, working the other side, catch me by my legs and pull me out. It's clear I was frostbitten and they took me to the hospital. Being in the hospital I met all kind of people. And I met one Bulgarian doctor. And we was, we start to have discussions and mine Russian wasn't so good. Now he knows German and so we spoke a little German. And I was sure that he is positive to me. Now soon he found out that I am Jewish, he changed the entire tone. "You Jews are lazy. Jews so..." because I told him

I no intend to work on the ship. I just went by accident to the ship and I want to go to be with my family. And he started to talk so with a abusive tone that the Jews only try to look for a easy job for this, for that. And we have a very bitter, hard discussion. Still I decided not to be on the ship. Being in the hospital I was already two weeks, because my whole hand was frozen. The skin went off from my hands. I decided, not being able, I was discussing with that Komolov from the personnel department, and he say, "Is no way that we will let you go. You are a good worker. We can advance you. We can make you a bigger thing from you. No, you will be with our system." I say, "I intend to be with mine family and I intend to go to school." And our discussion didn't help nothing. I decide to write a letter to Stalin. It was a very controversial thing. And I decided to write a letter to Stalin.

HR: Why? What did you have in your mind?

HS: Laying in bed I develop a whole plan, and my broth-...

HR: Stalin is gonna care about you?

HS: And he brought me a whole notebook from the school, my brother, to the hospital. And I wrote a big, big letter to Stalin in Polish. And I explaining there and I going through the whole our history and the whole our being in Poland and how they was behaving to Jews, and how the Jewish youth have no prospective of existence, how we was believing that Russia can help us, and how I am happy that I am in Russia. You know, and I would like to be, I would like to study. I'm just accidentally on the ship, just a job what I, that I took because, and this is very far from me and from my mentality. And I believe that I would be much more productive for the society if I can be educated and do a job what I like. To my big surprise, I have a answer.

HR: You actually mailed it to him!

HS: Not from Stalin. I wrote this to Stalin. And mine, I remember, my sister mail it with the registered mail on the to the [unclear]. I should have somewhere the copy. I receive a answer, not from Stalin, only from the Vologda State Department. Not the State Department, from Vologda Province Department. It's like from the governor of the...

HR: State.

HS: Like the governor from Vologda, a whole letter that they have instructions from Stalin's consulary to take care of me. What is my wish? And if I have some, yes, in my letter, and the instructions are sent to the *Profsoyuz* to the how is it in English *Profsoyuz*? To the labor...

HR: [unclear], unions.

HS: To the union department from the organization where I worked. This means to the *Sheksninskor Rechnoye Parokhodtsro*. And I should discuss with them the problem. And if I have no satisfaction from them, that I should be in touch with, not with Stalin, or be in touch with the State of Vologda. And sure a day after come a man from the unions, from the *Rechnoye Parokhodtsro*. And he start, and he say, and he asked me, he was very surprised. And he was very afraid of me and asked what's the problem. I explain him in a very civilized way my problem with him, and why and what. And I say, "I am not satisfied

that they, I am a young boy. I can't command the Russian language. I have to get basic education in Russian. And they're forcing me to work on a ship. I believe that if I will be educated I can be better for this society, do better things. Why should I be forced to work on a ship? First of all this is strange for me. I never saw a ship in my life. And it's strange to my mentality. And I would like to get a regular education." I told him again the whole *shpiel*. "In Poland I couldn't get education. I just, they beat me up in the school constantly. I believe I am now in Russia, in the free Russia, that I have a chance to better my life and be a very productive part from the society." He was very impressed with my speech, and he say, "How about we send you to school here, to make you a captain of a ship, or to make you something from the..." I say, "I would prefer, I know, I have not too much sympathy to ship business," because, I told him in a nice way, I told him that I was very abused on the ship, very mistreated, I believe underpaid. Because I was already later I find out the ropes. I was doing work that I didn't get paid for this. Other people was getting paid for my loading the wood and my free time. And other things what I wasn't impressed. And I will be, and I told him, "I would be, I believe it would be much better if I would be released. I would appreciate very much." The next few days before I have to go out from the hospital, this was already three, four weeks I was already in the hospital. I developed a rheumatism too from that, the arthritis with the whole thing I developed from that--yes. And I have a statement from the doctor that I have a rheumatism arthritis. And it is not advisable that I should be on the water. So, a week later I received a letter from that head of the whole *Parokhodstro* what once was inspect our ship. And, with a letter that I am released of my job, that I can go where I will. And he wished me luck, and he's sure that I will have success in my future life. This was mine way that I finished with the...

HR: The ship.

HS: Yeah, and it was a very original, revolutionary way, because I believe they was just afraid of the word "Stalin." And they wasn't looking for trouble. The Russian psychology...

HR: Why do you think that Stalin, why do you think that the big shots responded like that to a letter?

HS: I didn't think nothing. No, I start to learn the Russian psychology. The very people, they're very afraid to do something extraordinary. They always want to be covered with something, because they have a bigger experience. If they do something, and something went wrong, they go to prison. So, when they received a letter from the top, sympathetic to my condition [unclear]...

HR: Yes, I understand their reaction. But why do you think the top reacted to your letter the way they did?

HS: Because I...

HR: Why didn't you just get lost in that bureaucracy?

HS: Because, no, if you write a letter to Stalin it's like you want to write a letter to God. They would be afraid to, oh, what you talking? Stalin is more than God. God is in a...

HR: Yeah, but God doesn't always answer!

HS: Correct.

HR: Stalin answered your letter!

HS: No, they always, they're very afraid. If you write something to Stalin...

HR: He's gonna answer.

HS: If you do something, they will send it, they will expedite it to the top. And I'm almost positive that some person in the consulary over there studied, read that letter in Polish. Somebody have to read it in Polish. And I represented as a little, in a such a way, to give him our history, that I still I was believing that they are sympathetic to us, to our horror what we went through. And I told him, "I'm already, I'm here in Russia." I told him, "I am free in Russia. So, why shouldn't I be educated?"

HR: Remarkable.

HS: So, and that letter, it was a very big talk by the whole *byezhinitzes* community in Cherepovetz, because...

HR: Nobody ever did that before.

HS: And nobody ever did that. And they was amazed. Everybody, basically everybody was stuck with jobs what they don't like. Because this was the rule, and the Russian director from a factory or from work, he is so strict by putting up his power, showing what he can do, if you let's see come ten minutes late to work you'll get six months of prison.

HR: Oh my!

HS: No excuse. No telling that you have no train, that you have no car. Only if you're sick you have to have forty-one degrees temperature. This means 105 degrees temperature, registered by a doctor from the *Polyklinikal*, by the government doctor, that he give you a sign. No excuse that you're sick, no excuse that you were far, or if it's snowing or raining or something. No talking about traveling. Over there you no travel, you walk. So, the law was very strict observed, because if they no observe, if the director from the factory doesn't observe, there are spies in the factory what will tell about the director and he will be in trouble. So, I believe my way to try to go out from that is, it was enough successful, analyzing their psychology. I couldn't lose nothing. I only could advance me better. And from the ship I definitely can go out. I could accept a job in their system. They have plenty of work around in that *Sheksninskor Parokhodstro*. This means, it was a whole city for themselves, a whole government, you know? A big, with the apartments, with streets, with the hospitals, with schools, with *kinos* [cinema theater], with restaurants, with everything. Only I want to be with my family. I want to feel my family, and see what--and I was very thrilled with this that I succeed...

HR: Sure.

HS: Through such a revolutionary way to get out. So, I come home a big hero. And everybody was happy. And we were start to be at peace with ourselves. I wrote out to a Jewish newspaper from Kiev, because my father was like very much Jewish. That was the Kiev *Emes*. Now, to our big sorrow this was only, this was a, really a Russian paper written in Jewish language. Nothing, absolutely nothing on Jewish. Only everything which was in the Russian press...

HR: Was written in Yiddish.

HS: Was written in the Jewish, with that special Russian dialect, not a normal Jewish with the, not *soph*, *nun* or the *lamed*, nothing. No, what...

HR: What do you mean now?

HS: They are writing an entire modernized Jewish that nobody can understand.

HR: So you could read it?

HS: Very bad. Yeah, you have to read it but very bad. And we was already, we was reading that paper. And my father start to enjoy that, the job, because he was doing things what he knows. And they really respect him. He was, because basically only just accidentally people work from butchers and this. And he was a real professional in that line. And they was happy with him, and we was happy with him. He started to bring home food from the *boynia*, how do they call it? From the...

