HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

MORRIS STEIMAN

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Nora Levin
Date: August 5, 1981

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MS - Morris Steiman [interviewee]
NL - Nora Levin [interviewer]
Date: August 5, 1981

Tape one, side one:

MS: As the interview will start, I would like to make one comment. Today is the 5 of August. Sixty-three years ago today, in 1918, August 5, I was born. In a way to celebrate my birthday, and to give out a gift from me to future generations, perhaps, I will try to relive the years of what we call now the Holocaust period. And bring it out as much as I'll be able to, as much as my memory will serve me. Maybe the future generations will learn something from our tragedy, in a time when the whole world kept quiet and six million of our Jewish people got annihilated. There were some few exceptions but they helped us, but, as a whole, unfortunately, the world with so many so-called liberals, kept quiet in that tragic period. This will be as a gift from me, like as I said, for my birthday.

NL: Thank you very much, Mr. Steiman. Now please tell me where you were born, and a little about your early family life.

MS: I was born in a small, little town called Bodzanow. This is in the vicinity of a bigger city called Plotsk. It is about 90 kilometers from Warsaw. It was a small little town. The Jewish population were around--the beginning of the war when we driven out from my hometown--it was around 1200 people, not families, Jewish people. I was born in a small little town--parents were religious people. I was brought up in that way. My father used to always say, "It's better to be a Jew without a beard, than a beard without a Jew," which he meant, it's good to be a person. My father was a pious Jew, he had a beard and he was respected by the whole people who ever knew him. I have been trying to go in the same directions. If I see an elderly person, I'll give anything, whatever I can to help him if he needs help.

NL: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

MS: Originally, I was told, we were a family of fourteen children. I only remember seven.

NL: The others died?

MS: They died before I could remember.

NL: And you were?

MS: I was the youngest. I have a sister, God bless her, in Israel, which she is the oldest. I have another sister over here, which she brought me over here, her name is Bernice Zellis. Then I have another brother, which he also--the sister came over here in 1929 before the war, and she actually made out my papers, and she brought me to the United States. Then I have another brother here, which he got safe during the war, and he came over here in '52, I think, or '53.

NL: Did you go to a traditional yeshiva or *cheder*?

MS: Yes.

NL: What were your relations with the non-Jewish children? Did you have any non-Jewish friends?

MS: We had non-Jewish friends, although in the small towns, we had somehow, we were always in a fighting mood, even with the best friends that we had.

NL: Because of antisemitism?

MS: Because of antisemitism, and I used to wear--we had the special kind of hat, what we wore, the religious Jew, a round, black satin, silk, that's what the religious people wore in Eastern Europe. I went to *cheder*, later on around, I guess, I must have been around 11, 12 years old, I went to a yeshiva for around two years, where a brother who saved us--he's now in the United States, he lived in that city--so I went there to the yeshiva for around two years, and I then, I guess around 15, 16 years old, I had to go to work.

NL: The family needed the income?

MS: The family needed the income.

NL: What sort of work did father do?

MS: Well, since I can remember, for a while he was a baker. Since I can remember, he did very little of it.

NL: And mother, did she have?

MS: Mother couldn't do anything, she wasn't feeling well. We had a bakery, and we used to--for *Shabbes*--we used to make *challah* and *cholent*, if you know what it is…

NL: Sure, of course.

MS: …and for Pesach, we used to bake *matzoh*; otherwise, we--something happened a long time since I could remember, was a fire there in the bakery, or whatever it was, which we weren't allowed to bake bread. We also, during the summer, we used to go out on a farm and rent the fruit gardens.

NL: I see, I've heard about that.

MS: This was also a sort of an income.

NL: So, when you were 15 or 16, you had to go to work. What sort of work did you do?

MS: I was started as a tailor.

NL: Apprentice?

MS: Apprentice. I worked for a year and a half, and then when I started to work for money, I was getting about five *zloty*--it compares like five dollars, let's say, a week.

NL: That was considered very good.

MS: It was maybe yes, maybe it was considered good. It wasn't easy, even to start as an apprentice in tailoring. It wasn't easy, especially for me, it was somehow, I

went into a place and the co-worker--he was an older worker there, and he was afraid maybe I'll take away his job or whatever it was, and he didn't want to show me.

NL: Oh, my.

MS: But, somehow, I managed. I worked for around three years there and then, I had a brother in Warsaw, a brother and a sister, got killed during the war. One passed away before the war. So I went to Warsaw and I worked there. I started to work as a tailor, until the war broke out.

NL: What was it like being in such a big city after the small town? Did you live largely within a Jewish circle, or a broader circle of friends?

MS: I lived with families. For a while I lived with my brother. I had a sister there, the one who is in Israel now. She gave me a lot of help at that time. No, we had Jewish friends, yes, I got accustomed to the--even to living in the big city.

NL: Did you encounter much antisemitism in Warsaw?

MS: Yes. At one time, I remember, I was sitting with a friend of mine--it's a funny thing--it's so many years, I think it must have been in 1936--I was sitting in a park, and at the end of a bench, and two boys came over to us and we had a fight.

NL: You were called by some insulting name?

MS: They came and they just hit me.

NL: But you were used to defending yourself?

MS: Yes. Even in my small hometown, somehow I was called a strong boy, which, maybe I had a little power in me, but the main thing, I didn't give in lightly. If we had to make a standup, we were walking with a couple of boyfriends, and a couple of gentile boys came up, across, whoever walked on that side where they were coming, they went on the other side.

NL: They were afraid of you.

MS: And the Jewish boys, they went on the other side, if I should approach of the side from the gentiles. If I had my elbow out, they felt it.

NL: Now what did you remember--what do you remember of this period, '36, '37, in terms of the news from Germany? Were you aware of what was happening to the Jews there after Hitler became Chancellor?

MS: Yes, we were aware. As a matter of fact, I was working in Warsaw, '36, '37, '38, '39, and we had news coming in, as a matter of fact, people were coming in, running away from Germany, coming into Poland. A man came into the place where I worked…

NL: A German Jew?

MS: A German Jew, he came in with a coat that was fur-lined coat, and he said--he came in with the coat, he had a fur-lined coat, and he gave to the German, money what he had, and he thought he had a good friend. So when they were to deport the Jew, he went to the Jew, to the police and he said, "Give me his coat, let him take mine." So for a moment, that's what he did, they had no choice. But later on, when the

Jew came in, he found out that that particular German was a good one. Because he gave them back the money what he had, and put it in the old coat. But as a whole, we knew what was going on, as youngsters, 18, 19 years old. We were aware, we were reading, and we were always talking politics. We were quite aware of the happenings, what's going on around the world. And we knew what was going on, and very little we could do.

NL: You weren't thinking of--or there was no possibility of emigrating anywhere?

MS: No, as a matter of fact, my sister in the United States, in 1939, I think it was, what do you call--like it was just in Canada. Not the--what was it called? An *austellung*.

NL: Oh, a demonstration?

MS: Not a demonstration, it was like it was in Canada, when was it in 1968, was in Canada, in Montreal?

NL: The Olympic Games.

MS: No, not the Olympic games--an exhibition.

NL: Oh, an exhibition.

MS: It was in 1939, and my sister at that time…

NL: A fair.

MS: A fair, there was World's Fair.

NL: The World Fair.

MS: World Fair. So she was trying to bring me over to the States, me and my sister. She was two years older from me. Somehow, it didn't come about.

NL: Couldn't get through.

MS: Couldn't get through.

MS: Can we go back to the German Jew in the tailoring shop, you were saying that he came in with his coat.

MS: In other words, he told us this story…

NL: He told you that story.

MS: He told us the story of what was going on in Germany and we know what's going on in Silesia. People run out, run away from Germany. We were quite aware of the antisemitism, what's going on.

NL: Were you prepared for the invasion of Germany? Were the Poles prepared or did that come as a great shock?

MS: We thought that the Poles are prepared, because…

NL: They expected an invasion?

MS: They expected it, and the Poles were called a strong army, a good disciplined army. But unfortunately, the hierarchy of the army were sold out to the Germans.

NL: Was that so?

