

Interview with HERSHEL FRANKIEL
Holocaust Oral History Project

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Interviewers: Judith Backover, Denise Leitzel,
Michael Galaninsky
Transcriber: Jane L. Voltmer

- A. That's the story of my coming out, [pointing to shirt] referring to my coming out from, into life, out of the covers of -- the holocaust occurred then and at this point and it was A very difficult and loaded, really dramatic event, the sort of event that I felt like some outside force, someone pushed me out on stage. And I was at that time maybe 42 or three years old. No. Maybe I was 47. I think that's how old I was. I'll just start this and go in whatever directions we go.

I was living alone away from the Jewish community and glad of it and somehow experiencing a certain kind of security in that. And I lived on the coast at Tomales Bay, and at that time I had some good friends and one was a psychiatrist. And my wife and others urged me to attend the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors. And I had notice of that, and that notice lay around the house and was buried in trash and brought out and dug out for a whole year. And five days before April 11th -- that would be about April the 9th, you know, April 7th or 8th, whatever --

five days before, I called up and said, "I want to go. Do you have still room for me? And furthermore, I want to be in a place where I can eat kosher foods and like to sleep in a Jewish home". And they said yes, and they did that in such a welcome and they were really prepared for me or for anyone to provide them with private room, housing. And there were thousands, maybe 10,000 people, who came to Washington in April 11th through 14th, 1983.

And when I arrived, I still was quite distant from what was going on, but -- and I just sort of kept myself to myself. I didn't know anyone. It's difficult to describe the experience of coming close to that, to that part of my life, to that past. It still is difficult, and I keep returning to the edge like to the, to the front part of a stage at that presidium I think it's called, and then backing off and there isn't -- and sometimes in my life there's a great force that pushes me forward and I come out more front, but I'm always, there's also another force that pulls me back. I'm not very much conscious of what these forces are except that I feel them at work.

Some, those forces, the solitude and security of living on the coast, and some of the good friends I had there, let me, brought me forward and so that I

made the great leap forward. I got right on front stage by going to Washington and joining 10,000 people and being lost in one of 10,000, but it was very much a step forward. And there I retired into as much shyness as I could, I mean my solitude and privacy, which is a great deal because nobody knew me, nobody.

And I registered, paid my hundred dollars registration with some indignance, went into the meeting hall. And there was a huge hall and there were signs that said, you know, Poland, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia. I think there were -- and each sign hung over a big table so that people gathered around something that familiar. I think they were even more specific inside Poland, maybe there were three or four tables. There were sub tables for people identified and came down into (Wozen), Warsaw, Krakow and (Mietcovet), (Tomashoff), and I -- so that I was coming home. But it was easy to come home in the sense that the path that -- you know, I could go as close in as I wanted to or back as far back. I could sit anyplace in that circle. I could even sit somewhere else.

So meetings made it easier to approach, and then when I was at the table, I still didn't make very good friends with anyone. I've not made good friends with

anyone from my past. I don't have anyone. And in some way, that's a metaphor, not a metaphor but another representation of the loss. As I am carrying the reality of what happened, then I'm replicating it in some way, you know, just maintaining the reality of it. It's another way of looking at it, but it was a great feeling of freedom and moving forward.

Among the events that helped me to go there was about a year, half a year before that, half a year before that, maybe January of 1983, somehow I got ahold of Loni Silver or she got ahold of me. I got ahold of her, and she was working at Western Public Radio, and she made, and we had a conversation, an interview. It was the first time I spoke with anyone in an organized, orderly in some way trying to be complete about it. And nothing happened. You know, that sort of stayed suspended but sort of freed me up a little bit, which freed me up a little bit going to Washington where I met Loni again, just nodded to each other basically.

My private agenda was a very silly one. I mean, you know, it was sort of fantastic. What I really hoped I'd do is I'd -- what I really, what really that was the one thing that I wasn't going to tell anyone that I was doing there but I was going to do that but

I was going to be working on, that is to find out whether, not whether, to get ahold of (Hillik) Adler.

In the summer of 1943, (Hillik) and I lived in the same house and we were both grandchildren to our grandfather. (Hillik) was my cousin. We were very close. We were the only boys in the house, and so a Jewish home, they were certainly very outstanding. They have four or there were five or six, five or six girl grandchildren there in the house, too. We all, all the family had come together in (Porchow), as much of us could make it. And I know there were still members of the family that were scattered around Poland, but we were in my grandfather's house.