HR: Slaughter factory.

HS: Slaughterhouse. Pieces of meat, a whole stomachs with that whole fat inside. Fats, they are not u-, I don't know why they are not using the tongues. They permit him take out tongues. And my father...

HR: And your mother pickled this.

HS: And my mother start to do this. And my mother, may she rest in peace, was a very unusual woman. She started to cook meals for all Jewish people in our town. And we started to give them food, to the people. We had it that all meat and that everything. And she just let know to everybody. And they're every night, everybody would come with a pot, and my mother was filling them up the pots with soup and with this. And everybody was taking away. And that our *khozayki* shouldn't be mad, we give her food too. So she was sympathetic because this was too a anti-Russian thing. You're not making a kitchen and you're not just going around helping people. They say the government have to help people. Now there were people was so hungry. And I remember how they was blessing me on the streets when they just saw me, saying, "Imagine what kind of a mother you have!" I say, "I know what kind of mother I have." And we was in that, with that *khozayki* we was in very good, very good condition with her. She liked us, because we took over the whole work in the house. We was cutting for her the wood. We was bringing the water. Over there water is not like here [where] you open the...

HR: Spigot.

HS: ...in the kitchen. You walk over there four, five blocks to a pump and you bring the water. And you no walk on a street. You just walk on boards. In the winter time

you walk on the snow and ice. So she was--and who you believe is doing that job? Only women and children, no men. Men are not doing this kind of work. So she was very glad and she was very happy that I told her that we will do this. And we was bringing the water and we make a central water station in the kitchen that everybody can use that water. And finally they find out that we are Jewish. And there was a subtle hint of antisemitism. How they find out? The mailman, the mailwoman--there is not mailman in Russia--the mailwoman was delivering us the newspaper, a Jewish newspaper. And the neighbors saw that it's a Jewish newspaper from Kiev, and that there was over there a woman Anna, a beautiful young peasant woman, a blonde, you know. And I saw how she was changed to us. I saw that terrible glint in her eyes. Before she was believing we are Polaks, and now she finds out that we are Jews. No, to give us a compliment she say, "You are not like our Jews. Our Jews are not working. Our Jews are the bosses. Only you are the people what are working." This should be a compliment for us.

So, this was so. And we was happy and it was winter time. I started to go to night school, and because I intend to take a job. Being afraid that again, that I shouldn't be stuck with a job what I don't like, so I decide to take a job in the electro station where they're making electricity, cutting wood. Over there you can take a job, a season job, cutting. Let's say you make with them like a contract that you will cut during the winter time or during the summer time. And if you want we can prolong it. So you are no obligated and they can do this. And this was very extraordinary because they was used to have the farmers, peasants, cutting the wood for them in winter time when they have no too much work around in *kolkhoz*. So, they extend this to other people that you can get a job by them on contract. Or you can get a job, a steady job. I didn't want to take the steady job, and I went with two of my friends and we take that contract job, cutting wood. This means we were standing eight hours a day cutting wood for the furnace. The whole electro station was built, it was made where the fuel was wood. The wood was delivered with trucks, with cars, with sleighs, through the river with ships. And the wood was pulling out on the back yard from the station. And over there was standing maybe twenty or thirty people, teams, and cutting the wood. This was a very strange experience, to stay eight hours cutting trees. And again we started to feel the question, Jews and not Jews. This kind of work only was doing Russians. There was there a few Jewish supervisors. I forget his name. Rubenstein, one was Rubenstein. And one was Bielis. And how I come to that point? Always when they was calling Rubenstein or Bielis, they was calling with such a irony. Over there the *desiatnik* was a man, Spiridonov. He was like from the noble people what once was from the nobility. And I believe he was living in Cherepovetz that he was sent away in the '30s when it was the, something wrong with the rich people. That's, I have a constantly discussions with that Spiridonov, and he was so gently nudging too about the Jewish people and this, and how I am a Jewish man, a Jewish boy cutting the trees, the wood, and the other are not cutting. And saying that we are not productive. And we have constant dialogues with him. Now I would say that he liked me. He was a elderly guy. And he start

to bring me literature--old Czarian journals, like *Mera* means fields, and books from Tolstoy's, and all kinds. He give me tickets to the theater and was reference from the *Voznesenski* about the international situation. He called me in every hour when was the news. Over there you hear the news only once a hour. And you have not already, you have only a reproductor. And he calls me in to his room that I hear the news, and I tell this to the boys. And he was laughing. He was saying that, "You will not cut trees in Russia. You'll be a big commissar." With that whole irony, and that whole unproductivity, I started to hit him back. I say, "If you say so, they are, nobody is good, you're so good, how come that only that so many people are cutting the wood by the hand? Why no you shouldn't put in here a mechanical saw, a central fugal saw, and we can and one team can cut a matter of fifty people can cut." He look on me with the eyes, he said, "What you're talking?" I say, "Very simple. Why shouldn't we make a special saw and cut wood? We can in one day cutting wood for a week." He think about this. He called me to the director, and they make from this a whole *shvitz*. And the head mechanic come to me and ask me what kind of idea is this and what? I believe it's just to take a saw-

Tape eleven, side two:

HR: ...Skorr, June 28th, 1983, Harriet Richman recording.

HS: And since that episode with that electric saw, with mechanizing that cutting the wood, I started to be like a personality in that electric station. They wrote about me and our team in the rural newspaper. And for a special appreciation they let me eat in the *stolofka*. This means in the canteen where only the engineering part from the [unclear] are entitled to eat. The paradox in the Soviet society is it should be a classless society, that everybody is equal. Now eating in every factory, you have different canteens where only a worker can eat, and later where the technical staff, the engineers and the *politruk* and the director can eat. And this should be their new modern, equal, socialistic society. Their worker was, the working people in the beginning was grumbling against that custom. Only later they get used and they didn't intend to fight that system. Only they want to just climb the ladder to be too a part, to be entitled to eat in the canteen where they were, the engineers, eating. So I had the permission to eat in the canteen, only not my friends what I was working with them. Now I was entitled to buy for them food and take them out and give them too a part from this, from that food. And a other things, I was permitted already when I had the night shift, when I, we have the coffee break, I was permitted to go in in that boiler room from the electro station. And it was the enormous ovens they was throwing in the wood. And I was sitting over in the warm watching the big fires. And my troubled mind was coming in the memories what's happening with the Jews in Poland in that time? And in my fantasy I saw how they was throwing in in the ovens, not knowing either that this is not a fantasy, that this is really true. In that time already people was being destroyed in the concentration camps, buried alive.

Something specific about the winter from Russia. When I come out from that hot environment, from that boiler room, that special Russian frost have a special smell and catching your breath. And you can't breathe either. And your lungs get congested. It was like 40, 45 below zero. And after the 15 minutes of rest we have to go out again to that, in that cold, cutting that wood. Let's see how it's [tape off then on]. So, I was working in that electro station and doing all kind of works, everything with the wood supply. I remember we was going sometime to that wild river, to that Sheksna, and to the forest, organizing the, preparing the wood for the, to prepare it the wood for the summer time it should be prepared with the river. I had already experience from forest work, so I was no more, it was no more strange, that work, for me. And I was already a good worker. And they recognized already. I remember once we was going out in a small, not a village, a small place they called Torovo [phonetic]. It was about ten miles from Cherepovetz. And we was working together in a prisoner's camp and the train from the electro station, working together with the prisoners, preparing that wood. And I have sometime talks with them. And they was very envying us that after a day's work we can go home in the free, in...

HR: Russian prisoners? Russian?

HS: Russian prisoners, right. No...

HR: And what kind of crime?

HS: Not...

HR: Politically.

HS: Politically a criminal, mostly political. And mostly not crimes. If their system decided they need labor hands, they need to do some big unattractive work, is just arresting 100,000 people for nothing, just for the fantasy. Just, because how I say in the beginning, every Russian citizen have a case in the police. And they already know exactly what he's doing wrong, what he's not doing wrong, because in every factories there are informers. So, if something comes on a project to build, let's see when they were started to build the *Rybinska More*, the Sea of Rybinsk, or to build a big defense factory, they need 100,000 people. They're just arresting people without reason, without trial. There is not a trial. There are not judges. They just get sentences from the *NKVD*, five years, ten years. And the Russian person is already used. He takes his bag with a little salt, with a shirt and a underwear, and goes to prison.