MS: That's why, that's one of the main reasons why Poland collapsed so fast. There was one citadel, not far from Warsaw; apparently over there, the army didn't give in. They fought, Poland was surrounded, all Poland gave up already, that particular citadel held on for four weeks.

NL: Are you suggesting that the army collaborated?

MS: They sold out. Of course, the hierarchy of the army.

NL: For money?

MS: Who knows.

NL: It's the first time I've heard this. We were under the impression that the cavalry was very heroic, that it was no match for the armored [unclear].

MS: The cavalry was heroic, as a matter of fact, I lived about seven kilometers from, it's called a waterway, it's a waterway, the Vistlov [phonetic], it's called by [unclear].

NL: Vistula, yes.

MS: It's--when the Germans came over the other side, we were that close to the German borders, and they were going on the way to Warsaw, and they passed that waterway, supposedly they said they had such a cannons, Poland, but they didn't fire once.

NL: That's quite a shocking story.

MS: Yes.

NL: Did any of your relatives fight in the Polish army?

MS: No, no.

NL: What did you hear from the family in Bodzanow?

MS: When? Do you mean…

NL: At the time of the invasion.

MS: At the time of the invasion, well, the time before the invasion, I was working in Warsaw. About three days before--later on I find out it was only three days--it came up, rumors, that we'll have to enlist, or we're going to be mobilized in the army. Being I was accepted to the army, so I said--I was accepted, but I didn't go yet--so I said if I should have to be mobilized to the army, so I wouldn't want to be mobilized from Warsaw, I want to go to my hometown, where my parents were. So about--I went right home, and three days later the invasion came.

NL: So you were with them?

MS: I was with my parents, and we were trying to enlist, but nobody was even interested in it--the officials.

NL: It must have been very confusing.

MS: It was very confusing, there was no--that's why there was the outcome. We were thinking, because the hierarchy of the Polish government, the high generals, they were collaborated with the Germans.

NL: Were you able to go East or was there no time?

MS: Well, it was--in the beginning, right when the invasion came, we were trying twice, or three times, to go away from our hometown to go to Warsaw, because Warsaw wasn't taken yet. So we were trying to go one way or another, separate times, and every way was blocked up. So I went back, I got stranded home. Then, when Warsaw was taken, I had family in Warsaw, a sister and a brother of mine, so we--I wanted to--to take in food to Warsaw, with the horse and buggy.

NL: From your little town?

MS: From my little town. It was about 90 kilometers, I managed twice to go and take in some food.

NL: And you found them?

MS: Yes, yes.

NL: And your town was not occupied?

MS: It was occupied.

NL: But you could get out.

MS: At that time we still were free to get out. Then, around the end of '39, I guess November, finally we looked around and we thought it won't be good to stay home, so we left. I left to Warsaw again, and from there we were trying to go East.

NL: Were the Jews of your little town being mistreated in those early months?

MS: Yes, yes. We were mistreated. Driven out to work.

NL: Driven to labor units?

MS: To labor units and taking away the businesses. It was a small town. But, still it was a colony of Germans living about five or six kilometers from our hometown. And they came in, they took practically over the town.

NL: Were your parents hurt, Mr. Steiman?

MS: Not at the moment, not at that time.

NL: So you went?

MS: So I went East.

NL: You went with your parents?

MS: No, I went by myself. In Warsaw I got connected with another couple of boys, and we went to the occupied territory, from Russia I went to Brisk, and then we went to another--we were taken to a farm, there used to be a farm.

NL: Excuse me, but did you have trouble crossing from the German part to the Russian?

MS: It wasn't easy.

NL: Did you deliberately decide that it would be better to be in the Russian part, or were you just fleeing and took your chances?

MS: It was a time, we didn't know ourselves. The thought is, if it's not good here, maybe it's going to be better there. So this is what made us to flee our towns.

NL: Were the Russian guards helpful, or did they try to stop you?

MS: At that time, I didn't encounter on anyone--on the borderline, I didn't encounter anyone from the guards. So, while I was there, I was since November '39 till, I think, around March '40, and…

NL: How did you support yourself?

MS: I was, the first week or so, we were taken to a--a couple of weeks-- we were in the farmplace, and by coincidence this was a town, where Weizmann used to live, where Weizmann, President Weizmann was born. Motele.

NL: The famous Motele, yes.

MS: It so happened I was in that house where he used to live.

NL: Were you, by the way, in a Zionist organization as a youth?

MS: I was in the more religious *Agudah* organizations. So, then we left that farmplace, we went to Pinsk, there is like a navy yard, the same thing like we have in Philadelphia.

NL: I think that's where David Ben Gurion was born.

MS: No, Dave was born in Plonsk.

NL: Plonsk. Ah, excuse me.

MS: It's about 28 kilometers from my hometown. This is Pinsk. So, we went there to work, it wasn't easy to get in, so anyway, I worked there and somehow--I guess, we must have some kind of fate--see to look straight with the eyes to the fate, and I realized that the more I wanted to go away from my hometown, the more it pulled me back. This might be hard to describe, but that's the way I felt.

NL: You were still alone with this young friend of yours.

MS: Yes, then we divided, I was all by myself.

NL: You were all alone.

MS: All alone. So, the more I wanted to go away, to deep Russia, so-called, the more it pulled me back. I was so homesick, homesick maybe one way, another thing was, the--I was thinking of the fate of my parents. They were old people. My father was then in the eighties, 82, 81 or 82 years, and my mother was around 10 years younger.

NL: Did they encourage you to leave when you did leave? Do you remember?

MS: Well, they said, "If you want to go, try to save yourself." But anyway, after a while, I decided to go back home. It was quite a journey to make, crossing the borders, the Russian had stopped us. There was a very light moon, winter moonlight, and the Russians stopped us, then after a while they sent us over to the Germans, and little by little, I went to Warsaw, and then I did find my way back home to be with my parents.

NL: What had happened to them in the meantime?

MS: In the meantime, nothing happened. They were in the house, and they weren't specially too much, they weren't that bad treated.

NL: Were they able to get food?

MS: Somehow, they had food.

NL: They had food.

MS: Somehow they had food.

NL: And had any of your other brothers and sisters come back?

MS: No, no.

NL: They were alone.

MS: One brother was--he also left his hometown, he traveled away. Hiding out. Another brother with my sister was in Warsaw. That's all, but my brother was married and he had a family, and my sister was alone, in Warsaw. So, finally, I went back home, it was in March, 1940, then I went to work as a tailor. A German took over, made a shop, and a lot of us went to work there.

NL: There was no ghetto yet?

MS: No, there was no ghetto. Of course, we were driven out of town on the roads, to dig ditches or shovel snow, or whatever it was, and then I went to work for the Germans in the shop as a tailor, until March '41. A lot of times within that period of time, every once in a while it used to come out, people with rumors. It's going to be an evacuation. Tomorrow or next day. My father always used to say, "Why don't you have time to wait until the time will come? Why do you have to guess it?" That was his way of life. Till finally, one morning, we were awakened, it was in March of '41, the beginning of March. I think it was, to be correct, the third of March. We were awakened, and to go in the center of the town. There was like a circle for a big gathering, so they were driven to the place, and so going out from the house, we took what little we could.

NL: Why did they tell you that were going to be collected? No reason?

MS: No reason, they were driving us outside from the town.

NL: But did you have some idea of what their intentions were?

MS: It wasn't time to think. We couldn't think. We couldn't think. So, while we were going into the center of town, the streets were deserted, with just--saw groups people walking. On one side of the street were buses--trucks, empty trucks, and the other half of the street at one point were standing the Germans. The whole width of the street, from the truck side to the other half of the street. We had to pass by them. From a distance I saw whoever passed by, they were hitting them with whatever they could. There was no choice. I was going with my father, mother, a sister-in-law, and two children. And the sister, too, here my sister was home, too. So as we went by, they hit my father in the head with a stick. He fell to the ground, the blood was coming out.

Tape one, side two:

NL: . . . tape one with Mr. Steiman.

MS: . . .like in a daze, I still visualize like one person--another Jew was walking behind us, and he came and he helped me pick up my father to go further to the [unclear].

NL: Your father was conscious?

MS: Yes, yes, but he was hurt.