My mother was there. My grandfather was there. (Hillik's) mother was there. (Hillik's) father was not there, and then there were the girls and their mothers mostly. And (Hillik) and I were in, we were the best friends and we were in a certain sort of combat. We were also battling. We were battling for our identity that we could get from my grandfather, from (Moshe) Rosenberg. And it was a struggle that went on till, till about November 1940, 1943 when I think the fact is that he was herded on to a train that went and got -- it was destined for, some people say Auschwitz, but I think for -- now I draw a blank

for the other specialized killing camp. And I went into a hiding place, and I've been looking for him since then.

That was for 40 years when I went looking for him in Washington. I often thought how we structured our, how we created our struggle and structured it. We both got our grandfather's attention. We were both so that we both won. He was specialized in being the goody goody and I was the baddy, so grandfather, you know, had to pay attention to this bad kid who kept throwing rocks into the rain barrel and pushing the rain barrel to (shavez). And, of course, he had to pay attention to the good guy or why else. That's how we worked it out.

But the work, the relationship with my grandfather was the, was the focus, a focus for my life work for -- I don't think it's now very much, but for the next 30 or 40 years I was still trying to describe and justify and explain and prove myself to him, because I didn't get to do it in the few months that I lived with him. And he continued to be present.

So (Hillik) went on the train. My grandfather went on the train. His grandmother's youngest brother, son, two or three of his daughters, my

grandfather's daughters, and five or six of his granddaughters, all of them went on that train. What we did is -- somebody probably wants to know how old I was at the time. I was six years and -- no. Well, the real truth is that I was five -- I was eight years old, but I had to correct many records in order to make it so, because recorded in subsequent years, my records, my birth record, had become falsified. That's just one of the ways that our family alters its own history. And I can't answer, and I corrected it myself.

Anyway, I was actually eight years old. I was eight years and two months old. I mean it was eight years and two months old. I was eight years and six months old, eight and a half years, when I went into our hiding place, and (Hillik) was eight years and six months old because we were identical age, except that I was two weeks older than he, when he went to his death.

Some day or some time you may want to ask me later in the interview just how Washington was liberating and how I experienced it physiologically and psychologically, but I'll go on telling the story about what happened in 1943.

Somehow my parents, my mother and father -- I

(don't know. I just don't know the details, and my mother no longer, I think, can recall or my mother no longer, I think, can recall or sometimes she can recall. I haven't found out from her -- they found a Polish family, and it's a very rare thing to do, who are willing to hide Jews for only a short period of time because the war as going to end very soon. And besides that, we had, we were -- I mean we were people of means. We weren't poor so that they wouldn't need to support us, and we could provide, you know, some wealth besides that. And they took us in and hid us in their basement, going to the basement for, through an outside entry. No. There were -- no. There was an inside entry, a trapdoor, and the floor was wooden planks with cracks in them and nothing like the city hardwood floors. It was just a floor in a big farm house, medium, small farm house.

(And they put us up there, and we stayed there for two months. And the dust came down and the fear connected with it was terrible, and the conditions were just, they were sort of asphyxiating. It was very awkward and very frightening because any tiny move, sound might be heard by anyone sitting in the house, and that would be the end for them, at least for us, and maybe for them. So we had to get out of

(there, the tension of being there on the, on the brink of being discovered. I mean it's like being on stage all, you know, any time there was anyone in the house. It was, it's as existing in a state of sort of being under a screen or on the screeching brake of a railroad brakes, you know, when steel wheels screech on the rails. And sometimes it was just high pitched or it was low pitched, but that's how frightening it was.

(And so we had to go, get out of there. And since the war was going to end any time soon so that they didn't need to kick us out, they just find a better place and they created, their son conceived, created -- their son, his name is (Stosh), (Stanislaw) (Rubell). (Stosh) is familial, a family name. It's intimate name. He dug a hole. He went out with a shovel and maybe a pick, and he dug a hole during one night and covered it up with boards and covered it up with straw and covered the boards with straw and covered the straw with dirt. And he had some dirt left over from the hole, and he had to be careful that there would be no sign that there had been any digging out there, because people would be asking "what are you digging in your own, in your -- you're digging holes in your yard. Don't you have better things to

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do, I mean you got fields to work". But he put the dirt in buckets and somehow scattered it some place, but this fresh dirt is a very telltale thing, and he didn't manage to dig a very big hole in one night, but that was it. He somehow, for whatever reasons, including security, he wasn't going to spend two nights at it.