HR: Well did you meet any Jews?

HS: In prison?

HR: From [unclear]...

HS: No, no. I didn't meet Jews. I meet only Russians and all kinds of Serbs. So, and this was the kind of work I was doing. And at night I was going to school. I was in the same [unclear] my sister and my two brothers. And a little if it's possible to say, we was at peace with ourselves, not forgetting the trouble with news what's going on in the world, what's going on in Poland. And but the Russian system it was a twilight zone. If they decided not to mention that a German is a criminal, that the German is doing atrocities, nobody knows about this. Because in the newspaper they're not writing about this. And the radio, they're not announcing about this. It's you only hear what they want to tell you. And...

HR: So at this time you really didn't know the horrors that were going on.

HS: We didn't know the horrors what's going because either when we received one letter from the ghetto, from Warta what we sent a package, it was always written that--probably they was afraid of a German censor or the Russian censor--"We was living in the ghetto. Thank you for your packages, and we hope we will see you sometime." And this was the contact with them. And only it start to be political rumbles, a little uneasiness between Russia and Germany. And you have to read this between the lines. I always was going to the bazaar. This means to the free market. Why I was going to the market? Because over there was hanged out a newspaper to read. You can't buy in Russia a newspaper. It's not...

HR: It's on the wall. Like in China. They put it on...

HS: Yeah, it's only there is in a few places in the city hanged out the *Pravda*. From one side and from the other side. When you want to know something you have to go

over there and to read by yourself. Or if you are a big shot in a factory or a director, probably they're getting the newspapers and other journals. We didn't get. We only get a Jewish paper. We write out to Kiev. This was the *Kiever Emes*. Now it was a Russian paper written in Jewish language, without nothing news what you get. So, going to that bazaar and reading that *Pravda*, I was already much more fluent in Russian because I was constantly, in my free time I was constantly reading, and making better in the Russian language. I started to read some small announcement in the Russian press about concentration of German Army near the border, about big maneuvers, big field exercise from the Red Army in western Ukraine. And I started to feel a certain uneasiness. I was say that when I was working at the station, that Spiridonov, that old foreman was letting me in every hour to hear the radio, I always, in the radio I was hearing something like an uneasiness. And even he told me. And I remember he give me once a ticket to go to the *Goroskoy Theater*. This means to the city theater was a political *referent* from Voznesenski, a man from the Politburo, from the Censor Politburo, he was later killed by Stalin. And he start to mention too about inappropriate demands from Hitler. His whole *referent* was saying how the west was losing from the Germans, how the German Army is overcoming the west, how they are knocking down the--there was in that time the battles in Fretta [phonetic], and the [unclear] in Greece, and in Albany, how the German Army is succeeding. And no, and in between they was putting in saying that the German Army are putting up more forces on the eastern border. And when people started to ask questions he didn't give a good answer.

And so our life was going on until 1941. How was our daily, how was our week going out? The week was, we us working. Everybody who have to work was working. The children was going to school. After the war we was cutting wood. And we was bringing water for ourselves and for the *khozayki*. Sunday was a special day. Sunday was a *banya* day. This means we was going to the bath. Going to the bath is a whole celebration for the Russians, because they have no, in their houses they have no...

HR: Showers.

HS: The showers, or the *banyas*, how do you call it?

HR: Bath tubs.

HS: Bath tubs. So the whole Sunday day is going to the public bath. This is a *banya*, and this is a old, a Russian still from the Czar, a whole enterprise like a whole holiday. They're going, the men and the women, and they're taking on the small sleighs small children, and they go to the, all to the rooms. You take off your clothes and you go in in a big room full of steam, with hot water. And they give you a, such twigs from a beech tree, and everybody start to knock each other on the, and washing each other. And yelling and screaming and singing those all kind of songs. And later after that *banya*, this is a public thing. You take a wooden pail, you're getting a wooden pail. You're mixing the hot water and you're just throwing in that water on yourself. And when you want steam, there is over there a corner full with hot stones. You take that water and throw on the hot stones,

and comes out very hot steam. Now the Russians are very used to this. And it took a little time that we get used to this. You know, it's a, I believe it's a very healthy exercise. After that steam you go out in that waiting room. You're changing your clothes, and you go to the barber. The barber doesn't accept you before that you're not washed. So after you take the--you go to the barber, he give you a hair cut. And later you go to buy such a beer, a homemade beer. Is not a beer. They call it a *kvas khlebnyi*, *kvas*. This is like made from bread, such a fermented liquid. And it's a little sweet, and everybody is drinking. And we have to stay in the line and wait. In Russia everywhere you stay in line. And after this you change your clothes. You take your dirty clothes with yourself home. And you go home, this was like a holiday. We was going with our father and he saw how we, he was very happy that we all go together on that streets full of snow. And the sleighs in the middle. People are not walking on the sidewalks. Everybody is walking in the middle of the street. And plenty drunks, and plenty singing, and plenty dancing. How I say, if you meet ten Russians, and they have a harmonica, and right away they start to dance without reason on the streets. This was our regular winter day. And when we come home, the mother have already a hot soup. And she's taking out from the oven. And she feed us. And our landlord come in to take this soup. And the small children come in. We feed them all because we have that food from the place where my father was working. And we can say we was comfortable. My mother's eyes started to shine back like she was always, you know, in good mood. She was nice and at peace with herself and at peace with us. And I say how her face start to be nice and not clouded. And we was very happy to look in on ourself.

And this was the winter time from 1940 to 1941. And when you come 1941 we continued our work. My sister was already getting a job in her accounting business, and we was at peace with ourselves. Until come the first of May in our town. I have to explain what this means such a holiday in the Russian reality. This should be a big proletarian holiday. More in the fact the Russians are utilizing, because in that time the Russian government is giving them. It's strange to say that word. In Russia you're not buying merchandise. They're giving you. That you spend [unclear] money is not important. You're not buying from a store. You just ask, "*Shto dayut?*" What are they giving in that store?" So in that holiday they're giving you vodka, they're giving you cookies, and you no have to work.

HR: But you have to pay for the vodka, didn't you?

HS: Yeah, that they're giving you doesn't mean that you get without the money. Only they are so already...

HR: It's not available otherwise.

HS: Yeah. It's nothing normal is available. And it's so inclined that the government is so good, he is giving you. That you have to pay money for this is not important either. Because you can't go in to a store and buy, because nothing is in. It's very abnormal. You can find out tomorrow they will give shoes in that store. So in the morning right away, 2:00 in the morning, you have a line of thousands of people staying in line.

You need shoes or you no need shoes, you buy them. You buy them and put them away and later, or you exchange for something else, or you have in time when you can buy. So it's nothing abnormal. It's nothing normal. So that holiday, the first of May, is a very big celebration because officially the government doesn't permit to celebrate the religious holiday. The *Pravoslavna* [Eastern Orthodox] religious holiday, people are celebrating private how it is suppressed by the government. When it's comes such a holiday like first of May, everybody gets crazy, because everybody gets vodka. That means alcohol, and the cookies and other goods. And they're forcing you to go to a demonstration. This means forcing you. In every factory they say, "Tomorrow 10:00 you have to be in the factory place. And you get a red flag and you march around two hours." Not if somebody wants to go. Only you have to go. And when that May day, it comes in the afternoon, you believe you're in a mad house. In the beginning I was sure is something a illness come in the country. You can see all people drunk on the street, laying on the sidewalk, laying everywhere. Women, men, and children, even six, seven-year-old children.

HR: They get drunk? The kids?

HS: Everybody is drunk. I was sure that is something, a cholera or a *chuma* [plague] or something, a sickness come in everybody's--and the whole city is laying on the street drunk. This is the May holiday. And probably other holidays so. And their...

HR: When Christmas would come did you see some celebrations?

HS: Yes.

HR: You did.

HS: It's not Christmas.

HR: Like in the house, not out.

HS: Yes, private. In the few churches, there was a few churches what they have open, you can see the elderly people going with the candles. And they're going celebrating. And especially the *Pascha*, the, not the, how do you call the *Pascha*? The eastern.

HR: Easter.

