HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

JACK ARNEL

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Bonnie Bailis
Date: April 22, 1985

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JA - Jack Arnel [interviewee]
BB - Bonnie Bailis [interviewer]
Date: April 22, 1985[1]

Tape one, side one:

BB: This is an interview with Jack Arnel, taped at the Philadelphia Gathering of Survivors by Bonnie Bailis. Also, Jack Arnel's wife, Sheila Arnel, is present in the room. Jack, please tell me when you were born and a little bit about your family.

JA: I was born in Vilna [Vilnius, Lithuania], Poland on May 23, 1929. My father and my mother are also from Vilna, and they each had their own business. My father was a furrier and my mother was a custom tailor. I also have a sister by the name of Sonia. We had a very happy life in Vilna. Vilna itself was the elite of Yiddish life. We had a tremendous cultural program for the youth. We were involved in sports, music, and we had fabulous schools that had produced tremendous engineers, technicians, cantorial schools, scientists, authors, writers, and also, the home of the Vilna Gaon.[2]

BB: What was your life like before the war, your family life?

JA: My family life, I recall, as I can recall, it was an extremely happy one. My father, through his business, provided a nice home for us. We -- as well as my mothers' business -- also put us in a higher bracket, which we had. Every summer we were going away to the country. My mother employed a house-maid and also a special governess for me and my sister, who lived in the house with us, whom we loved dearly, and who actually brought us up. We were taken to the children's theater, we were taken to shows. We were exposed to dance lessons, ice skating, movies every Saturday afternoon. And it was one happy family, extremely happy.

BB: Is your sister younger?

JA: No, my sister is older.

BB: Older.

JA: My sister is also a survivor, and she's also here in the United States, in North Woodmere.

BB: Very nice. Did your family, to the best of your recollection, because I know that you were a young child at the time, but did they belong to the Jewish communal body, the *Kehillah*?

JA: My father belonged to the congregation. They had a special congregation of the furriers. It was sort of like a union of the furriers, and they had their own synagogue as well as--well, our own family had a family circle where they used to get together on occasions, and like Passover, like for the Seder. All the uncles and aunts

[1]Recorded at the 1985 American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors in Philadelphia, PA.
[2]Vilna Gaon - Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, 1720 - 1797, influential religious and spiritual leader.

used to be together in the same house for the Seder.

BB: Were you or your family, I should really say, members of any Zionist organizations or other Jewish organizations?

JA: Not my family, but myself, yes. I was a member of the revisionist youth organization which was by the name of Betar.

BB: Yes.

JA: And I strived to eventually go to Israel and build homes for the Jewish people.

BB: Oh, good, that's an excellent answer. How would you describe your family's relations with non-Jews in your community?

JA: Excellent. I had gentile friends. The people that were employed by my father's business and my mother's business, some of them were Gentiles, and we had the greatest respect and love for each other. We had--later on in the interview I will point out that we probably survived through the help of the gentile friends that we had. As a matter of fact, as a child, the governess was a Gentile, she was a Polish woman. With the knowledge of my father and my mother, on Sunday morning, I used to go to church with her.

BB: Yes?

JA: Yes. As a matter of fact, the father used to put some holy water over me and give me a blessing, and it was only through the greatest respect for each other and love for each other, and I grew up to love her so dearly. I used to make all kinds of promises as a child, that "when I grow up I'm going to marry you," or "I'm going to build you a home." Things like that.

BB: You really loved her.

JA: It was a mutual true love. Right.

BB: Now we're going to be talking about the years from 1933 to 1939, and my question would be, how did Nazi power over Europe affect your life between 1933 and 1939?

JA: Well, since I was born in 1929, by the time the year 1939 came I was only 10 years old. The Nazi movement had no effect on me personally at all. We still lived a normal life, and we went to our schools, and did all the things we wanted. Of course, in 1939, when the Second World War broke out, and the Germans occupied the western part of Poland, and had a pact with the Soviet Union, which gave the Soviet Union the eastern part of--they occupied the eastern part of Poland, which my home town was within that region, which was Vilna, Poland. And from 1939 to 1941 we lived under the occupation of the Soviet Union.