NL: Of course.

MS: And like I said, it's still like in a daze I could see the person, he walked over to help me with my father, picking him up, then we walked to the center of town and we stood in lines.

NL: Excuse me, and mother?

MS: Mother was going, too. She wasn't hurt.

NL: She wasn't hurt.

MS: No, she wasn't hurt, just me and my father. And we got in the center, there were lines with people and the trucks were standing. Whoever walked up on the truck, they were whipped with sticks, whatever they could, everybody got hurt. Finally, when we got on the bus, it so happened, I was with my father on one bus--on one truck, and my mother and a sister, and a sister-in-law with the children went with another truck. From there we were driven with the trucks--mostly everything was left behind in the house--from there we were driven to a place called Dzaldowa, D-Z-A-L-D-O-W-A [Dzialdowo]. It was a town not far from the German border. From a distance, when we got with those trucks, was the same thing, there were standing the Germans with sticks, taking off the people-- they didn't take them off--they pulled them off--also with a beating. From a distance I saw one truck ahead of us. He wanted to avoid the beating, so he jumped off of the side and tried to go around and go to the gate. So, I couldn't see much whatever happened, whether he got beaten or not, but when our truck arrived to the gate, I did the same thing. I jumped off from the side. Momentarily, as soon as I jumped off, I said to myself, "My father is on the truck." So I went around to the opening from the truck, and I took my father around like with both hands, I took him off the truck and we walked down. Maybe they saw that he was already full of blood, so the German said, "Go you old dog," and they didn't touch him anymore. Then we got to the--in the place there was a big yard.

NL: A camp?

MS: A camp, and we were there for a couple of days. The conditions were--it's hard to describe how the conditions were there. There wasn't a place to sit, there wasn't a place to stand, and there wasn't no facilities.

NL: No toilets, no water?

MS: No toilets, so we made a ditch, and that's the way we went.

NL: And mother and your sister?

MS: Then we met there.

NL: They were not separated from you?

MS: No, no. When we got there to the camp, we were together at the end, we were together.

NL: Did they give you any food?

MS: As little as they could.

NL: Was it a large camp, Mr. Steiman?

MS: It was a large camp.

NL: Mostly of Polish Jews?

MS: Polish Jews? Polish Jews, yes, it must have been mostly Polish Jews. It was like they got together from there, they took us to a different place. We were there a couple of days, I think from Tuesday until Thursday, we were in that camp, and then we were taken to Chenstochov[1], and then we were brought into the Jewish community, it was there, and they were supposed to take care of us.

NL: That was already a ghetto?

MS: That was a ghetto, yes.

NL: Was the ghetto already crowded?

MS: It was the beginning, but it was getting crowded.

NL: More and more people . . .

MS: More and more people, it was. . .

NL: . . .from the provinces were coming in.

MS: Yes, and it was made like in the synagogues, made like shelter for the people. And me and my father and mother were fortunate to get the shelter in a private home.

NL: You knew no one there?

MS: No, no. But maybe for the respect of my father.

NL: An older man. .

MS: An older man. So they took him, also an older man, he was by himself, and they took us into his house.

NL: His own house?

MS: Yes.

NL: He still had his own place?

MS: He still had his own house. He still had his own home, or apartment--it was a big apartment complex, they took us in. We were divided in definite places, but that place where we were was a big apartment complex, and there was a big synagogue. So they made a shelter there in the synagogue, but me and my father and mother, we

[1]This was the traditional Jewish pronunciation of Czestochowa; sometimes it was also pronounced Chenstochova.

were in that--taken into one's house--took us there. Then after a while, we contacted my sister in Warsaw.

NL: There was still mail?

MS: Yes, and my father and mother went to Warsaw.

NL: How did they get to Warsaw?

MS: By train. It was still possible at that time, it was still possible. They went by train to my sister.

NL: Didn't have any trouble traveling?

MS: Considering, not.

NL: They were able to get tickets and transport?

MS: They were able to get tickets and transport and they went to my sister. Poland was at that time--that particular part--Poland was later on divided in two parts. One was a protectorate, which was like self-governing to the Polish people, of course, with the hierarchy of the Germans, then it was like an occupied--like connected to the German place.

NL: I know about the General Government and the Wartegau area. Were you in one of those, or maybe it's pronounced, "Vartegau?"

MS: Varta?

NL: Vartegau--Wartegau.

MS: This was in Chenstochov.

NL: And that's the part that you were in?

MS: You're talking about Chenstochov, you mean?

NL: Yes, the ghetto.

MS: The ghetto, yes, yes. This was a camp.

NL: And Wartegau had more self-government, Polish self-government than the General Government? In any case, your parents were able to go.

MS: My parents went to Warsaw, and they were in my sister's house and of course, they didn't last long.

NL: Warsaw was already a ghetto by this time.

MS: Yes, but they were fortunate--- now we call it fortunate-- to die.

NL: Of a natural death.

MS: Of a natural death in my sister's house. Ten days apart from each other.

NL: It was merciful.

MS: Yes, and I was left in Chenstochov and a sister of mine were left in Chenstochov, and at that time, we came in March, like I said, I was full of blood, from Tuesday until Thursday, it wasn't looked after, the wound. While I was in that shelter house, people came in and tried to help us, clean out the wounds of my father and myself. A girl came and tried to help me, and. . .

NL: Was a doctor able to look at it?

MS: At that time, yes, in Chenstochov, while we were in the shelter house. So the girl who took care of me, tried to help me, I was bandaged, the whole head, just the face was seen. That same girl that came in May 15, '41 is my wife.

NL: What was her name?

MS: Rose. Maiden name, Tannenbaum. We called her Ruzha Tannenbaum. She had family there, brothers, two sisters, and they lived with one brother, her brother. We got married and lived with her brother, and naturally, we were driven to work in the ghetto from one place to another, and. . .

NL: Before your head had a chance to heal, you had to start working?

MS: Yes, we were driven to work. In camps. . .

NL: What did you do?

MS: There wasn't anything special kind of work.

NL: But I mean, you did heavy labor?

MS: Labor work, whatever they--we could take a stone from this side, put it the other way, and later on, we'd have to take it back. So this was the kind of work, it wasn't any particular way of building. I was working at that time, a place was called like the Air Force, we worked there. It was factories or whatever it was. So we worked there and like I said--no I didn't mention it yet--I was very fortunate to be together with my wife.

NL: She was also in the labor unit, Mr. Steiman?

MS: Yes, yes. She worked in the kitchen in that particular work where I worked with the Air Force like, and I worked in the fields, whatever was to be done.

NL: Working on planes?

MS: No, not on planes, not on planes, it was just the unit from the Air Force.

NL: I see. And you had to walk from the ghetto, and back?

MS: Walk from the ghetto and back. At that time, we still lived in the ghetto, I lived with my brother-in-law, our wives and children, and then from there, they liquidated that particular place of work. We went to another place of work called Rakow. It was a metal factory. R-A-K-O-W. And over there was the same thing, I still was fortunate to be together with my wife. Then. . .

NL: Excuse me, were you eating at all? Were you getting some rations?

MS: We were getting some rations.

NL: Just able to . . .

MS: In normal times, even now, I, as one, can eat anything, but that particular food, it was so--I don't know what to say.

NL: In Yiddish. . .

MS: In Yiddish *shlime*--it was like the peels of potatoes when it gets rotten.

NL: Slimy.

MS: Slimy, at that time whatever it was, we had to--we ate.

NL: Did you have any semblance of humane treatment by anybody in this--at this time? Were there any Wehrmacht people who are sometimes considered to have been kinder?

MS: Yes, yes, to a great credit. There was one, it was the commander of the camp, and it was a *Vize* commander. I think it's worth to mention his name, his name was Miloff.

NL: Wehrmacht?

MS: In the Wehrmacht, and he helped a lot of people.

NL: In what way?

MS: In what way--like when we were closed in--it was a big ghetto--put that first. Then, they made a small ghetto. Then we were locked in--in the camps.

NL: Outside the ghetto.

MS: Outside the ghetto. We couldn't go back to the ghetto no more.

NL: Just your labor unit?