HS: Easter you saw it more on the streets. Christmas is when it's winter, you no see so much. No, the *Pascha*, this means the Easter, you can see on the street a such a shine in the eyes of the people. And strange people coming to each other and kissing when they meet on the street. And they say, "*Christos voskrés*." This means, "Jesus Christ raised up, and he's truly raised up." And people are kissing each other on the street. And they're going to the old, neglected cemeteries. They have the cemeteries that are very neglected, the *Pravoslavna* with the crosses. And they're not...

HR: Enclosed?

HS: Taken care of. They're not enclosed. You can see cows walking around eating the grass. Because usually is over there near every church is a graveyard. And this is now neglected, because now the modern cemetery is back in the, out of the city. So you can see that people going over there, sitting down and crossing themselves, you know, and putting candles.

HR: Did you see any antisemitism particularly at Easter time?

HS: No.

HR: No?

HS: We didn't see antisemitism because we didn't see Jews.

HR: You were the only...

HS: We are, now we wasn't, we was like on the stranger of Russian life. We wasn't integrated in the Russian life. We was living our personal life.

HR: Did you know other Jews? No, you didn't know other Jews.

HS: We know only our Jews. And the Russian Jews, I know a few Russian Jews. No they didn't [unclear] with us. They didn't, we couldn't go so closer to them. The reason is most of the Jews what was in that city, they was political they send away. How do you tell it? They was...

HR: Prisoners? No.

HS: Not modern prison. If you was in prison and later they send you away, and they say...

HR: Exiled.

HS: Yeah. They was political exiles in that time, because mostly there was coming from wealthy Jewish families, they was, the heads was all destroyed or something. And they was exiled to that town and they can live their life. They can be doctors. They can be lawyers. Not lawyers I didn't see. They can be doctors, pharmacists, a watchmaker, a photomaker maker on the street. And we know each other. You know there was a little, there was like a wall between us. They was afraid of us. We wasn't afraid of them because we had nothing what to lose. We was like--and we wasn't accepted. I wouldn't say that we was accepted in Russian life. We was only like tolerated. They didn't let us in in this. We was, they was, how saying, we are not a *nashi* [native]. *Nashi* not, is not ours. We are the strangers. And when they find out how I say before that we are Jews, because when we was getting the Jewish paper from Kiev, I saw a little hostility, especially by one young woman. Anna was her name. And she was mentioned to us. And I saw the hostility in her eyes. And the other people was just tolerating us. So, this was going on until June, 1921 [he means 1941]. And this was...

HR: '41.

HS: 194-...

HR: Forty.

HS: Yeah, 1941, in June. We was being in bed still, I remember. We had a radio, a loud speaker, not a radio. And we hear in the morning, it's probably so 4:00, a special announcement. And that sign, a special announcement hit us like a knife in our heart because in Russia if they say a special announcement it's something unusual have to come. And we hear this speech of Molotov that a terrible thing has happened, that the German Army, without provocation, without this, attacked us. And they crossed over the border and they're attacking us. Only we don't know we will be strong. We should be ready. And

we will fight them back. After this start a whole upheaval. We, everybody runs to his working place. And that whole city, that whole town, you saw a whole revolution. I would say that the Soviet reality like was going a little in backward, and like the old Russian life was coming, start to come out. People start to be very serious. They wasn't talking in that modern slogans. The women start to cry. The men start to get drunk. They start to be very unruly. And it was start to be a very disorganization. I was surprised only by such a announcement such a disorganization can right away be in a city. And we come to the work, to the electro station. Already we didn't get the supply of wood. Already the ships didn't arrive. Already I saw that it's a whole, like we wasn't moving in the same orbit. And right away they start with the mobilization papers. Everybody start to get his mobilization card. And the people start to be very hostile about the work. They came already drunk. And they was very vile. And they started to sing the vile songs and going around with their axes.

HR: My God!

HS: And you can already see in their eyes the killer instinct. And they don't talk already more in Soviet slogans in the modern. You can see like the Russian *muzhik* [peasant] started to come out. Like, you know, like that Russian reality start to push away the Soviet reality and they start to sing the old Czarian songs about the swords, about rifles, about killing, about this, you know. And they was very easy on the fight. They was very edgy and right away you know every discussion you can see they're right away ready on the battlefield. And we was working in this condition. Already they start to take away the people. And the military *garnizon*, and the city start to make, how to say it, so controls in the city. They're going around, the soldiers, and checking documents and by the railroad and by the water, *vugzal*¹⁷, you know? You could see thousands of soldiers, you know, checking, being afraid of sabotage, and being afraid of that, and being afraid of this. And it was a very sense of uneasiness. One day I saw the whole city was cut off with the army like a chain of army. Later we saw that Molotov or other big men was going through the city, going through the river to checking or there is, probably it was only rumors, that they will transport sea boats through that water system, to the *Rybinskoye More*.

And how I say it was very, the supplies already was bad. And we wasn't get already the bread normal. Usually we was getting deliveries, the bread, that pound of bread what we was entitled. Was a woman bringing in in a carriage every day. And every person put out a bag in his name and later he collect that bread in the carriages. That system stopped. Was no more bread. We have to go stay in the line, go in the city to get bread. And was no more bread. We was coming home, and one day they say, "There will, on this day there will no be bread. They will give you only grains." And it's amazing how the Russian was ready for this. They already take out the grain mills. They have home grain mills. And they're already making that grain flour. And they're already making bread in their homes. That right away they was already no more dependent on the Soviet regime. They're already

¹⁷Large railroad terminal.

back to that old Russian origin not to be dependent on something, and already making their own, old historical way of existence. It's clear we was right away hurt by this, because we wasn't prepared for this. We didn't have no supplies. We didn't have no--we didn't know either how to make from that grain flour. So, the *Khozayki*, the landlady what was working, what was living by us, she teach us how to do this. And she lend us this. We had to give her a little flour for this. And we was doing it. And...

HR: Your mother could bake bread, but...

HS: Yeah, we was...

HR: [unclear]...

HS: Yeah, we was doing, we start in our clumsy way to do things how they are doing.

Tape twelve, side one:

HR: This is side two [?] of an interview with Mr. Henry Skorr on the 28th of June, 1983, Harriet Richman interviewer.

HS: And the news from the front, the official news, it was horrible. The German Army advanced so fast, taking one big city after the other city, going hundreds of miles. And we started to think, where is that whole Russian power? Where is that everything what they was talking that we are so strong? We have such a tremendous army. We have so many planes and so many everything that we will overcome the whole world. How it's possible that in everything is collapsing so fast? And in connection with this, the change from the, by the people, and the, you could see what the Russian people in the city, by the news that the Russians are losing so much, how they start to be anti-Soviet, how they start to be pro-German. And you could see on our street how the people started to be very edgy, and not listening so much to the Russian news. And they're going around like with such a inner happiness that their regime have so much trouble. And it was very amazing and very scary for us. And that woman, Anna, what I say, what was so outspoken before, she start to be very outspoken now and say, "It will be very bad for the Jews. We will kill all Jews. And we will kill all Soviets. And we will, it will be still old Russia. We will destroy our houses," she's saying. "We will go to the forests." Now, to me she say, "You are good Jews. You we will take with us to the forest." And we was very scarey because it was so reminding the attitude from the Polaks.

HR: But they weren't pro-German were they?

HS: They wasn't pro-German, no, they was anti-Soviets.

HR: Oh.

HS: And soon they say, and they was always under the propaganda, the Soviets are so strong, the Soviets are so, they're unbeatable. Soon they say that the Soviets are very much beatable, and that the Germans are going so much strong, and that the Germans are so technically advanced, they right away, the old hopes what they have inside in their heart right away come out with the whole ugliness, that they will get rid of the Soviet regime, that they will work with the Germans, that they will get back their ground. There will be no *kolkhozes* and they will get rid of the commissars. They will get rid of the Jews.

HR: And they think the Germans are gonna let them have all this then.

HS: Yeah. This what it was the German propaganda.

HR: Oh.

HS: And they was probably listening German radio and German propaganda. And it was entire anti-Soviet mood in that where I was living, because I was living not in the center from the town. I was living where the former villages what moved to the city. And they was basically very anti-Soviet. And you could see going in the bazaar and standing in the line a very ugly, anti-Soviet mood in the eyes from the people. You saw already that glint of hate in their eyes, and a glint of hate against the Jews, against the

commissars, against the regimes, against the *Kaganoviches*. And you could feel it. You can cut already the atmosphere with a knife feeling this. The same on the working place. You could see that hate in their eyes from the, especially from the women when they're taking away the men to the front. They was already praying that the German take over and that the husband shouldn't get killed on the front. And it's amazing they wasn't afraid to express themselves. And the official part with the *politruks* and the engineers and the directors. they was very subdued. And amazing this was, we are so far in the deep in Russia. No they, you see the news--is the invisible pulse goes so fast. And the mood was very much changed to the negative.