And then I could sketch it, but I can describe it somehow. We don't have a sketch board. It was a hole six feet wide and six feet long. He was strong. He was a pretty strong guy. And it was less than 30 inches high, maybe 30 inches high, and four of us got into that hole. As far as I know -- as I know my recollection, I don't -- I can't really trust my mother because sometimes she is dramatized, so I, as I recall, and so I -- those who went in there was my father and my mother and my mother's sister and I. And as I recall, we didn't get out of there, we didn't leave it, for two years, except once one night in the winter in March I'd say of that first year, I think on a dark night, on a moonless night, we crawled out of the entry hatch and just sort of -- you know, it's a hole that's down here.

To get into, you got the hole through a little shaft that came from -- oh, the hole wasn't dug in the

dirt in the yard. It was dug in a shed, a pigsty. There were no pigs in there, but that's where the pigs had been, so there was a shed that he had and made the hole inside the shed. One reason why the hole was no bigger because it couldn't be any bigger than the shed, and it was a small shed and under the trough where the cows were or horses were. Cows and horses both were in the same barn. There was a little shaft and that's the shaft that he passed a part or parts of food that he brought to us and he took out our excrement. We didn't take any baths for two years. Did wash though. And through that shaft, through that hole, I and the other three of them crawled out and walked around on that night inside the barn till a horse kicked me in the groin and then, then we just went back. And it was too dangerous to, I mean to do that again.

I can tell a lot of anecdotes about what went on and some are too private or embarrassing in other ways just not for the telling, but it is what life was like in that place. But I'm still missing a lot and some of it comes back to me, it comes back to me from time to time, you know, as I mature, as I just come to accept or be accepted in my life.

Just two days ago I received such appreciation

and affirmation from my mother. She had never, that I recall, expressed appreciation and respect and regard for me publicly and wholeheartedly. She always had some theory that it's better not to praise people because it will go to their head, so that, and some other maybe deeper reasons, for not wanting to say positive things to me or about me. But we were in the courtroom in one of those funny ways that I started telling you that survivors, our family of survivors, has energy to keep us apart and that we don't stick well together. My son was suing me for custody of my mother, okay, and my mother was not a credible and acceptable witness because she, because of the way, strange things that God has created this whole scene for us. She had been diagnosed as not mentally competent. The diagnosis was in fact stacked because the doctor who diagnosed her had been giving her drugs that were knocking her out, and so by the time she got around to making the diagnosis, she had a vegetable. My mother wasn't a vegetable before, but the diagnosis was made over the vegetable that she had become. Since then this same doctor was finally persuaded to cut down the vegetable that she had become. Since then this same doctor had started some other medications that have done wonderful things for my

mother.

Anyway, she was in the courtroom. She got in the witness stand and she spoke very beautifully and positively, very nicely, about me that I feel so, like I'd gotten back a piece of my life that I never knew I had. Just, I'm not even sure that she really said those things. I'm going to get a transcript, but then again, she said it under oath, which is more public than she had ever imagined she'd be making it, so there are events. Because I am saying I'm 54 years old and it may seem strange that I'm maturing, but I feel like I'm just getting back. I'm just growing up in some ways.

One of the ways that I'm growing up is about four years ago I was walking in an -- I live in a sort of countryside on Lucas Valley Road in Marin County right off of Lucas Valley Road, and one morning I was walking out on the road because whenever I want, I like to be up very early in the morning. And I smelled a strange smell and I knew what that was, and I said, "God, no. That can't be. I smell the smell of blood". I didn't know that blood has a smell, so I asked Mike (Thayler), who's a physician who I saw a few days later and I'd become active at that time in the Holocaust Center or at least, yeah. Some things

were to do with them, and Michael said, "yes. Oh, it has a very distinct smell", and I said I never knew the smell. I'd never been around blood except once in 1943, in 1943 as I said, except once in 1943 and at the time too in my grandfather's house and I guess it was in June or somewhere in the time of early summer that the Gestapo had been so tormenting the work brigade, the men of the town, had been taken into a work detail, a brigade, my father among them. That's why I knew very little of my father, because he was taken out very early in the morning and digging and was working at digging rocks in the quarry with pick and ax and came home tired late at night on limited diet, and so he didn't have much energy. Though I think I'm making only circumstantial excuses, part of it was, is it was, it is his personality. It's just personal way of being, but he just wasn't a big presence in my life at that time.