BB: And what was that like?

JA: That was, I'd say, somewhat different than before. We had lost a bit of freedom. My father was forced to give up his factory and donate all his machinery to a unified factory, which the Soviets forced it on them. There was, under a Communist

regime, there's no such thing as private ownership. Therefore, all the furriers or all the private entrepreneurs were forced to give up their factories, their shops. And, under the heading of the Soviet propaganda, they formed these big, huge factories and they were employees rather than employers.

BB: But your father was no longer the owner?

JA: No, my father was not the owner. However, he was a very skillful furrier and he was made a manager of a department within that place. Life was quite different. He had to punch a card, and when he was a little bit late, and he had to run fast. And I recall this incident where he lost a shoe and he continued running without picking up his shoe, because he didn't want to be late. Of course, that put a different way of life for all of us. However, we still enjoyed our freedom. We still enjoyed. We learned the Russian language. We still enjoyed, to some extent, a beautiful life, even though there were other restrictions, definitely nothing the way the Nazis were doing it.

BB: Okay, when and how did the war affect you and your family?

JA: Yes, that was then the Germans attacked the Soviet Union. That was in 1941, when they continued with their war machine, marching and throwing back the Russian armies, and they occupied my hometown. I recall the first incident when the German tanks rolled though the main streets of Vilna, and one of the trucks stopped where the Germans stepped out. And I was with a bunch of friends of mine who were Gentiles--I was the only Jew amongst them--and we just walked over to them to talk to them and the first thing that the Germans said was, with a motion cutting the throats of the necks, that they were going to kill all the Jews. And I turned around, and I left my friends, and I went home. And when I arrived, I just ran in my room and broke down. My parents tried to console me. My parents tried to say that it was just one individual that made this comment, but that was my first jolt. I had never heard it before, and I was deeply insulted and hurt.

BB: Did you want to say more about this period of time?

JA: Referring back to the question . . .

BB: It was how did the war affect you and your family?

JA: Well, it had different effects in different periods. If I were to tell you in the beginning and continue to the very end of the war, it would take an awfully long time. It has broken the backbone of our human feelings. We have suffered much too much. And we have been affected in many different ways. To begin with, when we were put into the ghetto, which was in the year of--the middle of the year of 1941 . . .

BB: The ghetto of Vilna?

JA: Of Vilna. We were--left everything behind us. We could only take with us whatever we could carry on our backs. It was another blow to my ego as a child. I couldn't understand. I couldn't come to grips with it--why it was being done to us. I knew that only criminals, or people who kill or steal, or things like that, were being put behind bars. I was confused, as much as my father and my mother tried to console me. It

was really very painful.

BB: At this time you were 12 years old?

JA: At that time, that was 1941, I was 12 years old, exactly. Because my father was a furrier and a skillful manager in the fur business, and because the geographical area where the war was continued was a cold region, because the Germans had moved their troops deeper and deeper into the Soviet Union, they needed warm clothes, something like fur vests for the Wehrmacht, for the German armies, to be able to fight the cold of that region. As a result of that, the Germans recognized that a fur factory that my father was a manger at, would be a very useful thing for them. And they created a separate small camp for all the furriers, and they took us out of the ghetto and they put us in this camp, which was called Keilis. *Keilis* is from Lithuanian, having to do with furs, the word *keilis* itself. And that there were two big buildings with approximately, I would say, maybe 200 apartments in each. They put a fence around, and they put the German Nazis guards. And they were guarding us, and my father and all the other furriers, every morning they marched them to the factory, which was nearby, to work, to manufacture fur vests for the German armies that were fighting the Soviet Union up in Leningrad and Moscow and the different areas.

BB: And your family was with him, you and your mother and your sister?