One day they come in the electro station with a announcement that we, there is no, we have a shortage in labor, that we will, they're mobilizing us to go in the forests to load that, prepare wood on ships and bring it to the city. And they say we're mobilized, that we have no choice, just to accept this. So, all men from the electro station including mine Jewish friends what I was working with they loaded us on a very big boat. And they give us food for a week. And they let us swim down to the river, and the river to the forest, then we have to work where we have to work on the in the forest loading that wood.

The river was already no more so strange for me, because I was already, I had already the experience. Now for my friends and other people it was a very strange experience. And we was rowing that boat. We was maybe about forty, fifty people, a big boat. We was rowing that boat maybe fifty miles a day. And we have to cover ourselves with *brezent* [tarpaulin] because this was so many mosquitoes--billions--like whole things of mosquitoes, until we come to that forest. In that forest we was working two weeks, and loading that wood on barges. And my shoulders was rubbed off to the blood. And still we make such pillows from the sacks and we was continuing to work. And then we loaded up that wood. We have a order to walk back to the city. This was maybe about fifty or sixty miles to walk back to the city through the forest, because the barges was loaded and the barges was waiting for a ship to carry them against how do you call it, the stream?

HR: The stream.

HS: Against the stream. And this takes a long time. And we took it the old Russian way. We started to walk. And we walked four days. And we walked through the forest, we come to the city. We come to the city, was, and we didn't know the news in the forest. Was no radios, no nothing. We just was working and not hearing nothing. And we had our bread with us. You know, we have to going to bring some mushrooms in the forest. They are, the Russians are very specialists to get food from the forest. And I started to learn by them. And this helped me later in my future troubles, to know what kind of mushroom I have to take, what is poisonous, what is not poisonous, where I can find berries, and where you can walk in the forest not to drown in the, how do they call this, swamps there. You have swamps that you don't see there is a swamp. You have grass on top and everything.

HR: A swamp.

HS: Swamps. And you can go in and in two minutes you can disappear.

HR: Is it quicksand you mean?

HS: Right. And they taught us, and we can see in the special grass what is growing over there that you should avoid this. This, everything I was accepting and my mind was very open for learning the old tricks of life, and to be in the rhythm of them. I already start to feel the rhythm of the Russian life, and the mentality of the Russian people. And I was adjusting myself with them. And they started to accept me. Because I wasn't fighting. I tried to do, how I say mine policy, since my trouble in Poland, no hard work can scare me. It's not was important the hard work, what suffering, what pain. This couldn't overcome me. And I was going how hard this was for me. I did not throw down a, the wooden middle. How painful it was when the blood was in mine...

HR: Shirt.

HS: From mine shoulder, I was going. And they appreciate this. They are too such hard people, without mercy to themselves. They are so sturdy to pain and to working and work twenty-four hours. And I was little by little overtaking them, because I say this is the way only to survive and to be in peace with them. You have to develop such a rhythm. And I learned by them and I was accepted by them. Even they change my name. My name is Genadi. They start to call me Genasha. So, by the Russians is always, they make everything so soft if they like something. As a, Genasha, Genya, or water, *voditchka*, of *molo*, *mashlichko*, of *khlievbushka*, you know?

HR: What is your name?

HS: In Russian was my name Genadi, Henry.

HR: Genad?

HS: Henry. Genadi.

HR: Genadi.

HS: Yeah. This is a official name.

HR: Genadi.

HS: And now they was calling me Genya.

HR: Genya.

HS: Genasha. You know?

HR: Oh. They make a little...

HS: Yeah, a little softer and you should see men like killers, you know? And they can be so tender and soft when he...

HR: What did they call you in Poland, your friends?

HS: Henrik, Henryk.

HR: Henryk?

HS: Yeah.

HR: It's a Jewish name?

HS: No, Haynoch, Hanoch.

HR: Hanoch.

HS: Haynoch. Now in the school they was calling me Henry. And the teacher, when she likes me then she called me Henryk.

HR: Henryk.

HS: Yeah. So, and we was walking in that forest back like them. And we took off the shoes because we have to save the shoes. You no have to save the legs. You put the shoes up on your...

HR: What about saving the feet?

HS: No, the feet you no save. The feet you no save. Self you no save. You save your clothing. You save the shoes. You save your bullets. You never save yourself, because you are...

HR: Replaceable.

HS: Correct. So, we was walking a few days. And behind me mine friends, my Jewish friends what wasn't so on the level, they didn't accept this. They didn't accept that Russian life, you see they was stubborn. They didn't go in in that written, it's hard to, I don't know, I can't explain it. They still was themselves, not willing, you know, to...

HR: Mold in.

HS: To mold in, and not willing to say the work is not too hard. You no have to complain. You see what less you complain, you better you feel inside. What more sorry you feel, what more depressed you get. And what more you throw away, I no feel sorry. I can do this. I can do this. And you're doing. And you're like, you get a inertia. And I tried to pull them behind me. They was doing what I say, because it was easy, no with a very much resentful. It's like driving a car with the brakes on.

HR: Yeah.

HS: So, we come to the city. This was in the afternoon. We come to that, we reported to the electro station. And over there was sitting a military man. And soon he come in, they surrounded us and they say, "You're all mobilized to the army." Now in this moment he say, "You're no more free people. You're all mobilized how you are." We was walking around then, okay. And we went up and we have to swear, it was a very strange, you know, ex-, very strange, unrealistic. A Russian commissar stand like this, and he say, "We have to swear allegiance to the Russian. And we fight," and this and that. And later we sing the international. And he says, "You are now Russian soldiers." Okay, so we are soldiers. "So now everybody can go home for a hour, bring a shirt, underwear, a cup, a spoon, a knife, and if you have bread, and come report back in this place." We went out and mentioned our names. They had written down our names and we went home. We wasn't home a few weeks after this...

HR: [unclear] give you an hour.

HS: And we come home and the mother, you know, and my mother I saw in her sweet eyes I saw already new trouble brewing. I saw already the atmosphere is entire different. You know the development was so fast, the deterioration on the front was so fast, the deterioration of our life was so fast that days wasn't, was counting. And I see my mother

already is in trouble. And my f-, and everybody is so tense, you know? We hear already the Russian going on Leningrad. And this was a few months after the war, you know, maybe three, four months since already. And we was in such a turmoil. How thousands of miles? What happened? We couldn't even, we didn't know either what's going on. Because I was, the news from the radio is only what they want to say. The street's so hostile. You know you see there a hate in everybody. And we are again the stranger. And I come home with the bad news, "I am here and I have to go away." They didn't know nothing, when I will come home. I told my mother, I say, "I have to go back to the army." And I remember we didn't have bread in that day, because how I say, they didn't give us bread, only they make. They give us that wheat. And my mother make *lipioshki*. You know what's *lipioshki* means? Like pancakes, from that...

HR: Flour.

HS: From that flour. She make me three, four such pancakes, wrap it in a towel. And she give me, I remember still such a red coffee cup, from metal. And she give me a shirt. And long, I have long underwear, homemade from the Russians what they're making by themselves. How do you call it? Linen.

HR: Weaved it themselves.

HS: Weave it by themselves such a [unclear]. And I will tell you in the future, I was walking in that underwear a half a year on place of pants because my pants fall apart. And this, and good that I have such strong underwear. This was my clothing. So, I took the mother and I say--I kissed them, everybody, you know. They didn't dare to cry either. They didn't understand. This was so overwhelming, coming home after two, three weeks.

HR: And to leave right away.

HS: And leaving right away. They say an hour. And I didn't want to start with the Russians. You see we was very careful. We was very, like, you know, we was the strange people. Oh, I forgot to tell. When we was over there already, in that city, a half a year they call us to the police. And they give us passports, internal passports with a *Statia* 58. This means that we are not reliable elements. *Statia* 58 means that we can live only, let's see, a thousand miles from the border, a thousand miles from Moscow, a thousand miles from this, that we are not secure people. This is the written, it was written, we was getting a five-year internal passport with *Statia izat wozen*. This means *Statia* 58. So I was evaluating in my mind about this, why we were undesirable people. I didn't say nothing to my father and mother. No, I felt that we are something undesirable.