MS: Just in that particular place, I mean, in every place was the same thing. You couldn't go back to the ghetto. So, people were in the ghetto, hidden, they didn't go out to work, and then it was locked up and nobody could go in, nobody could go out. And that particular *Vize* commander took a truck; he was told that there are people hidden--a certain family in a certain house. So people who knew him already had confidence in him.

NL: Jews?

MS: Jews. And he took a truck and went into the ghetto, took a couple Jews, workers with him, like to get furnitures.

NL: Food?

MS: Furniture--like closets--furnitures. So he went into the gate and all the Germans knew him. So he said they're going in to get furniture, and so he went to that particular house and took out the furniture and the people in them hidden in this closet, and he was going out and they asked him, "Have you hidden somebody there?" He said, "Yes," but they didn't dare to go check him.

NL: How many people did he bring out?

MS: A family.

NL: A family.

MS: And he brought them into the camp.

NL: It was better to be in the camp at that time?

MS: It was better to be in a camp, because in the ghetto nobody was there.

NL: It had been evacuated.

MS: It had been evacuated--the-- the small ghetto too. He did a lot of things to help. Like if somebody wanted to leave the camp. He made sure that she should go out. Somebody had hidden money in the house. He went in and got it.

NL: Did you ever talk to him, Mr. Steiman?

MS: Yes, yes. But not in any special capacity, no.

NL: I was wondering if he ever talked about his conflict with the SS…

MS: No, no, maybe those who were very close with him.

NL: Might have.

MS: Might--maybe yes, but I for one, no.

NL: Can we go back just a bit? We'd be interested in knowing about the Jewish Council in the ghetto, if there was one, or some Jewish authority and whether you had any connection or contact with it.

MS: I particularly didn't have no contact with them and no connections with them, but there was a council, and was certain, like, office committee which they handled the Jewish cases. There was also different kind of people, or it was the Jewish Police, so-called.

NL: Yes, what was…?

MS: Even in the camps.

NL: What was their reputation?

MS: What was their reputation? Their reputation--a lot of them wasn't--to our own discredit.

NL: They collaborated with the Germans?

MS: To our own pain--whatever we may have of it--to our shame, a lot of them weren't humane.

NL: They helped to round Jews up?

MS: They helped to round--if they didn't help to round--they did--it was like the so-called chief of police was Jewish, a Jew, and he rode on his horse. He didn't ride on the street. He had to go on the pavement.

NL: Scaring everybody?

MS: And since then, if I am in town, many times I walk in the streets and I see the police walking on the pavements with their horses, it still burns me up.

NL: And they maltreated Jews?

MS: They maltreated Jews, yes. They were like *Kapos* or like chairmans from the work. Like we had an incident--my wife was working in the kitchen. Other women were working in the kitchen. There was there like a chairman from work, a shop chairman. And he, that particular shop chairman, he had a brother, and his wife had two sisters. The brother, he was a single man. It so happened we lived back to back in the ghetto. So, once he came in and said he wanted to take out my wife to work from there from the kitchen--he must have got something from somebody else. So, my wife talked to him, talked to his wife, and said, "I am with my husband together. Why do you want to separate us?" So his wife said, "How long do you think you have to be together?" That brother did he gave her a lesson for it. For saying a thing like this. And then it was made like a lottery, whoever will win, will win. So happened my wife won--she remained there. But to our own shame, it was many of our people. A certain distant

cousin of my wife throwed out a brother of my wife--the last days before we got liberated. So my wife went to him. He said, "If you're going to say anything more, I'm going to take your husband, too!"

NL: A few days before the liberation?

MS: On the other hand…

NL: Were these assimilated Jews, or were they criminals? What sort of element?

MS: Not necessarily, it's hard. I don't know, it's hard to say. They didn't have no character, and maybe they were thinking by knocking down somebody else, they will live through. It's hard to tell, but the fact remains.

NL: Would you say the council members were of a different quality?

MS: Some of them, yes. The head of the council, his name was Kurland. He said they were taking him out, the whole council, for a ride to the cemetery. Nobody got back. That particular one, he managed to escape.

NL: Kurland?

MS: Kurland, he managed to escape and then came back to the ghetto and somehow they took him back to be in charge. But when it was close to the end, they took all the Jewish police, and some of them from the council, and they beat them to death with a hammer. That particular Kurland told to the Germans, he said, "Now is five minutes to twelve, you beating us to death." Twelve o'clock it'll be you are dead.

NL: He was beaten with the others?

MS: There were some which they gave their lives to help others, and some, it's a shame to say, but it's a fact, a fact of life.

NL: So the people in the ghetto, then, some of them were evacuated to other camps?

MS: To factories.

NL: To factories. Some were shot.

MS: A lot of them were taken, when it was we called the *"selectzia,"* [unclear] yes.

NL: Yes, the selections.

MS: The selections, they were taken away to the Maidanek.

NL: To Maidanek?

MS: To the extermination camps--to the gas chambers. Only those who got left.

NL: When was the whole ghetto liquidated, do you know, Mr. Steiman?

MS: In '42.

NL: '42, and what happened to you and your wife, at this time?

MS: At this time we were in the factory.

NL: Your wife was shifted?

MS: No.

NL: She was still in the kitchen?

MS: We managed to be together, somehow, I don't know, I wouldn't say this, I was that smart or I was in any way powerful, because there wasn't such things, to be powerful, but we were in the camp, in the factory, that metal factory, and then from there were taken to a factory where they worked in ammunition.

NL: In the same area?

MS: In Czestochowa, there were four different camps. So we were taken to the ammunition factory, it was called Pelzery, Hasag Pelzery, and there we worked with the ammunitions and same thing. I was together with my wife. I was the mechanic by the machines and she worked at the machine. Going back for a while, in that metal factory we were, it was a time when it was made a barrack for married couples. Unbelievable, it may sound.

NL: Yes, that's the first I ever heard of this.

MS: Unbelievable it may sound, it was made the barrack for couples. In the worst conditions, I don't think any other nation could do things like this, what we did to ourselves, to try to keep within dignity as much as we could. Even, it was like…

NL: A dormitory.

MS: A bunk bed, the whole length of the wall, and there we were supposed to sleep, husband and wife, husband and wife.

NL: How many were you, do you suppose?

MS: It was a couple hundred, maybe, 200.

NL: In one room?

MS: In one room. But we did manage to keep our dignity. Proudly I could say it. Everybody.

NL: Remarkable. All Polish Jews?

MS: Yes, we made partitions with whatever we could to keep the dignity alive.

NL: Remarkable.

MS: As a matter of fact, they called it a certain name, I don't know how--in Polish it was…

NL: In Yiddish?

MS: It wasn't--like a double horse barracks, like a pair.

NL: I see. Was there a Jewish supervisor of this whole bunk?

MS: There was a Jewish supervisor.

NL: What sort of person was he?

MS: Fair.

NL: Fair?

MS: Fair, fair.

NL: And you ate in this place? Whenever you ate.

MS: We ate either there or we ate in the factory. As a matter of fact when we came to the barracks, there was me, my wife, and then later we were separated, and she was sleeping in another barracks, and there was me and a boyfriend of mine. We got

very close, also a tailor. We were trying to get pieces of material either from ourselves--the Polish people used to come in to work there in the factory, too. So, pieces of material, used to make caps, by hand. Try to get maybe a potato or whatever it was. . .

NL: To exchange the caps? How did the Poles treat you?

MS: It was a mixed feeling, some of them maybe were glad.

NL: That you were suffering?

MS: That this was going on, yes. But, although they were suffering too, in some way, but this didn't bother them. They were more glad. . .

NL: The Jews were suffering?

MS: The Jew was suffering.

NL: Did you work side by side with them, or were you segregated in the factory?

MS: No, we worked side by side. As a matter of fact, later on when we were transferred to the ammunition factory, we had Polish boys, too, together to work together by the same machine. I was the mechanic, my wife worked at the machine. That was, the machine was a control machine which examined the shells for guns.

NL: Was there any effort at sabotage in that place, that you knew of?