JA: That's right, the families were not separated at that time. As a matter of fact, my father was called, "*ein nützlicher Jude*" [German: a useful Jew], which meant that he was an important Jew because he was contributing, sort of indirectly, to the war machine by providing the fur vests. I recall an incident, which was only one month before we were taken into the ghetto. My father continued to work in that factory, and it was taken over the Germans. And we had very expensive furnishings in our home, and the German Gestapo one day arrived, and they wanted it. They were looking for homes that had nice furniture and nice things, so that they can hide or take it and send it home to Germany to their families, or set themselves up wherever they were in their headquarters. I recall a time when a German came in with his lieutenants to our home and looked around, and he wanted to take the bedroom set away, and my mother motioned to me that I should run and tell my father. And I ran to the factory, which was about six or seven blocks away, and that factory was also controlled by other German units. And they sent a German, two German soldiers, who came into the house and explained that my father is an important man for them, and they shouldn't touch it. And therefore, as a result of that, within a period of six weeks, every week a higher ranking German came, and finally, the highest ranking--the head man of their Gestapo headquarters--came with a whole entourage, and still wanted to take it away. And every time they came I ran back to the factory telling my father and they would send these soldiers to say that they can't touch it because he is an important Jew and they need him, to leave it alone. "Well," he said to my mother, this high-ranking Gestapo man, he said, "why are you putting up such a fight? Suppose tomorrow a bomb falls here and destroys this whole thing?" And I recall

my mother's answer. She said, "If a bomb falls and destroys it all, that's one thing, but if a man comes and takes it away, that's something else altogether. You can't make this parable." Well, the finale was that when we went to the ghetto a month later, we left it all anyway. So there's one little episode.

BB: Now, we're up to the part where you were sent to a ghetto, so would you like to describe . . .?

JA: From the ghetto--I already mentioned that we were moved to Keilis, where we spent two years, and the situation there was much better than the people in the ghetto. We were important because the parents were furriers, and we were pretty much left alone. However, as the war turned around and the Germans were beaten back by the Russian armies, and as the front line kept getting closer and closer to us, the Germans because more and more vicious, and more and more violent, and more desperate, in a way. I should just mention one other aspect before I go on--that during the two years that we were in Keilis, we had limited amounts of food. However, my father had some gentile friends from before the war, who actually risked their lives once a month to come. And they would pass by where the building was and throw a stone at a window, and my mother and even myself, had to watch for a period when the soldiers would look away and he would throw a package of food to us, and this continued for a period of two years.

BB: The whole time that you were in Keilis?

JA: That's right. As a matter of fact, it was because of that, that we were able to sustain the remainder of the time during the war, that we had a little extra. This is just to reflect that there were Gentiles who were very helpful to us.

BB: That's very important.

JA: I also want to mention that where my home was before the ghetto, our windows of the bedrooms would face into a garden. The garden belonged to a Russian monastery, and all the years before, we were very friendly with the monks who were there attending to the garden because their big patriarch lived there. And, as a matter of fact, as a child, they knew where my bedroom was and they used to throw apples and pears through the window. And they used to call me in Russian, that I should come down and walk into the garden with them, and I did. And there were times when they took me into the Russian cloisters there, and they showed me how they make their own candles and things like that. Would you believe if I tell you that one of those monks came while we were in Keilis--it was six months after we were there--he found out somehow that we were there--and he was pleading--also took a chance on life. He found a way to get in when the Germans weren't looking, and he was pleading with my mom and dad that they should release me and he would take me and he would hide me there until the war was over. And well, we considered ourselves fortunate because we were not in the ghetto, because we were important Jews, that we were working over there, and we felt that perhaps we were more safe than the others, and we didn't. Coming back to when the Russian front line was getting closer to us, at one point when the front line got real close

they wanted to liquidate us, so they developed this method. Method number one was they wanted to get rid of all the children. What they did was, when the men went to work in the morning, they took over a hospital that was right across the street and they sent in special SS troops, and they made an announcement that all the children must go across the street to be checked for health and inoculated against disease. However, when we looked out the windows we saw already that there were troops with machine guns facing our buildings. And all the children, as well as the elderly and the invalids, all of them were taken to that hospital across the street, at which point, once everybody was placed there, they surrounded us with the machine guns and at that point, the trucks came in. And this we referred to as the *Kinder Aktion*, which meant the Action of the Children. That what they referred to it. I was a tall boy for my age and I was a little muscular, and the Germans could not--did not want to carry the invalids on their chairs, so they selected me and another boy to carry the invalids from the chairs and load them onto the trucks. And we did that, and all the children were put on the trucks and taken away and they all perished, they all died, they were all shot. I was the only one, I and my friend that was helping, the two of us, they told us that we are strong enough that we can still work and they sent us back. The greatest tragedy to see was when we came back to the camp, just the two of us, the mothers of all the children actually attacked us, asking where are their children, what happened? You know, how come you are here and ours aren't? It was a sight I will never forget in my life. Then, a few months later, apparently the front line has come in closer and they decided that they have to evacuate and they're going to have to liquidate this camp. The ghetto was all gone by a long time ago already. We were the last that were left over there.