So, we come back. I reported back to the electro station where I worked. And we come over there and everybody was already there. And they marched us down to the River Bugzal [phonetic] and they load us on a big river ship. And they shipped us, thousands of people, not only us. This was a general mobilization from the all, from every factory they took only 30 or 40 percent of able bodied people.

HR: How far were you from Leningrad?

HS: We was from Leningrad, from the northern part, maybe 500 miles. And what I later find out, the Germans was going so fast that they decided to make a fortification line, like a *Maginot* line around. And they was mobilizing hundreds of thousands of people, from all around. And we was a part from that whole thing. So they shipped us with a big river boat to the Volga, to Rybinsk, where I, and I know that route because I was swimming over there. And we was over there. And they put us in in a prisoner camp. I, you remember I say before that whole bridges, how do you call it? The whole...

HR: Bridges?

HS: No, the whole sides of the river was prisoner camps.

HR: Banks?

HS: The whole banks...

HR: Banks?

HS: ...of the river was prison camps. And prisoners was cutting wood and putting this on the river, preparing the Rybinsk sea, artificial sea. They put us up in such a camp overnight. And they was forming from us division, the units what we have to do.

HR: They didn't take your father?

HS: No.

HR: Too old.

HS: I didn't...

HR: Too old?

HS: I, no, no, I didn't know nothing. The father was home. Everybody was home. When I left, everybody was home. I didn't have time to talk to him either. I didn't have time, I didn't either say good-bye to them really, you know? Because the half an hour what I, a hour-and-a-half, in Russia this was a five miles we have to walk. There is no transportation. So, until I tell him I'm, to say, "Hello I'm here, and give me this," I didn't even have time to tell him what and how, because I didn't know, and what's happening with them, you know? I just look on my mother and I had enough. I saw already the whole trouble what's going on. So we come in to that, they loaded us up in that prisoner camp and from where my friends was getting vodka, I don't know. And later they didn't get vodka, they get *eau de cologne*. You know what's *eau de cologne*? Perfume. Perfume and cucumbers. And this they started to drink.

HR: They drank the *eau de cologne*?

HS: And I have to drink too. I decided that I am a part of them. And I drink *eau de cologne* with cucumbers. I was right away vomiting. And they was laughing. No, I was a part of them. You know, I was integrated with them. I felt they, that vile body of them, you know? And I feel the anger what is accumulating in them, you know? And I wanted to be on the other side from the anger. I no wanted to be, you know, I felt this is not, though you see, my instinct, I got very developed instinct what I had to do in this moment, the thing to do right or wrong, you know? I was trained. In that moment do this. In that moment

do this. And I felt I have to do with this, you know? I was already accepted. And I was thinking, I no want to be a softie in their eyes. I no want to be...

HR: But when you vomited did they make fun of you?

HS: Oh, they was vomiting too.

HR: Oh!

HS: Oh, vomiting is a normal thing.

HR: From the *eau de cologne*; nobody can drink it.

HS: Oh, sure. I forgot to tell you when I was in that forest, in that Turovo, in the beginning. And they sent us to work cutting trees...

HR: Cutting trees.

HS: Yeah. I was, from that food I was very sick. I was getting *farunkalas*.¹⁸ You know what's *farunkalas*?

HR: Great big holes in your skin?

HS: I have, I will show you, I have here full, I am full of *farunkalas*, everywhere, you know? And I was very, and my legs was swollen. This was from the bad nourishment, from the lack of vitamins, you know? And we was in that Turovo sleeping over there and they was bringing vodka. And they was drinking. And they fall on me, you know? And with this they break me the *farunkalas*. That pus was going out, you know. You squeeze...

HR: Yeah.

HS: You see, you squeeze.

HR: Oh my.

HS: You see the holes? And pus goes out like glasses of pus.

HR: And they got big.

HS: Big like a fist.

HR: And left you with those marks.

HS: And left me with marks, right.

HR: All over your legs, [unclear].

HS: Here. Not only legs. Here and here and everywhere, you know? It was like a sickness, one start and the other come. One start and the other come. So, and I remember, and I was, and they fall on me, drunk, you know? I was sleeping with the *farunkalas*. And he make me so much pain by falling on me, he bangs that *farunkala*, that I kicked that guy. And I give him such a kick that he ran out through the door, you know? And so I was used to already to their drinking and to their vomiting and to their cursing. They are using such a curse. Language you never saw. There is no one sentence that shouldn't be two curses. And everybody--children, women, professors, doctors.

HR: Are you talking about words, curse, swearing words? Or a whole sentence of curses, like, you know, that you [unclear]?

¹⁸ Abscess or boils.

HS: A swearing curse, and whole sentences in curse. And this is amazing this, how this release you, how you, your anger goes away.

HR: You know, in Yiddish they have curses, I don't know...

HS: No.

HR: But not like this.

HS: I no believe in no language is this.

HR: No language.

HS: You, I can tell you a sentence, a whole sentence, just one curse after other. And so elaborate, you know, so whole this. And it's amazing how this release your tension. If, now if I get mad I curse too, in Russian.

HR: One word or a whole sentence?

HS: A whole sentence.

HR: You can't translate it it's so bad?

HS: I, it's very bad. It's not yeah.

Tape twelve, side two:

HS: And being a day in that camp, near Rybinsk, they loaded up on trains thousands of thousands of people. And we went with that old Russian historical way, from Rybinsk to Bezeck to Bologoje to Staraja Russa. This is the old, this is the heart of Russia, great Russia, on the way to Leningrad. That time was already a horrible time. The Soviet power was crumbling. The Soviet power was crumbling and you can see everywhere, when we was looking around, millions people on the run. This was reminding me the time when we had it in Poland, when people was running. Now here was a scale much bigger, much more people, and much more territory. All railroads was bombed. All bridges almost destroyed. All either the signal stands almost destroyed. And we was going and standing, standing and going. And sometime days waiting for our train to go through, and not being able to move. And being almost constantly under German bombs. The Germans develop a, all kind time of technical bombs. They was bombing our train in the front. Later they was bombing the train behind. And we was caught in, not a way in and a way out. And we develop a whole technique just from jumping from the cars. And sometimes we have to jump in the swamps and sometimes we have to jump in the water. And you have to jump and to run maybe 100, or 200 meter, because the pilots, the German planes was going so low down above the wagons that you can see their faces. And they was looking down. You can see their faces with their...

HR: Goggles.

HS: With the goggles what they have them. And you can see how they start to spray with fire the, you see the fire comes out from the *pulemyoty*, from the machine guns. And you just lay down looking on their faces and waiting that you will get the bullet, because you are not able to move. Most time we was in the tangle from the telegraph wires what was. And after such a thing, they bombed out, we have to get up and we have to walk to the next station and to board our next train and everything to by the order what they was doing this. And we really didn't know or they know what we are doing. Until, so going and waiting and bombing, we come to a lake, Kalinin [now called Tver', northwest of Moscow], no, no, not far from Kalinin, Lake Ilamayn. And not far in Kalinin it was the that time was the big battles in Kalinin. And at night we saw the first time how the first Russian *katyushas* was firing. This was a terrible weapon never seen before. You could see a sea of fire coming out with a tremendous noise. It's not a regular cannon artillery. And you know, like a ball of fire with a very terrible noise coming out. And they tell us in that time, "This is the new secret Russian weapon."

We continue until we come to a town, Valdaj. This is like a, was Valdajska, *Vosvishenoist*. This means like small mountains. Valdajska *Vosvishenoist*, this is from the northwestern part from Leningrad. And they told us this will be our destination where we start to work on our fortification line.

HR: How far from Leningrad now?