MS: There was some effort of sabotage, not in that particular place where I worked, it was a different part, also the same part that I worked, but in a different unit. It was where readymade bullets were completed. Somehow, we were told, they made some sabotage there. Or it was taken--once it was said it was taken out a wagon with bullets. As soon as they went out a distance from the camps, they were caught. The partisans stopped them and took away the ammunition and they took off their clothes, just in their underwear, and they went back to the German who guarded that train.

NL: How long were you in the metal factory, Mr. Steiman?

MS: In the metal factory, it must have been around a year and a half or two years maybe, maybe about a year or year and a half or so.

NL: In the ammunition factory?

MS: In the ammunition factory, I was until the end, it must have been around two years so, two, three, '42, '43. I guess around close to two years most likely.

NL: During that time were you getting any news about what was happening elsewhere?

MS: Very little, because the Poles, I don't think the Poles wanted to tell us as much.

NL: They knew?

MS: If they knew, but we knew very little. We knew very little.

NL: Were there changes in the work force in those two camps? Did you see new Jews coming in from time to time?

MS: Yes, they were coming in Jews, brought in from Lodz one time. Then, there was brought in, another big factory, a ammunition factory, which the Russian army came there about six months before, sometime in the middle of '44.

Tape two, side one:

NL: . . .Mr. Morris Steiman, August 5, 1982. This is Nora Levin.

MS: So they evacuated that particular factory.

NL: The Germans evacuated?

MS: The Germans evacuated.

NL: You say the Russians came there?

MS: They came close to it.

NL: But the Germans thought there might be [unclear]?

MS: The Germans thought they were coming in, because it was a big factory, bigger than the one we had in Czestochowa. So, they brought in some people from there, too. And maybe, maybe this--that evacuation--what they evacuated about six months ahead of time, this maybe saved us in the camp of Czestochowa. I guess you must be wondering why.

NL: Yes, why?

MS: Supposedly, the Germans in that particular camp said they should have left the factory working up to the last minute.

NL: The other one?

MS: The other one. They should be able to have the ammunition from that factory, and this, maybe, saved us in a way, because our factory was going up to the last minutes when the Russians were already in the city.

NL: In order to keep producing?

MS: Producing.

NL: The gunshells?

MS: The guns, yes, everything else.

NL: And so you had to keep production going because the other factory was no longer operating.

MS: Yes. This is what I said, they should have left to go to the factory with the production, because they Russians were close--closing in. So they thought they were coming in any day, but at that time, somehow, they waited about six months, to go to Warsaw and take the other parts of Poland.

Going back to that camp--ammunition factory. I was working with my wife, as I said many times. And somehow, I had a pretty good eye at my boss. I was a tailor, and that particular boss, one--we used to call him, a fool--a foolish man. So whatever we wanted, we told him--I forgot his name--there was a couple Jewish boys, one Jewish boy was the main mechanic. And we told him we need to do this. He said, "Do this. Do that." I used to sew for him something, so I had a pretty good eye on him. He didn't mistreat me too much.

NL: He was a German?

MS: German, yes. Late, then, sometime in the middle of '44, they replaced him with another guy. The other one, we called him already the *mashugener*. He was crazy, foolish. With him we couldn't do anything.

NL: You mean he was illogical?

MS: Illogical, and I had. . .

NL: You were sewing?

MS: No, I was working at the machine, but I came in and I used to do something. With him, we couldn't do anything, we couldn't bribe him, there was no way of bribing and I had a funny incident with him. Looking back, at that time, I can't get over what I did. We were working night shift, day shift and night shift, and--[to NL] maybe you want a drink? [machine off and then on.] So, many times I used to pass by the machine where my wife was working and saw her crying. I walked over, I said, "What's the matter?" "Well," she said, "He find something on the floor, an empty shell and he hit me." I couldn't say anything. He was German, he's the boss. One time. . .

NL: What did this mean--that she was wasting it?

MS: Yes, and it got dirty.

NL: Oh, the floor got dirty.

MS: The floor got dirty or the shell got dirty. So, one time, it was the beginning of December '44. We were trying in a certain way to bribe him. Like the main mechanic, he said, "Let's do something, let's give him something, maybe he'll relax a little bit." So we were thinking what to do, so one night I passed by the machine, and see my wife is crying. I go over, and I said, "What's the matter?" Because I was the mechanic, I was trying to see the machine should be right. She said, "I don't know. Everything was--there was nothing wrong, he hit me with a screwdriver." So I went over to that Jewish boy and I told him, I said, "Listen, we're trying to bribe him. Let him show something--decency." The slogan was, "If not today, it will be tomorrow." I don't know whether you heard this or not. Which meant, we won't be finished today, it will be finished tomorrow. The same thing that boy told me too, he said, "What do you worry about? If not today it will be tomorrow." So I said to him, "I'm not taking from anything." I went over to the boss. He stood between two machines and this is like I say about three-four feet between one machine and another. I'm not tall. And he was a little smaller from me, or about the same size. And, somehow, I opened up my big mouth at him, and I said, "Why did you hit my wife? If you're hitting her for nothing, do it to me. I'll be able to take a beating better than she does." I plain screamed at him; I yelled at him. That time he hit me. While he was beating me, I told him the same thing, "Next time, this is the way you should do. Instead you have to beat my wife for nothing, do it to me." I don't know.

NL: He stopped hitting her? He could have killed you.

MS: He could have killed me at the place, and apparently he didn't. And he stopped hitting my wife.

NL: And he stopped hitting. . .?

MS: And he stopped hitting my wife.

NL: The good angel was watching over you.

MS: That's the only excuse I could have, because I don't know--looking back, how I did it. Because it's an unbelievable thing. It's an unbelievable thing!

NL: It is, it is. Were there other supervisors, or was he your main boss?

MS: No, he wasn't the main boss, there was another supervisor. There was another supervisor and he was more humane, decent, nice. But, he once killed a woman.

NL: Why?

MS: Why? Why? Like they say, it's a crooked letter. It's the guilt. He killed her, but the guilt, why he did it, is from a Jewish boy.

NL: I don't understand, Mr. Steiman.

MS: That woman. . .

NL: The woman was a Jewish worker.

MS: Yes.

NL: In the factory.

MS: And she was a little bit off mind. A Jewish boy went over to the boss, to the main boss, not the very main boss, but the main boss in that unit. He went over to him and said, "She doesn't want to work." From the same hometown.

NL: Oh, my.

MS: From the same hometown, and he knew her, that she was sick. And he took her out and shot her.

NL: What made him do that?

MS: Later on, he explained he was drunk. At one time, something was running on the floor, a mouse. He grabbed to his gun and he stopped, and he said, "Only once I did it." That particular German, he saved a lot of people.

NL: The one who shot the woman?

MS: The one who shot the woman.

NL: Saved a lot of people?

MS: Saved a lot of people from getting a beating at the police station.

NL: There was another jurisdiction?

MS: Yes.

NL: In other words if you. . .

MS: It was like a police station. The police from the camp, the watch-people from the camp. They had their station, and so if they saw anybody doing wrong, they took him and gave him 20, 25 beating-- lashes, and many time he saved.

NL: And some workers might have been taken there on charges?

MS: Yes, oh yes, like it was the place where it was finishing off the bullets. We didn't have no wardrobe place to put away the coats, so we had the jackets near the machine. In that particular room, it was there those bullets--they searched everyone

going out. They find in somebody's jacket a bullet and they were taking him to the station. He just happened to come across--they were carrying that boy. He said, "What's the matter?" "Well," they told him, "they find a bullet." He said, "Leave it to me, I'll give him whatever."

NL: Take him to the police station.

MS: And he saved him. He saved him.

NL: He saved him from going to the station?

MS: From going to the station and getting 20-30 lashes.

NL: Was he a Wehrmacht man, do you know? Or SS?

MS: I think he was SS.

NL: He was SS.

MS: Yes, but he was more or less a decent person. Like, going back to the same man--his name was Herzner.

NL: The intermediate boss, the one who saved. . .

MS: Yes, yes, and the last day when we were liberated--you know, we're jumping.

NL: That's all right, we'll cover it all.