BB: At this point, your family had not been in Keilis. You're back in the . . .

JA: No, we're still in Keilis.

BB: Keilis, okay.

JA: Keilis is what we are talking about.

BB: And the ghetto had been . . .

JA: The ghetto had been liquidated before.

BB: Before this?

JA: Yes.

BB: Oh, okay.

JA: Remember I mentioned that I was there for two years?

BB: Yes.

JA: We were there for two years in 1944. The Germans decided that they have to liquidate and so they selected a certain group, I think it was probably only 40 or 50 families, and they said that they are sending us to Kovno. Kovno was a town in Lithuania, and that we would continue working there in the fur factories over there. There is a small town called Ponary outside of Vilna, which is the mass graves for most of the Jews from there. The people, when they liquidated the ghetto, all these people

were taken to Ponary[3] and they were shot dead there. I believe something like 60,000. When they put us on board the train to Kovno, we were sure that we were going to Ponary, because we happened to be passing through Ponary--the line, the road was passing through Ponary. Needless to say, we all thought that we were going to our final death. However, we saw Ponary, we passed Ponary, and the train continued to move on and there was a certain silence and a certain realization that came upon the people that were in the train, and just--I can't find the right words to explain the feeling of the people. Remember, I was then 13 years old. We arrived in Kovno and they put us . . .

BB: The feeling that you had was relief or like gratitude?

JA: It was a mixture. Here we thought we were going to our death, and here we had sort of an extension. We didn't believe the Germans. The Germans constantly and always lied. That's how they got everybody to go so readily, so easily. There would have been much more resistance if people knew what was going on. We arrived in Kovno and were put in the ghetto of Kovno and it was a very unusual thing that happened. The Lithuanian Jews from Kovno greeted us warmly and they tried to do the best they could for us but it only lasted two months until they liquidated the Kovno Ghetto, because the front line kept coming in closer. And that was the beginning of 1940--I don't remember exactly what month it was. I guess it could be looked up.

BB: 1940?

JA: 1944.

BB: '44.

JA: 1944. And those 50 families that arrived wound up with the Lithuanian Jews from Kovno and they loaded us onto trains. Of course, the children were no longer there; it was only the adults from our group. We, at one point, we passed--the train had passed Stutthof, at which point they said to stop the trains and they said we're going to go to a labor camp here, everybody stay put until further instructions. Then the further instructions came that there's going to be a nice labor camp, lots of food, and the women must get off first, and then the men, and you'll all be resettled over here. Well, all the women got off, and the Germans then closed the doors, and the train took off, and all the men were taken to Dachau. My father and I went on to Dachau. My sister and my mother remained in Stutthof, and they were put in a concentration camp in Stutthof, and my father and I were taken to a camp called *Lager* Kreis Landsberg, which was a camp, a subsidiary of the main Dachau camp. There the real hell broke loose for us. To begin with, the beatings, the starvation, the hard work, the insults. I think that any animal was treated much better, and it kept getting worse and worse as the time went on.

[Tape one, side one ended.]

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[3]Ponary – location of the largest site of mass extermination for years 1941-1944 on the eastern borders of pre-war Poland (Kresy Wschodnie)-Ponary, near Vilna.