And what had happened to that work detail is that they had been driven so hard that they went on strike. They refused to work. They quit work. I don't -- I think they went out to work and quit work there. I mean they did it in a dramatic fashion. Somewhere it's written in the records of, for (Pishken) ghetto and I suppose it must be. Nobody would let that sort

of piece of resistance go by. And the next morning, which was Friday morning, two Germans mounted a machine gun on the back of a vehicle or the back of a jeep, a German version of the jeep, and drove it through the town slowly and shot anybody and everybody and anybody they could find.

Now, we had a way to -- my grandfather that just, he was a great powerful man. He provided for us 20 years before the need. He had dug in 19 -- I don't know when. Maybe 1920, maybe earlier, probably earlier. Maybe 1910. He built himself a stone house with, right behind was his soda pop factory with a big yard and with a workman's shed where, the workman's house where the workman, maintenance man for the house and factory lived. In front was his house. In front of his house was the store, and next to his house across this yard was a large public garage where trucks and vehicles, a truck or two of some other -- he was a merchant and a businessman and did things in that way. And underneath the house he really did build with truly multi-purpose housing. I mean there was the soda pop factory. There was the workman's quarters. There was his house. There was the store. There was the garage, and under the house was the cellar dug three floors down, huge, as big as the

house, where he carved the ice from the river that goes through the town and stacked it. And there were stairs going down to the bottom of this huge cellar. Ice was stacked, sawdust was laid and another layer of ice, and so in good years in preparation for the summer heat, he had a cellar full of ice three stories full, which would then be taken out block by block, chipped up and used to cool the soda pop. And the soda pop was loaded with the ice in carts and taken off to the villages to market because there wasn't refrigeration. I mean refrigeration was just coming in. It wasn't available. It wasn't in such use.

So on that Friday afternoon in June or July of 1943 when we heard the bullets and we heard the sounds and somehow picked up the smell of what was going on in the air and heard the screams, everybody in the family that was in the house or was available -- it was morning. It was not afternoon. It was, maybe it was nine o'clock in the morning. Everyone, everybody piled down into the cellar, and, you know, in the dark cellar deep down far away so that we heard boots tramping through the house, but it wasn't anyone there. And I, I was, you know, frightened. I don't have any emotional recall of anything that happened beyond during that war right now yet. I don't

remember the feeling of something. I mean I could work at it and maybe I could even work it out now, but I don't want to.

But that was certainly one of the most, one of the more frightening experiences and one of the more characteristic ones of, one of the more characteristic ones of me, of mine. I tend to be a risk taker under certain conditions of risk. It's got to be very risky and then I'll take risks. And I sneaked away from everybody, made it up out of the cellar and checked out what was going on. I went up to the fence and there was a knothole, and I looked out and I saw the first wagon or a wagon full, hay wagon full, which if you know how hay wagons are built, a hay wagon full of bodies. [Pause]

And I smelled the smell of blood, which came back to me 45 years later, because I haven't smelled blood before or since I mean. I didn't know what it smelled like, but I certainly recognized when I did pause and there's a part of me that, there's a part of me that will always yearn or seeks to affirm that I am worthwhile, that I am of value somehow. And if I, if I feel that it's hopeless, then I, I quit trying and I just choose another piece of stage or else I withdraw and just curl up about it. And there's a part of me

that judges this whole thing and says this is something not to be, I mean just not the right thing to do. And so this judging part of me works in such a way as I'm silent and I won't talk about anything. Either that or I'm a show off in order to get some recognition.