MS: The last day, in the morning, so, we were in the barracks. Usually we out in the morning to the factory to work, but we were in the barracks. Later on, around nine o'clock or so, it was made everyone had to go out from the barracks and stand in the line, at attention. So he passes by our group and he said, "Take with you whom you know best." I guess he must have known already, something is brewing. So we went in, we went in groups, we went into the factory, and so meanwhile when I went in the factory I took my wife's coat--we had a room where we had our tools. I took her coat, whatever she had--it was in January, and put it in that room, and I stood there for a while. Another boy comes in and said, "Moishe, go out and take a look where your wife is." So I went out, I didn't see her, then I look, look, she is coming in from outside. This was a day before, the night before they sent out a shift, a group of people, but they were working night at that time. And the boss from the other shift was supposed to take over this shift. So he was taking out the people [unclear] which he didn't know them--he was taking them out, to be sent away. So we, my wife saw he had been taking her outside so she walked over to him, and she said she had the coat in the room. She wanted to go for the coat, and he was more or less, he was a fair man. So, he said, "Go ahead but come right back." So I went over to that intermediate boss and I told him. He said, "I have no power, nothing I can do," but sadly he said it. A *machtlos*. He has no power. So, at the same moment, the same time, was standing there in the main boss over the whole factory, that particular factory. In normal times we shivered when we saw him.

NL: What was his name, do you remember?

MS: Chasott [phonetic].

NL: Chasott.

MS: So that's how terrible he was all the time. That particular time, people were told to go there, and taken there, and they run back to stay here, because at a time like this nobody knew where it's going to be better. Better to stay or go. But the normal thing was to stay in the place. And he stood with a stick, hitting over the heads to go there. I did another unbelievable thing. It's unbelievable, even for myself, I cannot figure out how come I did it. While he was standing with the stick and hitting over the head, I walked over to him, calmly, and I said, "Mr. Boss, I work here from the first moment when they started that unit, with my wife; now they're going to send away my wife, so I'm going to go with." Like I was threatening him. He said, "Where is she?" I said, "Here she is." We had two bosses, the same like that *mashugune* of mine, that I started a fight with him. Another, an elderly man, from time to time he gave her a piece of bread, from time to time he hit her too. So, he called him over, and said, "Do you know her?" He said, "Yes." "Is she a good worker?" He said, "Yes." "Stay here." Another boy went over to him, said the same thing and he did the same thing.

NL: He did the same thing?

MS: In the moment when he stood with his stick, while I was talking to him, he hold his stick in his hand, raised up.

NL: And many, many people were being evacuated to some unknown. . .?

MS: Many people were evacuated to some unknown place.

NL: You don't know what happened to them? They probably didn't survive.

MS: A lot of them didn't. So. . .

NL: A good angel again.

MS: A good angel, must have been a good angel. Somebody must have been watching over us.

NL: Now, toward the end of the war, Mr. Steiman, were you aware that the Russians were coming close? Did you get any rumors or, or news?

MS: Lately, right before, we were getting some rumors. A day before, we didn't know, it's the day before, but now, they know it came out, it was the day before. While we were in the camps, they evacuated the night before about 700 people. They took them, and just took them out. They took them--they just took them out and marched them away.

NL: Took them out and marched them away.

MS: I had my sister here in the United States. Home, when we used to get the letters. I wasn't writing the letters because I had an older sister and an older brother from me, but whenever the letter came in, I used to read the address. She used to live at 633 N. Fifth Street in Philadelphia. So I read it in Polish, which it came out [says the translation in Polish], 613 N. Fifth, and once, while I was working, it hit me the address in the mind. I took whatever I could find--a piece of paper and write down the address. For myself.

NL: Now, these letters were coming to your hometown?

MS: Yes.

NL: Before you went away?

MS: Oh, yes, yes, before I went away.

NL: And you remembered those numbers.

MS: It just happened to hit my mind those numbers. I took out a piece of paper and I wrote it down. A day before we saw they were trying to do something I took on a piece of paper, another piece of paper, and I gave it to my wife. I said, "Listen, if we'll make it, if God forbid we should be separated, here will be the place where we could meet."

NL: Magic number.

MS: So, anyway, we stayed together. There was times that I was to sent away within that period, within the camps--she went to try to get me out, and times when she was about to be sent away--I did, to make her stay.

NL: And your immediate bosses conceded, and they allowed you to stay together?

MS: Yes.

NL: Even when they had other plans?

MS: I don't know, I don't know.

NL: Really extraordinary.

MS: It's unbelievable.

NL: When did the Russians come in?

MS: That particular day, the 15th of January, we. . .

NL: 1945.

MS: 1945--we came into the factory in the morning, and then the incident with my wife, which I made her to stay, helped her, and guards helped us to stay, and we started to work like nothing happened. Like nothing is going on outside of the city. We went in--a couple of people went into the kitchen and brought in the food whatever we had, and we got in the cans the food. My wife was working at the machine and I sat down on the floor near the machine. It must have been around one, two o'clock, whatever it was, maybe before. And while we were sitting at the machine, while I was sitting eating, I hear some kind of bang. Well, it's a big factory. So I didn't pay too much attention. Then a while later, another one. Then a couple repeats.

NL: Like gunfire, or a bombardment?

MS: Something like bombardment or whatever it was. At that time I said to my wife, I did not finish the food yet, at that time, I said, "You know what, I think I'm going to leave the food now." And we started to look around--somebody snuck to the windows and saw the people, the Germans, running already, and we heard already the bombarding. Then around two, three o'clock, one of the Germans came in and he started screaming. He said, "Don't you hear the Russians are behind us and you're still working, chasing the work." So finally they stopped the work and went into the barracks.

NL: They went into the barracks?

MS: We went into the barracks, and they started running, packing. It's a funny thing, it's 36 years, what that day, I can still figure out almost, I won't say to the minute, but to the hour. Then we went into the barracks--it was me, my wife and a friend of mine, who she hold together all the time. We went into the barracks, then it got dark, around five o'clock, maybe six o'clock. One of the bosses, the one who wanted to take over that shift from the previous like I mentioned, he brought in some bread and gave out bread.

NL: Where were the Russians?

MS: Not there yet, not in the camp yet, must have been at the outskirts of the other side of the city.

NL: I see, and he didn't run away.

MS: Not yet. So, naturally, whoever had a chance to grab it, so he got it. Then, the camp leader, the German, was going around in the barracks and said, "*Yidishe kinder*, Jewish children, come with me. I was to you like a father, come with me," and believe it or not, some went.

NL: Some went.

MS: So. . .

NL: They were going to be his insurance.

MS: Yes. So, then, I was still in the barracks, hidden me and my wife and that friend, and a lot of other people, not only me. And the shooting was going on, then all of a sudden like a bombardment was right on the side of the pavement. We were taken out to the gates--driven out to the gates.

NL: This was at dark.

MS: This was at dark. Must have been around nine o'clock in the evening, but it was light, a very light moon night. We were driven out to the gates from the camp. All the time during the years I always had some kind of faith. Maybe something good will happen, although it was dark moments, but like I said, I learned from my father, not to jump to conclusions, let's wait when it will come. All the time, whenever it was some kind of dark moments, my wife asked me "What's that, what's going to be?" I always managed somehow, either to fool myself or to not let to give up hope for my wife. I always had an excuse, "It's not that bad. It doesn't look as bad." Two moments that I had, my wife asked me, "What's that?" I said, "I don't know." I couldn't say, maybe it's going to be better, because it looked completely out.

NL: But you had seen some Germans run away, didn't you, earlier in the day?

MS: No, no.

NL: You hadn't seen them run away?

MS: What I mean is during that period of time during the years in the camps. So at one time, all of a sudden it got dark--it was a blackout. My wife asked me, "What's that?" I said, "I don't know." The same thing happened at that gathering near the gate.

NL: I understand.

MS: While we were standing near the gate, all of a sudden, it was like a pushback. Everybody got pushed back, and we were standing there holding hands, me and my wife and that friend of mine. My wife asked me then, "What's that?" I said, "I don't know." Because we had a suspicion that Germans are ready to blow up the places with the people.

NL: I see. Yes. They did it in many other places.

MS: They did it in many other places. When that pushback was, this came into my mind, but I didn't want to say it. It held on for a few seconds, all of a sudden we got free. It was, we went back to the barracks and. . .