Tape one, side two:

JA: We didn't know what was going on, who is winning, who is losing. I worked --actually, there were private construction companies in Germany that utilized these concentration camp inmates for their labor. I worked for a company called Moy [phonetic]. It was a construction company that was building underground facilities to manufacture weaponry for the German armies. And it was an ongoing labor process of 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the different shifts of 12-hour shifts. A lot of people died right there. We poured concrete and if you fell off a place, they wouldn't even bother to pull you out of there, you remained buried right into the concrete there. We had, in the wintertime, we had these wooden shoes which were torn, and we used some wiring to put it together, and the feet were cut. And the beatings that we got in order to work faster and harder were just impossible to take, and a lot, a lot of people died right there. Every day when we marched back to the camp from labor, we had three wagons loaded with dead people that we had to take them back, that died right on the job. Some of the Germans, who were not the SS, who were in the construction, sort of tried to help me personally. They saw a young kid. They used to throw me a piece of bread here and there. Not until at one point the SS came, and they held some kind of a meeting, and right after that they became as vicious as the SS and they were probably indoctrinated into this thing or whatever--that we had to be exterminated, and that's how it went on. I just want to reflect a time of enormous joy in my heart. Right inside the concentration camp, there was a time I recall being so starved and so hungry, and it was on a Sunday, I believe. We were in the camp and I just walked outside of our barrack, and I was pulling a little grass and chewing on it like a cow because I couldn't take the hunger anymore, and I looked up into the sky and I saw planes, I saw them sparkling, passing us like little birds way up in the sky. And I'd never seen that before and I said--I ran inside and I said to one of the inmates there, "I think there's something changing, I think something is happening. Look what's going on out there!" And quietly he came out with me, and I remember counting up to 600 planes were flying, and just about 10 minutes later, we heard these tremendous explosions. They were bombing Munich at that time. All we could say, "Please bomb the camp. Kill us, but bomb the camp," because the Germans would be just as killed as we would be. It never came to bombing the camps. Why, we don't know. In my imagination, if there would have been some kind of a plan to bomb the railroads that led to the camps, to all the gas chambers, my estimation is that perhaps a million Jews would have yet survived. My own personal feelings at the time, begging God to allow the bombs to fall on us, was something that I will carry to my grave. While it was obvious that the front lines were getting closer, we were waiting. Finally, the day has come. They have taken us out of the camps and they loaded us onto trains, open cattle cars without any roofs, and they closed the doors. They packed us like cattle one on top of the other almost. And the train took off in the middle of the night, where,

nobody knew. The Germans, every third or fourth car was a German car with a machine gun above on the roof. In case anybody tried to escape they would shoot you right down. Somehow, we wound up in this town called Kofrou [phonetic], in a station, near a station, and next to us they placed a German train with anti-aircraft gunners and anti-aircraft cannons. And, sure enough, as daylight broke, planes came running down in formation, one after another, and it was American planes and a whole fight has ensued. The anti-aircraft gunners were shooting at the planes, and the planes came out of the sky running right alongside the trains and they were shooting with 70 millimeter bullets, even though we wore the striped uniforms from the concentration camp. There was a whole war going on and obviously the Germans wanted to cover themselves by showing that there were inmates from the camps next to them. They thought perhaps the planes would stop shooting up and bombing the railroads. I must tell you that when I looked around me, it was a blood bath. Cars were filled with cut up people. It was like a butcher shop, blood all over, and I just touched myself trying to find where was I hit, and I wasn't. In my wildest feelings I was so frightened, and I heard the planes coming, a second round. I jumped overboard and I opened the doors and I ran down like a maniac opening all the doors. And the Germans saw what was happening because people started running out of the cars, and so they stepped back, and they allowed us a certain area to hide in the woods, and they surrounded us there to get away from the war zone actually. When I looked back, there was blood seeping right through the floors of the cars all over. When I ran to the woods, at one point, there was a rain of bullets right at my feet. I just could not believe that I wasn't hurt. I saw the bullet jump off the ground like a rain. So, finally, we ran back in the woods, and I was still together with my father, by the way. We traveled together all this time.

BB: Even at this point?

JA: Even at this point.

BB: At this point, you were with your father?