But something that I did that I feel like I really made a contribution, whether it is appreciated, was appreciated, it hardly seems like what I would want to have said of me when I go to the grave, it was something that I did while we were in that hiding hole. To put it most dramatically, I brought light into the place. Physically, actually and in a way that I don't yet fully appreciate in spiritual or psychological terms. What I physically did was -- it was a dark hole. I mean there was no light. There was no windows, nothing. It was a few inches under the ground or half a foot under the ground, I would say.

I still -- I really want to physically describe what it was like, what it was constructed like. I mean what the straw was like, the fact that bugs nested in the straw and dropped down on you and what being sticky with dirt for a long period of time feels like and what it's like to breath in the same air --

we weren't cold in the winter ever because four bodies generate a hell of a lot of heat, and it was a very good insulator so we were in a good insulated space with quite a lot of heat. So we were basically in light clothing all the time, light clothing all the time, winter and summer. Summer it was hot, I suppose, but again, earth insulates and earth is cool. Physically it was, heat temperature extremes weren't the stress. But what I did to bring the light in is it was at great risk. My mother -- the experience conditioned, my mother is perhaps fearful for many reasons but that, those two years conditioned her into being afraid, being apprehensive, being worried, being just thinking ahead of what's going to be next, and knowing that it can be very bad became a total activity. There was time, room for other things to do in the mind, but that was going on all the time anyway, no matter what she was doing. She could tell you what was going to happen that was going to be disastrous and horrible, and I was under her constant influence and the most impressionable member of the group.

What I did was my motto was I needed light because I wanted to see, I wanted to read and also I had an idea and I really wanted to create. And there

was something about a kid that kids want to make things, create things. Kids are enormously creative, and I had no tools, no means, no instruments, no nothing to take out my play. I mean my, you know, whatever there is in my hands and my mind to do things. There was nothing to do, nothing to do anything with except in my -- except to create fantasies. And you know how most adults are interested in kids' fantasies and especially when their minds are preoccupied with fear, so there was not much audience for my fantasies. Besides fantasies are most fun when they're acted out, and I had nobody to act with.

So what I did to bring some light, because if there was to be light, at least I could read and any, any day I could read. So I dug a shaft as big as an eight year old kid's hand, which was smaller than my hand here, and I dug the shaft that went like as long as my arm could go, which was about this long [indicating with hands] but not quite this long. So I dug the shaft about -- I have an eight-year-old boy, and I really ought to see how long his hands can go because maybe we could even do one. I could tell him and maybe we could look at this video, and we'll figure out how we'll do one. I have a friend who once

urged me, a psychologist urged me, to dig a hole and go into it and do it over again, but -- I have a lot of respect for her, but she never got around to doing it.

Anyway, I dug a hole that went this way [indicating with hands] and then I dug a hole that went this way. And, of course, this way I couldn't do very much distance and angles and so on, and then I got a stick somewhere and I dug some more so that it went further this way. And we had a mirror -- okay. So I broke through the ground where there was against the wall of the shed, and there was, at sometime during the day there was more light on that side. I don't remember whether it's north or south or which direction it faced, but there was light. At certain times there was more light there on the shed. And I laid the mirror at 45 degrees, and we had a beam of light coming into the hole. And I read a book. My father read a newspaper.

Q. WHAT WAS THE BOOK?

A. The book was a story of the kings of Poland.

[Pause]

Q. WHAT DID YOU DO WITH THE LIGHT WHEN THE BOOK WAS FINISHED?

A. Oh, I know that I learned the math, multiplication

tables. I don't remember whether my father wrote out numbers so I could see what numbers were like. I seem to think that he did. We just enjoyed it. I told you that my mother was fearful and how she was, she was like a little fury when I was doing the digging, as I was doing my thing, but I was, through my impetuous -- through my willfulness, I was putting everyone's life at stake because they were going to be discovered from this and because somebody was going to see the reflection of the mirror.

You have to really, you know, appreciate that what a fearful person fears. What's strange to me now is that I don't remember the light as being there for 600 or for 700 and some days. Well, it wasn't there for 700 days, but it was there for 600 or 500 days. I just remember certain days.

- Q. WAS THERE, WHAT DID ANYONE ELSE IN THERE BESIDES YOUR MOTHER THINK OF THIS LIGHT PROJECT?
- A. I feel now still the encouraging energy of my father. He has exact quality. Had is perhaps a better way to say it. He died, may he rest in peace, in 1980, August, late August, in late October of 1980. But he like me or just sort of has a quiet affirming quality to him. He's the sort of person who says, "okay. You want to. If you want to do it, do it. We'll see.