HS: Probably this was about 200 miles from the other side from Leningrad. You see, and we was, from Leningrad, Cherepovetz was from south, down to Leningrad. We was now from the west of Leningrad. And how I understood, the Russians tried to make a fortification line around in the, how they call it Dalidostupitulenga [phonetic] to Leningrad, from the wide range from Leningrad, and stop the German Army. Why was it strategically so tremendous important? Because the Americans and the British start to give supply to the Russians. It was already after the Atlantic Charter, when they say they will help Russia to fight the Germans. And the help started to come from Murmansk and from Archangelskoie, from the northern railroad. And the northern railroad was in danger to be cut off by the Germans. And we should keep that line open. So, we come down from that Valdaj and we was walking to the forest again maybe a 20 miles. This is a very small walk in Russian style. We come to the forest and they make from us brigades. And they give us shovels. And they make a, and we started to dig anti-tank trenches. Anti-tank trenches we was digging maybe a 100, 200 miles. Was hundreds of thousands of people mobilized to do the job, without no technique at all. We have only a shovel, a saw, and a ax. And we went in to the virgin forests over there and we started to make the very deep trenches. And we was cutting the trees down. And from the trees we was making *dzot*. This means we make holes, we put in the, like houses in ground. And on top we put the mountains of grounds, with one small window where it was put in a *pulemyot*, a machine gun. This was called *dzot*, *Dolgovremennaya zenitnaya ognevaya tochka*. And we was making mines...

HR: Fields?

HS: Mine fields. We was mining the fields where we couldn't dig the trenches, because it was highways where the army have to move. This was everything mined. And the side was protected by anti-tank artillery. We was joining, this was a country of lakes, thousands of lakes. This was still from the glaciers period when the glaciers was moving, with the big boulders and big--so we was with the anti-tank ditches we was joining lake to lake, just keeping a small piece open so, and this was mined, so if there will be a need, this will be explode and the water will surrender the whole anti-tank trenches. This was the plan. I don't know how in the reality was, because the German knows everything what we was doing. We was working constantly under German fire. They was bombing us, and they were strafing us. And they was throwing down leaflets.

HR: Leaflets, yeah.

HS: And we was under court marshal order. We was ordered not to pick up the leaflets. I was in that brigade with, mine brigadier was one Fiodotov. He was with me working in the electro station, a man strong like a bear. Very powerful a really forest man. Born in the forest. He knows everything, strong, and mad like hell, a very mad man, and very anti-Soviet. And always you see in his eyes a boiling rage. And it's amazing, he was very close to me. I was very friendly with him and he was helping me. He was teaching me either how to make the handle for the shovel that it should better dig and we should get less blisters. And how I should move really the arms, by throwing the earth with the power

from your body, not only the hand. And you shouldn't work so hard. I was very close with that man, and I was saying, "You see in what kind of terrible situations we are." He said, "Genya, this is a very good situation that we are in. We will get in a terrible situation when we'll be in the regular army. Now you see still we can run, we can hide. When they're shooting us you can..."

HR: [unclear].

HS: Yeah. "When you will be in the front line, you will not do and you will not have the freedom." And how really his words and I saw this in the future. We dug in and we was living in the forest. And the ground was very--there are so many lakes it was very watery. You dig in, and we constantly was sleeping whole nights in the water. Sleeping outside there we couldn't because the Germans was harassing us. And we cover us with branches. No sooner you dig a little deeper, you was already in the water.

HR: In water.

HS: So, we have the choice and we was sleeping in the water. And the Germans was terrorizing us. And mine--we had a few Jewish people there, Jewish boys what was working with us in different this. And I wasn't too happy with them. Again I have to mention they didn't arose to the situation.

HR: Wait, I want to ask you a question, Mr. Skorr.

HS: Yes, right.

HR: Before you go on. In all of your experiences in Russia, after you left Poland you went to Russia. And up until this time now, did you, was there any observance that you remember of Shabbat or of any of the holidays?

HS: No.

HR: It's completely gone.

HS: Absolutely nothing.

HR: For your father, your mother? Nothing.

HS: We didn't know either.

HR: You knew Saturday.

HS: Saturday we know.

HR: But, it was a...

HS: No, Saturday was a regular day of work. The system of life doesn't...

HR: Right.

HS: Yeah.

HR: And you didn't have a Jewish calendar and you never knew what...

HS: [chuckling] We didn't have a Jewish word. Only once when my mother come home from the bazaar and she told me she met the guy from the photograph [unclear] what is, he was a Jew. And he told us, "You know, soon will be Rosh Hashanah." And the mother was amazed that how they know this, and how we are so disoriented that we don't know this. No, I was no, and we didn't have nothing about the...

HR: Okay.

HS: Yes. Again, what I was working with the Jewish, with our, the *byezhinitzes*, with our refugee people. They didn't arose to the situation. They didn't want to commit to their work how it have to be done. They always was trying to go to the doctor, that he, this hurt them and the other hurt them. Probably it's hurt them. It's hurt everybody. Now you see they didn't make them, they overcome. They didn't start to be a part of that whole struggle. They just looked themselves still like they are in the...

HR: Separate.

HS: Separate, and they are individual. And I have to say they evoke resentment by people. Let, I'll give you example. My friend Yasha, a very big boy, stronger than me like a bear, bigger than me, he was so afraid of the Germans that he wasn't the one to sleep in that *dodo* [phonetic]. He went to sleep at night by the lake. I say, "Why are you going to sleep by the lake?" He said, "The Germans are intelligent people. They will no throw in bombs in the lake." Well, once we have a--they attacked us. He jumped in in a toilet. And he was sitting in the toilet the whole night, coming out stinking from the toilet, and not realizing that it's only up to God if the bomb will hit you here or the bomb will hit you that, you know?

HR: Here or there.

HS: It was like finding a needle in a...

HR: Haystack.

HS: Yeah. And the end of the days, when it was a commission of disabled people, come a commission. And they, most of the people show they are disabled with rheumatism, this with this. And they were sent away. I was left with a few boys. I didn't want to claim that I am sick.

HR: You mean a lot of the Jewish people.

HS: A lot of the Jewish people went through, probably they was sick. No, they didn't make a effort to do the job. Mine impression was if you are over there, you're the same safe like you would be in a other place. You have to do your part in fighting the Germans. You had to do your part. It's very hard to [unclear]. You no have to try to just to run in with your head in fire. No, what you have to do in your part of the struggle, you have to do. We was treated over there very bad, the whole population, the whole.

HR: Not just the Jews.

HS: Not Jews. I'm not talking about the Jews. We was like a...

HR: No, it was everybody.

HS: Let's see...

HR: They didn't differentiate you probably this time.

HS: They was talking about Jews, we let's see it was over there 100,000 people. Maybe we was over there a 60 or 80 Jews. So we was almost in, and we was known in our brigade. No not in the other things. The whole, I want to just give a situation. We was very mistreated from the management, from the commander, from the [unclear]. I had the impression that that whole defense job was dished out to the NKVD. That whole defense

fortification work was dished out to the management from the prison camps. And they put up the same regime on us like they would put up on prisoners. This means if for any reason you're not able to work that day to dig and not only a hole, you have to dig let's see 20 cubic meter of ground. If you dig less, you'll get less bread. If you are sick and you no get from the doctor a this, you will not getting feeded. My shoes tears apart from that digging that ground. And I had very big shoes. So the permission from my, from that Fiodotov, from my brigadier, I left in camp to fix it with wires, just because the shoe was, I have no soles. I have only the tops. I was walking with that. So I want to put them together, and I find some wires from a plane what fall down, from a shot down plane. I find electric wires and I try to...

HR: Put them together.

HS: Improvise. So when too the, accidentally that commandant from that, the head [unclear] and he still have the insignias from the NKVD. He say, "What, why are you not working?" I show him the shoes that I want to fix them. He say, "Today you're no getting bread." And I didn't get bread. I just want to say a example how they was. And they had bread and they have shoes and they have vodka and they have meat and they have women and they have orgies. You can hear at night the whole orgies what they are doing. And they are, yes, with the whole management, with the whole *politruk*. They are living like kings.

HR: Who? The officers?

HS: The officers, the whole management. They didn't give a damn about us. They have a whole, let's see they have clothing, they have shoes, and they didn't give us. Only what happened with the shoes? One days the Germans come so close. We get a order, "Run away! *Sposaisa kto mozhet.*" The whole, everything was ran away, and we left the whole shoes, the whole everything. And they, loads with, carloads with bread, they was throwing on the highway. And if somebody is able to take, we was taking. And near the Valdaj, that city of Valdaj, the city of Valdaj was abandoned. Probably that was already the front line. We, sometimes we was marching through to other positions and you can only hear the radio that produced this in the street was on. And just talking, "Soldiers fight to the last drop of blood," and this, the all kind agitation.

HR: Because you hadn't met any German soldiers, right?