JA: At this point, I was with my father, right. We decided to escape at night. In the darkness, my father and I ran away from the camp through the German lines, and we were running in the forest. We didn't know where we were going, we were just running and running until we finally collapsed and fell asleep in the woods. It was the biggest downpour we ever had, and we were still there in the morning when we were discovered by three German soldiers. And the German soldiers told us to get up, and they put the pistols at our temples, and they said, "You're going to be shot unless you get the hell out of here." We said, "Tell us where to go and we'll go." He said, "Well, if you go this way, you're going to find the Americans." And we went were they pointed. We were sure that as soon as we start walking that they would shoot us, but what could you do, we ran. With the last bit of strength that we had, we ran and we ran, and we finally came to a highway. It was completely deserted. There was no Americans and there was no Germans. We were all by ourselves, bedraggled, dirty, filthy. The cannons were

shooting, there was a lot of artillery fire flying right over our heads, and we wound up at the train where we originally got bombed out, got shot out. Listen what happened to me. We were so filthy with lice, and so hungry and we somehow wound up at a train. There was nobody around, just my dad, myself, and a few other stragglers. We opened the German cars. They were loaded with some food there and clothing for them. I changed my clothing. I put some clean underwear that was available there for the Germans, but nobody was there, so I changed my underwear and I put on some German uniform with boots, just so I could be clean and warm. And I got out and we found cheese and we ate cheese, my father and I. And we went back to the road and we walked the road all by ourselves with all the cannon fire flying all over. Nobody, not a living soul, not even a dog, was out there. And we were marching until we came to the first little town, and when we walked in there in the main street, we saw the first American jeep. The thrill and the happiness! I lifted up my hat and I said, "Who are these people?" There was an American lieutenant, I think he was, sitting on his jeep with his feet up, smoking a big cigar, shouting all kinds of instructions and all that. And he calls me over, and he tells me to go right in there into that house. It was a big stable like, and when I walked there, I noticed that there were all German soldiers that they caught and they were imprisoning them, taking them as prisoners of war. And I ran out like a maniac and I was stopped by an American soldier with his gun, and I started screaming and yelling, "I don't belong there, I just got out of a concentration camp!" Well, they found one Yiddish boy who spoke Yiddish, because nobody else understood German or anything like this. I explained to him what happened and all that. He said, "Oh, my God!" and he took me into the first house, a German house, and he with his gun told this woman, "Give him some civilian clothes immediately." "Get the hell out of this German uniform, that's the first thing." And I got into the civilian clothes, and my father and I were actually carried by the American soldiers in their arms. What I want to bring out, how the Germans, the last seconds they had their pistols at our head, they wanted to shoot us, they would have shot us, if it wasn't that there were other people around. And the American soldiers disregarded the fact that we could have been diseased, we could have had all kinds of sicknesses available that they could catch and all that. They actually carried us into the trucks and they took us to St. Ottilien, which was a church that was turned into a hospital for the German soldiers that were wounded in the war. Well, we arrived there, and they collected a lot of other stragglers, and all the floors were taken, the Germans, all these wounded soldiers. I recall the time when the American lieutenant took with him two soldiers and a machine gun, he opened up the big doors to a big hall that had perhaps 80 beds with German soldiers laying, and he said, "I'll give you one hour to evacuate!" And within one hour, they were all put outside on the field and all those stragglers, the people that they found in the woods and all that, they were put into the St. Ottilien hospital. And we were there for two-three months until we recuperated, and then we were sent to the displaced persons camp, by the name of [unclear]. That was my father and myself; we

were spared together. We didn't know where my mother and my sister were, what happened to them. We didn't know where they were. How much time do I have on the tape?

BB: Maybe 15 minutes or so, a little bit less.

JA: Fifteen minutes or so. Unless you want to ask me some other questions now, I have a few very important things to say, what happened after.

BB: Okay, I would prefer you to say what you would like to say and then, please God, if there's still time, I have questions.