We'll see". And he did more than that. Perhaps in the best possible way, best way possible, he in a quiet way prevented my mother from stopping me, which she should have, could have, maybe should have. I just don't want to say it.

I don't remember in any way an active role for my aunt. She's been a mystery to me and she still is. Keeps herself that way because I think that she has the best recall of those who survived. Now, my mother and I, I am colored because of my age and we have also my mother because she has a loss of memory now because of her age, but my aunt is just keeping back from telling me things because of she's zombied like many survivors are by fear of the pain.

I learned to read there, and I learned to read by that light because I didn't know how to read before, I think. I'm sure I didn't. I had some -- in the ghetto -- I'm now going back all the way back to 1943, the summer of 1943. The ghetto was the ghetto of the village of the town of (Porchnow), and my grandfather wanted me to have an education that was the best available under the circumstances and so he wanted me to go to a cheder, a school where I would learn to read and to be fluent in Jewish, in Jewish learning. And my mother has a streak in her that resists my

grandfather. I mean from childhood it must have been a resistance, but when she became an adult, she was just being modern. And she said those things are old-fashioned, that way of schooling, and she may have herself not done that kind of schooling and they are brutal and they're cruel. Well, when I heard that I was going to be sent to a school that was brutal and cruel, no way was I going to go there and so I didn't. My grandfather gave in. Besides that, I was being the bad guy, so I he gave in and I went to the alternative school. So I had some schooling while, during the few months that I lived in the ghetto in (Porchnow). It was the alternative Jewish educational path. I don't know what it was.

Now because, partly because I am trying to tell my father that I'm really a good guy, I'm an Orthodox Jew now and not an alternative Jew. And because of that other being that was nurtured by my mother, the person who, who is contrary to the traditional views and in other ways in education as well as in lifestyles, I take positions that are quite unpopular in an Orthodox congregation.

Let's say in the community where I live there isn't anyone who tolerates the literature of Auschwitz Shalom, which is a political peace movement in Israel,

in their house and I'll go out and collect money for Auschwitz Shalom. So I'm the bad guy in that context.

[Pause]

So a lot goes back to that summer, spring, summer of the ghetto of 1943, and it's framed in such dramatic ways. On the one side of it is that all of that community of 10,000 Jews is one morning loaded on to some cattle trains and I had a dramatic picture of one of my uncles, the only male in the family other than my father and my grandfather, within the next morning jumping off the train and either dying from the fall or being killed, and my cousin -- all, just the loss of all of it, and on the other side is how I got in there. I can't recall just when it was that we made it, whether it was in the early spring or in the mid winter. No. I am sure. I'm pretty sure that it was in the fall of 1942 that we were, whether we came to the ghetto and I know we made it, whether it was in the early spring or in the mid winter -- no. I'm sure. I'm pretty sure that it was in the fall of 1942 that we were brought, whether we came to the ghetto in (Porchnow) because we didn't get there by any natural means. Going backwards in time and I would say in 19, in late '42 we were in hiding. We were living in a village and we'd escaped another ghetto.

The war started, you know, in '49 -- '39. In '40, '41, '42. I guess in '41 we'd escaped the ghetto of (Tomasalefski) and gotten to a village. I don't remember the name of that village. And my father had a productive life there serving the needs of farmers, because he could color wool. He could produce good colors, and they loved colorful clothing which they weaved themselves, so he colored the basic stuff that they would weave it out of. So we were in that village and I had, I guess, the one small stretch of childhood where I was with other children, except I was a Jew. They were Poles. And I remember in the summer -- I guess it was the summer of 1942 -- I had the -- it's an idyllic time that I keep wanting to go back to.

I mean when I was 40 and 45 and 50 and even now, I love camping and I love the woods and that's how I -- I'm going to go back to -- I mean I love the woods. And I used to go picking mushrooms in the woods around that village by myself, and I went into the fields where the harvest and the hay wagons were loaded with hay, and I was riding on top of the wagons and Polish kids said "get your Jew ass off this hay because the cows won't eat it", and it hurt me so much. That was one of the most hurtful things I remember from the

war. I can't feel, recall the pain of losing except in some other ways but that one I remember as an actual pain. I mean it was a sort of emotional pain, the pain of rejection. So we were left in this village and somehow the Germans had learned that they had given out orders that all Jews should be in ghettos, concentrated, accessible, you know, for control and we were not going to do that.