NL: The Russians came?

MS: The Russians didn't come in. So we were walking around on the place, in the barracks outside, then slowly like a bombardment was right near the barracks, nearby. Then all of a sudden it got quiet. We didn't see anymore Germans. Like they just vanished in the air. There was the Polish, from the fire people. . .

NL: The fire brigade.

MS: The fire brigade, they said it must have been like--I mentioned at that meeting on January 15, I looked at the watch, it was around 9:30. That's when it was. And they said, "Now you are free, but watch out from the top, from the place."

NL: So this news came from the Poles first.

MS: From the Poles first, they said, "Now you are free."

NL: How did they treat you, Mr. Steiman?

MS: Well, how did they treat me? So the three of us. . .

NL: You just left the camp?

MS: The three of us--I still took that can with the food that I had left over from the day. I still took it with me. We went out, the three of us, in the city. It was around 9:30.

NL: You walked to the main city?

MS: We walked out from the camp, because the camp was in town, in the city. We saw an open gate from a house, like an apartment complex. We went in there. They were resenting us to stay there.

NL: Polish, or Polish families?

MS: Yeah, but we didn't pay attention.

NL: You just stayed.

MS: . . . and we stood there over the night.

NL: You still didn't see any Russians?

MS: No, no, it was nighttime. Then in the morning, we went out. Then we saw already the Russians.

NL: How did they greet you, or how did you greet them?

MS: With joy, naturally.

NL: It was different than your meeting with the Poles?

MS: Yes.

NL: Any Jewish soldiers among them?

MS: Not at that time yet. So, then we went out from that house and we were walking around in the street. It was frozen, my wife was frozen staying all the night in the outside, practically. So we knocked on a door, asked to be let in. The same Poles like they were.

NL: No change.

MS: No change. They didn't want to let us in. So we still walked, walked into another house. There was a woman. Supposedly, she said she thinks she had a Jewish husband. She let us in, gave us the house. She had to go to a funeral. She gave us the house, she let us in, and my wife started to make tea or coffee, whatever it was that we could, and me and my friend started to go out in the streets to see what's doing.

NL: Were there many other Jews? Many other people liberated?

MS: It was liberated there--some other people, in that particular city, Czestochowa.

NL: Then did the Russians make any effort to take care of you? Or did you have to fend for yourself?

MS: We had to help ourselves.

NL: So what did you do? You stayed with this woman for a while?

MS: We stayed with that woman, I think for the day. A funny thing, I walked out with that friend of mine on the streets, to see what's doing.

NL: Yes, after being in jail.

MS: Yeah! We couldn't imagine anything what to do. So, looting was going on all the time, apparently, so while we were going in the streets, there was some Polish woman looted a store with shirts. Everybody stopped. People went over to grab it, not only Jews, but Poles too. So me and my friend went over and grabbed a shirt too. I grabbed a shirt and he grabbed a shirt, and we were walking.

NL: With shirts?

MS: With shirts in the hand! Then we came into a house, like an apartment complex, there was a bakery. Well, it was a bakery, so we tied up the two sleeves, was a long shirt, and we took in a lot of bread. Then we went to the house. So we went to the house.

Tape two, side two:

MS: So we had already bread. Then, we had to go out to see a place where to stay. So we went into a house where used to be the train people, people working at the train stations. So we went in there to a house. It was a different house first. We went into a house, there was an empty room, so we stood there overnight. It wasn't good enough, because there was nothing there. So we went to another house, looked around, finally went to a house, there was something there, beds or whatever it was, and we didn't have anything to lock the door with, so we just put some chairs or whatever it was to lock the door. During the night, we were awakened. Russian soldiers are in with the knife, like about a yard the length, over our necks. He thought that we are Germans. So slowly…

NL: How did you communicate?

MS: Slowly, we started to communicate, "We are Jews."

NL: You knew some Russian?

MS: Some Russian words. So we started to communicate, "We are Jews." So finally, they let us go, they brought up whiskey, and onions or cabbage or whatever it was, and we made a party.

NL: Your first big party.

MS: And slowly, we went where there was a big apartment complex where we stood. One night, me and my friend wanted to look around to see what we can try to make out something of it. So we went down into the basement and there was a sign on the door, "Don't steal from *landsmen* [people who come from the same place]" we call, in Polish, so if this was the case, maybe it's something interesting there. So the next night we went down, four of us, to see what's there. So was there hard coal, you know, for the…

NL: Heater.

MS: Heater. So we brought it up so we could make a little heat. Somehow, it started to fall in together and tried to see how to start our lives of new. One day we were walking around in the house, me and my friend, we didn't realize the house was once on fire. And, luckily for us, we could make it on time. We opened up a door to another room, and the floor collapsed. So luckily, we were able to make it back.

NL: Did you stay in…?

MS: I stood in Czestochowa till, I think, in November, December '45.

NL: Almost a year?

MS: No--almost a year, yes.

NL: Almost a year. Did you get some work there, Mr. Steiman?

MS: Yes, I started to work as a tailor. Do some work home. I had a *Polak*. I find somebody who had the machine and I went to his house and did some work, and

meanwhile, we started to do some business, traveled one city to another, buy something, sell something, and…

NL: Did you know some people by then?

MS: Yes, by then we knew already, made contact, yes.

NL: Did you have any contact with your family in Warsaw?

MS: My family in Warsaw, I couldn't get not contact, but I was trying to get contact to my sister, to the States.

NL: 635?

MS: 633 N. 5th Street. So it was said, that in Lublin was a temporary Polish government, so I was trying to send letters through there.

NL: That was the Communist government?

MS: Yes, Polish. So it didn't work, I didn't get no response. So I started out writing in January, February, March, April, May--didn't get no response. I think in May or June, a friend of mine heard there was a brother of his, in Czechoslovakia, in Theresienstadt. So the two of us--I left my wife home--went to Theresienstadt just like this. No money, no tickets, but we went to Theresienstadt. How did we go? I guess you want to ask?

NL: Yes. How?

MS: We went by--we took a train, the freight train, sneaked on the train, and we went to Prague. Somehow we managed to go up to Prague. Getting off from the station in Prague, they asked for tickets. We had no tickets, had no money. They took us to the station, the police station from the train station. I'll never forget it. While they took us in, started to talk rough. A woman walks in. Maybe she noticed what was going on when they took us in. She walked in and she said, "What's the matter?" So they told us, apparently in Czechish or Slavish, we came from Katowice. We had no tickets. She asked, "How much?" She took out money, she paid, and she gave us change.

NL: Do you think she knew you were Jewish?

MS: Maybe, yes. We never asked her the name. We never had a chance to say a word.

NL: Another good angel.

MS: Another good angel. So while I didn't hear anything from my sister, while we were in Prague, I saw they had a post office. Post office, good, I'll go send a telegram. I asked if I could send a telegram, they said "Yes." I went over and wrote a telegram, naturally, in Polish. It's no good. It's got to be in English. Finally, I was going around and around the station, "Do you speak English? Speak English?" So I find somebody, he wrote me a telegram in English. I take it back, it's got to be printed. Here I had a train to go to Theresienstadt. So, somehow, I managed to take a couple blanks with me, just in case. Sure enough, while we were there in Theresienstadt, walking around, saw people and said, "Do you speak English?" "Can you write English?" Somembody said, "Yes." I said, "Please write me a telegram. I'm so and so from that

city," and gave them the address, and nicely he printed capital letters everything. We came back to Prague and I gave them the telegram. Four weeks later, I got a telegram from my sister.

NL: From America, from Philadelphia, and you were still in…?

MS: Poland. In Chestochowa.

NL: Now what did you find in Theresienstadt, Mr. Steiman?

MS: We found his brother.

NL: I mean, what was the situation? It had just been evacuated already in May. Were there soldiers?

MS: Well the people were still there.

NL: Jews were still there?

MS: Oh, yes, it was free already.

NL: It was free, but Jews were still there.

MS: Oh, yes, the Jews were still there. As free people, naturally.

NL: And the Czechoslovakian government…

MS: The government. . .

NL: …was taking care of them?

MS: …taking care of them? Yes.