JA: Sure. We were placed in this displaced persons camp. We were all completely without any kind of clothes to speak of. We had one shirt and one pair of shoes perhaps, and other emergency things. We didn't have any money or anything. It was a displaced persons camp. There was nothing. We came out with nothing. We had nothing. Somehow people started to travel. The railroads were bombed out. The mail took six months for letters to arrive. It was a complete chaos. All Europe lay in ruins. Somehow, a person came from Poland, and he says, "What's your name?" and I said, "My name is Yasha Aronovitz and I'm from Vilna, Poland." "Say that again," he says to me, and I said it again. He said, "Your mother and your sister are alive and they're in Lodz, Poland." I couldn't believe it. I ran to my father, and I brought him out, and I wanted him to hear from this man. He says, "Definitely, they're alive. They survived, and they were liberated by the Russian Army." We didn't know what to do. How do you go? How do you travel? Then, another group came from Poland. In order to travel, it wasn't that you just went to the border with papers or anything. You had to actually steal your way through the lines. If you were caught, the Russians would catch you, they would send you to Siberia.

BB: Even after the war?

JA: Even after the war. If the Czechs or Poles would catch you, they would arrest you. We didn't wait for any legal papers to travel from one country to another, we had to steal our way through the border. Well, another man came a week later and said, "Your mother and sister are alive, and they know that you are alive, because there was a list sent of the survivors into Poland immediately after, and they found your names on the list. And they are now in Prague, Czechoslovakia, attempting to join you here, and they have sent letters to you, and they are stuck. They don't know what to do. They can't get through the borders." Well, my father, in the most tragic times, he always found a way to be a little bit of a comedian, to lighten up the lives, and he made a decision. He said, "Yasha, I'm going to Czechoslovakia. I'm going to find Mom and Sonia and bring them here." Being that he was a comedian, as I said, we had one black tie among the survivors of 50. He has asked me this poignant question: "*Tattele*, which tie should I wear, the black or the black?"

BB: That's nice. Good for your father.

JA: Well, he got dressed, he got on the train in [unclear], and he traveled to

Munich. And he approached a German railroad worker, and he said to him, "Sir, I have to go to Prague, Czechoslovakia, and I don't know how, which train to take. It's all bombed out, there are certain trains traveling certain routes. What should I do?" And the German said to him, "Mister, don't you travel at daytime. Travel only at night, go only on the freight cars, hop on a freight car to go to this town and this town, and then you have to find your own way." Being that it was in the morning, he figured he has a whole day to kill till nighttime. Well, my father decided where would a Jew, a survivor, go when he was in Munich? He would go to the area, staging area where all the survivors were accumulated. People were traveling back and forth, they were going to different towns, but it was already a center where people were collecting themselves and finding information about each other and all that. He went first to a barber, took a haircut, and then he went there, and he walked into this big hallway with all kinds of people mingling and going. And he passed through and he looked to the right and saw my mother and my sister sitting there on their valises, trying to find the next way out to find us where we were, and how to get there.

BB: Oh, my God, he could have missed them!

JA: He could have missed them. Not only could he have missed her, but he could have been gone for years. He could have been put into jail trying to get through the borders to Czechoslovakia, and not find them there, and God knows what could have happened to him. He didn't have any money, I know that. And to find them sitting with their packages there. I must reflect one more thing. When my father left and I remained, I really don't know what happened to me, but I had some sort of sixth sense. At the time, I worked in the main kitchen that was cooking meals for all the inhabitants of the DP camp. I was supposed to quit at five o'clock and I had already had some friends that we lived together in the same place, and I couldn't leave the kitchen. Everybody left, and I remained myself. I was in a mixed state. I had a feeling that my father was coming back that day. I stayed there and some of my friends came checking on me. "What are you doing?" "Oh, I have to clean up here, clean up there," and they left. Well, about nine o'clock in the evening, a man came running down to the kitchen, breathless, bringing me the news that my father is back with my mother and my sister. The entire camp came running because it was only one out of millions that had found each other. I can't even tell you the feeling, it was something that even today, I have difficulty describing how it felt. We have lived in this displaced persons camp as a family. It was a very unique thing, because there were no families. This is a complete family: father, mother, son and daughter. We had the fortune. My father had good friends in America, whom he wrote to, and they made up papers for us. And we waited for our quota to arrive, and in 1949, July of 1949, we arrived.

BB: My goodness.