HS: Not yet, no. And only I picked up, once I picked up a leaflet, a German leaflet. And it was written in Russian and in German. And when I have a chance I went to the field, I read it in German and in Russian. And it was their standard agitation saying, "Don't dig holes. Our tanks will overcome you. Throw away your weapon. Put your bayonet in the ground. Kill the officers and kill the Jewish commissars. And come over to us and we will guarantee you security." This was their...

HR: Did some do it?

HS: This I don't know. I didn't see it.

HR: You didn't see it.

HS: I didn't see it. We went near, far from the Valdaj is a Valdajskaj *azero*, a lake of Valdaj, with a beautiful monastery. We was going over there, you know, and it was such a beautiful, and it was looking like in Switzerland. And I was always so admiring this. And that Fiodotov told me, "Don't look over there. You know what in that monastery is? In that monastery is the biggest prison from here, from the *NKVD*." Hundreds of thousands of people was destroyed in that *Solovietski* monastery. We, okay, we finished this fortification line and they sent us over to a other line. And by lining up, when we maked that *Appell*, this was in a field. We was attacked by German planes and plenty of people was killed. Because we was massed over there. And later they say that this was a sabotage, that we have a, somebody in the fifth column what was monitoring everything what we are doing and reporting this to Germans. And the Germans know everything what we are doing. And they're sending out descends, air descends, were taken over the all fortification what we digged behind ourselves.

HR: Sending out what?

HS: Descends. *Parachuten*?

HR: Oh, parachuters.

HS: Descend? How do you call them?

HR: Descend.

HS: Yeah.

HR: The parachutes were descending.

HS: Yeah.

HR: All right.

HS: Parachuting. And they, sending out parachuting, our soldiers, and the Finish soldiers. And they're taking over everything what we was digging was useless.

HR: Because the parachuters were coming down on the ground and...

HS: Yeah, behind the lines.

HR: Behind the lines.

HS: And the whole line was a...

HR: Oh, useless.

HS: Yeah. That was...

HR: Oh my.

HS: ...useless.

HR: How far behind the lines?

HS: I don't know. This I didn't...

HR: I mean you didn't see them?

HS: We didn't see them. Only we was forced to run away.

HR: Oh.

HS: And we come so...

HR: I want to ask you, Mr. Skorr, when you say so many of those people were killed, did they bury those people? Did they take...

HS: We ran away.
HR: Nobody...
HS: Who knows?
HR: Nobody did, they left everything.
HS: Either...
HR: If people were wounded what happened?
HS: In my time? If there is near help, there come a *sanitar* [paramedic]. And most time if you are wounded, you're dead.
HR: They left them.
HS: They left them.
HR: No help.
HS: No help. Because they was in such a disorganization.
HR: You didn't have aids or medics and all this? Nothing.
HS: It was such a disarray, and such a disorganization. And the Germans were so controlling everything. I will give you a example. We was working near a lake, deep in the forest, making a fortification point with wood and earth and they put in machine guns over there, and *minamioty*, and mortars. Come to us to check a Jewish commissar, I told you about a commissar. This was already cold. It starts already freezing. He comes in with a car, and he had to us a speech. And we told him, "Take a look how we are walking around." I was already in my underwear. I have no pants and no shoes. And he say, "*Nuzhno v zemliu zaryvat'sia*." This means, "You have to go in underground it shouldn't be so cold." Well, and we was looking on each other and we continued our work. He with that car didn't went away maybe a half a mile that we see diving a German plane, diving. They have the divers planes, and straight tearing apart the whole machine with that commissar, killing him. You know, they was such in a control. Later we went, we finished over there they throw us away to a other more dangerous point. We come to near Ostaskov, near Demjansk. They was going on very bloody battles. And not far from Ostaskov they made from us battalions. And they give us rifles. And they give us machine guns. And they send us near Demjansk to occupy positions already, prepared for us from different people. We come near Demjansk and we saw that battle maybe a mile, that constant firing, you know, with the artillery and with the cannons. And we just took positions. We fired positions with machine guns, with the rifles, with everything. And it was till 12:00 at night. So 2:00 at night we hear a call, a big *sumatokh* [panic] and yelling, "*Sposaisa kto mozhet*." This means, "Save yourself how you can. We are overrun." And we saw from the right flank tanks going over, German tanks going over, the tanks and everything. And that whole, we didn't put up no battle whatsoever and we was already surrounded from all sides.
HR: You mean close? Real close? Did they, they got you?
HS: Yeah! We was the second position from the front line.
HR: Were you close to Leningrad now? Or...
HS: Not yet.

HR: Still far out then.

HS: This was, yeah. Well you see, Leningrad is a geographic position. You can, we was going--Leningrad you go around from three sides.

HR: Right. And you were...

HS: One side, this is...

HR: Still on the western side?

HS: Yeah, yes. No going closer to the northern railroad, Demjansk, we was going on tremendous battles. In that time, General Vlasov, did you hear of Vlasov? The Vlasovs what they went over to the Germans? General Vlasov surrendered a whole army more than a million soldiers to the Germans. He went over to the Germans helping fighting the Russians. This was that period of time. So when we was in the second positions from the front line, that come in that order that we are surrounded, we started to run. Everybody how he can. I tried to keep myself with my people, and with that Fiodotov, with the other guys. And we started to run to the forest. Because the forest was our home, our safety. Because the Russian in the forest was much more safe. And the Germans with their technique, with their tanks, they couldn't go in so deep. And in the forest was much easier to fight the Germans than outside, because they wasn't supported so much by the technique. The Germans was only fighting the Russians because they was much more superior in technical, they have much more tanks and much more *motozit* [phonetic], canons. They have much more mortars. Their soldier wasn't so tired because he was always...

HR: Well-dressed and well-fed.

HS: Well-dress and well-fed, and well-prepared to the front. Not tired. We have to march 70, 80 or 100 miles until you come to a position you're that, your legs, you know, your legs getting so tired. And you're getting, you're sweating so much. And your legs, you're developing rashes. They're called *gvuls*, *gvoks* [phonetic]. And you start to be, you have no time to wash, you know?

HR: And you can't walk.

HS: You can't, yeah, you can't walk and he say, "Walk!" No, it's very tiring. But only I want to say what kind of soldier are you in such a inconvenience, when you come to the position you're already half dead. And the German soldier come ready with trucks, with the motorcycles. And every, and he is already, this he was much better. And they were much, very technical, and much more better officers [unclear].

HR: But in the forests you could use guerrillas [unclear].

HS: Correct. In the forest the Russians were better, because you can go with bigger units. And the Germans didn't go in the units. They didn't was interested. They was only interested to go to take more territory, to leave big surrendered, they have, they call it a *cotyol*. You know what's a *cotyol*? A *cotyol* means a pot, a big pot. It means to make a big pot. In a pot you can have 100,000 soldiers. So, in that time we started to be already very cold.

HR: And the snow?

HS: Not yet snow. Now already in the morning...

HR: Frost. Frost.

HS: The *zamorozki*, the frost, you know? And we was in very bad condition. And...

HR: And you still had no pants.

HS: I still had no pants. And I had no clothes either. My first--our first occupation was when we was a demoralized group. So that Fiodotov told us, "Now we are by ourselves. We have no connection with the army. We have no connection with nobody. We have to be a unit like a guerrilla unit. Everybody have to listen to me, and I have to listen to everybody. We will do better what we can." First of all, he say, "Your clothing is no good. We have to find clothing from dead Russian soldiers or from dead German soldiers." This was the first thing, and we, at night we was crawling to the, near to the battle fields. And we find clothing from the soldiers. We find boots from German soldiers. You couldn't take them off of those soldiers. We, with axes hack off their legs, you know? Yes, because they was frozen in.

HR: And how did you get it off them?

HS: Yeah, we put this near a fire and...

HR: Oh!

HS: When the leg go out, and we pull it out. We washed the boots later. And I had very beautiful *sapior* boots. You know what's boots means?

HR: To the thigh.

HS: Yeah, how they call that? *Shtivel* in Yiddish, you know? Boots.

HR: Up to your knee.

HS: Up to the knee, and I was like a king, you know? Very good, strong. Well, it was a little revolting to, from a dead person. No I was becoming...

HR: But to put them into the fire, the odor from those legs...

HS: Well this...

HR: [unclear] nothing.

HS: This didn't matter. No, this meant nothing. So, and we started to live our lives.

HR: So you got clothes? Did you get clothes?

HS: And the, we got clo-