NL: Were conditions fairly decent by then?

MS: About then it started to get--it was--we were there in June, I guess, June or July, so it wasn't so much time yet, but they were starting to get it together. [unclear.]

NL: In Thereseinstadt, you saw your brother-in-law, did you say?

MS: No, my friend saw his brother.

NL: Your friend saw his brother.

MS: His brother, he was sick. We couldn't take him with us.

NL: Couldn't?

MS: No, because he was very sick. So later on, he came back.

NL: Did you have any relatives there?

MS: No.

NL: You just went with your friend?

MS: Just went with him. While we were liberated in January I went for a ride home to my hometown.

NL: Ah ha.

MS: Naturally, I wanted to see my hometown. So I managed to get to Warsaw, and from Warsaw I had another big ride until I got to my hometown. While I was in my hometown, I saw already some--a couple people came back, my hometown was about eight people I think.

NL: Out of 1200.

MS: Out of 1200 came back, and…

NL: Was your home still there? Your little bakery?

MS: Yes, yes, the house was still there. I went into my brother's house. He had a backyard, like a little shed. Over there I had hidden a *kos*, a silver cup. And silver…

NL: Dug into the ground.

MS: Dug into the ground. A silver candlelight, candlesticks, which I took out.

NL: You found them. Mementos for you.

MS: So the silver cup, my daughter took it, I gave it to my daughter.

NL: Good, yes. And the candlesticks?

MS: The candlesticks, I couldn't carry with me, so I left in the Jewish community, there was already a Jewish community in Czestochowa, they started together a Jewish community. So while I was in my hometown, a friend of mine said there is some girl from our of town, is in a hospital in Warsaw. Which I went to see her, and that's how we started to get in communication.

NL: And your wife? Did she try to search out her family?

MS: She was from Czestochowa?

NL: She was originally from Czestochowa.

MS: Yes, nearby a small town. We did find later on when we went to Germany, we find--she find two sisters. One was in Germany, and the other one was in Sweden.

NL: One had stayed in Germany throughout the whole? No, she returned . . .

MS: No, no, she was in the camps. Then after the war we went to Germany from Poland. I went too, to Germany, at the end of '45, I went to Germany, to the DP camps. So, while we were in Germany, somebody said a sister is in the English zone. So I went one week. I went to look around, until I did found her. Then another sister--there were two sisters together, the other two. One was very sick, so they took her to Sweden, from a particular camp. And she remained in Sweden.

NL: Is she still there? So you and your wife stayed in Germany, then, for a while.

MS: Then we stood in Germany, we came to Germany in December '45, and…

NL: Where did you stay-- in what town?

MS: We were in a town, Lampertheim, not far from Frankfurt.

NL: Was there some special reason why you went there?

MS: I don't know. We went to one place and we were taken to that particular place.

NL: Was this part of the American zone?

MS: The American zone, yes.

NL: Was it a DP camp?

MS: Was a DP camp, yes.

NL: I see.

MS: Yes, it was a DP camp. So we went there and then I got in contact with my sister, again, from Germany. She sent me letters, and packages to Poland, and then when I was in Germany she started to make out papers, which I missed. I could have been here in the middle of '46.

NL: My, that was early.

MS: I could have been here, because they were in the camp, coming in from the HIAS[2] or Joint[3] asking whoever has family, a brother or sister, has to have to proof or a letter, they could send them away. So that particular day, I was in a different town, I was out to visit somebody.

NL: So you had to wait.

MS: So I had to wait. So I came over here on March 3, 1947. Which coincides…

NL: An anniversary?

MS: Which March 3, I was driven out from my hometown.

NL: Some cycle. Would you like to say any additional words about this terrible experience, aside from the silence of the world? Do you have any other thoughts about studying the Holocaust?

MS: Well, I wanted to say it in the beginning, but I'll say it now. I think you, Dr. Nora Levin, you deserve a lot of credit.

NL: Oh, Mr. Steiman, thank you. We think this is an important project and we're very grateful to all survivors for going through the pain of retelling their experiences, but we feel it's important for the sake of new generations, and the story, the experiences of the survivors must be told and retold, generation after generation.

MS: I said you deserve credit for undertaking this project. You, for the short time which I had the privilege of knowing you while I was the President of the Association of Jewish New Americans, it gave me great pleasure of knowing you.

NL: Thank you.

MS: And to me, you resemble an old, nice Jewish mother. That's the way I look at you.

NL: Thank you. That's a great compliment.

MS: And the story should be told and retold. It's not--it isn't for our generation, because we don't have to be told the stories. It's good to have people like you, to set great examples, on American-born Jewish women. And now, when the time would be to relax and take it easy for you, you undertook this project, which I think it should--it will--go into the history. Maybe like I said in the beginning, people should learn from our tragedy. My own life story, I don't know whether it is that significant, but I think everyone in every way, did resist the treatment from the Nazis against the Jews. Resisting doesn't mean actually just with weapons. Resist, we also resisted in our way to

[2]Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
[3]Joint Distribution Committee

keep our dignity, our humaneness, our cleanliness. Teaching if there were any children in the ghetto, or whatever we could help each other, we did. Of course, it wasn't--some of them which they couldn't do this, but as a whole, we did help each not to fall down as a human being, and I think this was the greatest resistance, what anybody could do. It is very false from some antisemitic educators trying to say there was no Holocaust. We witnessed it. And a great part of the world knows about it. How undignified can they be to try to deny this world catastrophe?

NL: It's an outrage.

MS: It's an outrage, that's why it's good, people like you, many others, which they're putting in a lot of effort. Future generations will be able to learn, maybe educators in the future, maybe some educators from now, maybe they'll be able to try and to say or come out with any conclusions. This, what all of us went through, but still the will to live, everyone practically started from scratch. Some, very nicely, I am very pleased, succeeded. We became very famous, in wealth and names, some working trying to make a living, but still the will of life is great. How we can do it, maybe some good angels might be able to put in sometime the word to some people to bring it out, how this could came about with our will of life and try to stay as a human being.

NL: Extraordinary--it was an extraordinary phenomenon, I think, unique in human experience. Thank you very much, Mr. Steiman. [Tape machine off, then on.]

MS: The World Gathering.[4] What we had, it did gave something to a lot of people. I know you, Dr. Levin, were there, and I'm sure you--I wouldn't say it was a thing to enjoy, but I think to think of it and bring out to the world, we are here. And nobody can deny us whatever we went though. It was a good thing, that World Gathering, which I myself experienced and I've never been in, *keyn ein hura* [no evil eye], in a crowd, what we had at the conclusion of that four-day conference.

NL: And also the presence of seven or eight hundred children of survivors was so moving.

MS: Yes.

NL: And a source of such great pride.

MS: Were you at that time when there was in memory of the million and a half children?

NL: Yes.

MS: That gathering?

NL: Oh, yes.

MS: That was very touching.

NL: Overwhelming, overwhelming.

MS: That was something. I guess you didn't see from the World Gathering, the conclusion that giving other people the legacy.

[4]The World Gathering of Survivors, held in Israel, June 1981.

NL: At the candle lighting ceremony, no, I told you I had to leave.

MS: This was--I have it on tape.

NL: You have that on tape. I hope they'll repeat it on Channel 12, I understand there was a magnificent coverage on Channel 12. Did you know some people who watched it here on Channel 12?

MS: Oh, yes, I myself was on television.

NL: You were on television.

MS: Believe or not, it was a friend of mine from Cleveland. He had his bar mitzvah. He himself, I guess he missed his bar mitzvah when he was a youngster, so he made his bar mitzvah now, and I know him, so I was invited and while they were televising the bar mitzvah, my wife saw me and many other people saw me at the Wailing Wall. That was interesting.

NL; I hope they repeat it.

MS: So it was--I don't know whether I covered all the things, what I went through. I am sure I missed a lot.

NL: Yes, well, if you think of some other episodes, I'll be glad to come back and tape those other experiences.

MS: Okay.

NL: Thank you very much.

MS: Thank you, Dr. Nora Levin, it's my pleasure for having you as a guest in my house. I look forward to meeting on happier occasions, and tell about future lives.

NL: Indeed. Thank you.