JA: In the United States. I must reflect that my father was a soldier for the Tsar Nicolai in the First World War. He survived that war. He also survived the Second

World War. It is a unique distinction. He lived to be 86 years old. He worked as a furrier in the fur market, and he passed away in 1977. He's buried at the Montefiore Cemetery in New York. My mother lived to the age of 82, and she passed away in 1979. And here I am telling you briefly my story, which is really briefly. There were many, many other episodes that can be told. The reason I want to tell, the reason I have this compelling drive to say, is because I am afraid that it could happen all over again, not necessarily to the Jewish people. I'm convinced that Hitler picked the Jews, not because we were Jews, but picked only because we were so vulnerable, because we didn't have a homeland to call our own. Because he gave all the others the chance to rob and steal and take away. Because the Jewish people, because of our history, were tradesmen, and they were hard working, and they had developed businesses and the rest were jealous. I strongly believe--I must mention this--I feel a sense of insult. I feel a sense of being let down by the fact that President Reagan is going to honor, lay a wreath at a cemetery in Germany where 47 SS are lying, and some of them it's been thought, had to do with killing of the United States prisoners of war. What else can I tell you?

BB: Jack, this interview is coming pretty soon to a close and before it does I want to thank you very much for not only doing the interview, but how you did it. It was so apparent to me that your thoughts were coherent, and what you wanted to say, I think you said in a perfect way. This would not even need to be rewritten or edited. My question that I have for you is, when you reflect on the Holocaust and your experiences in it, as a young person, and what has happened since, what do you tell your own children about it? Obviously, it must be on your mind all the time. What do you say to your three lovely sons?

JA: I say to them, "Hold your head up high, and carry the torch. Never forget Israel, because if you had Israel before, maybe the Holocaust would not have happened." I say to them, "Be strong, let me tell you my story. If you don't want to listen to me, it's okay too. But be a *mensch*." [Yiddish: decent, caring human being] They have their convictions. They're not always as demonstrative or showing it, you know, but I know very much that deep down in their heart, if they could only have a chance to get some of the Nazis in their hand, they would tear them apart. They carry this hatred in their hearts, and I keep telling them, "Please, only against the Nazis, those who did it, not to any innocent people." I tried to restrain myself. After all, it's not fair for me, who has lived through such tragedy, to impose my philosophies and my feelings on young people who have grown up in a democracy, in a free land. It's not fair. I don't want them to really carry the kind of burden that I carry. They should be aware, they should be watchful, they should make the decisions that will help humanity throughout, not discriminate. The next time it may be God knows where, you know, fix them a helping hand, and to work very hard not to allow this is to happen again, never again.

BB: Do you feel that you have told them your experiences? Do you feel that they know what you went through? What age did you begin to tell them?

JA: Well, I was the kind of person that was always willing to tell this story, regardless whether I choke up, or shed a tear here or there. I always want to tell the story, whether it's my son, or you, Bonnie, or anybody that matter, because the story should be told. They have listened to me at times, particularly when they have friends over, is when they open up a little bit more somehow. I don't know why. And it's very difficult for me how much I can tell. At a very young age I didn't want to burden them with it too much. I thought perhaps they're too young to listen to this horror story. Also, I tried to instill in them pride, and needless to say, all this degradation that we suffered through in the war from the Nazis, you know, has diminished a lot of people's pride at a given time. It's very difficult. We always had a constant fight with yourself, and you say to yourself, "I wish I could have killed them right then. Why didn't we pick up a rock and die with them together," and things like that. But if you read all the books that were written, the way the Nazis have lied and cheated, and they used all their--the entire machinery of the Nazis was devoted to extermination. How much could civilian people fight against them? It was very difficult.

BB: In about a word or two, what do you think it was that got you through that period?

JA: Stealing from the Germans a piece of bread. No matter what philosophy I had, no matter how much I wanted to live, I would not have survived if I did not steal a piece of bread, or look in the garbage for an extra piece of potato peel, or any which way to just keep going. I feel this was--I had a tremendous willpower to live. I didn't want to die. I was scared of dying. And especially when I saw those planes over Germany and I heard the bombings of Munich from the distance, that certainly…

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