And so anyone who wasn't going to do it was going to be captured and shot or something. Shot usually. And my mother looked out the window or got word that there was a German, black German car coming down the road and she told my father to get lost, and he went out and hid in the woods, and the Gestapo picked her and me up and took us to the nearest Gestapo headquarters, which was not in (Tomasalefski) but in (Porchnow) and so God saved us. I mean put in in (Porchnow) in her home town and her home town, her father was a man of substance and some wealth, and the Gestapo also picked her up, picked me up. And they questioned her about the man that was supposed to have been with her, and she said she didn't know anything about him and there was no such man. And anyway, she and I were in the Gestapo and there were some other people that they picked up. They only picked up one

other man and she tells me the story. And that night or sometime the next morning, that man was shot in the head through the mouth. I don't know just why, but it's a very vivid and horrible -- I guess it must have been a horrible experience for her, but she doesn't talk about the emotional terms of it.

And it seems, as I recall, that my father made it through the woods and made it through the roads and got into the ghetto at (Porchnow) and got to my grandfather's house. I don't know just how that happened or over what time span. Somehow my grandfather knew that his grand, knew that his daughter was being held, knew that his daughter was being held by the Gestapo and his grandson. And somehow he brought whatever he had to bear, including money, to the Jewish community counsel, used whatever he's got. And they brought whatever they could to bear on the Gestapo officers, officials, and first I was let out and then my mother was let out. And that's how in the spring, the spring of 1943 started.

My grandfather in 1943 for Pesach still had kosher wine. He did it the same way that he made his own wine for I don't know how long. He fermented raisins. They made raisin wine, which was delicious. I don't remember any more of Pesach other than that,

but I remember fermenting wine.

So now we've covered 1942, three, four and we were coming up to 1945, the end of it, the end of that part of my life. And we stayed in that hole, and we heard it was going to end soon. That story that it's going to end soon started in 1943 and was true every day for the next 700 days, and somehow it became more real. The Germans who had been driven back from, they were defeated at Leningrad, and they were driven back across the Steppes and they were driven across the Ukraine and come into Poland. And they were going back and back and it was going to happen any day now, and then the Russians stopped doing it. The Russians stopped doing it by Warsaw for political reasons. They wanted to exterminate some of the Polish strength, and so for the next three or four months nothing happened.

But then it started again and the Russians started to cross the border. The lines started moving across and they were moving across with Polish men on the Russian, in Russian uniform and in Polish brigades. And we heard artillery even when they were in Warsaw. We slept, we lay on the ground, so we could feel, we felt the vibration of the cannon a few hundred miles away. Yeah. More than 100 miles away.

And then nothing happened. And that feeling -- it was a terrible feeling just to know that it's there, it's going to happen and nothing's happening, nothing's happening and we don't know. We might die just now. I mean we might die now when, after we've done all this, we've gone through all that and gone through all that fear every day with every barking dog, feeling like that is the end.

And my mother created the horror story of how they're going to drag us out of there, how before they do that we're going to dress ourselves in the best clothing, so that's how they are going to shoot us and go through that scene that she visualized and described as vividly as how we were going to be shot, because somehow it helps her fear to really project it, I mean to really manifest it. And I had gone through to the scene of where, as a response to, just an order to control me and to assure control of me and to most deeply -- just in grave seriousness of what it was about, she told me that there had been, that she knew of other families that had been in hiding with children and some, some of those children didn't know how to keep quiet. They made noise. And there was this woman and she had an infant and his cries threatened the lives of the other people, and so what

she did is take a pillow and suffocate the infant.

[Pause] Well, and if I thought that I was very special to them, well, I wasn't that special because not only was I dispensable and replaceable, the replacement ready, I mean waiting for her. My replacement was already in place. They had another child before me, and they had sent him off to Israel before the war started. Really.

Q. IS THAT TRUE OR JUST WHAT THEY TOLD YOU?

A. Just what they told me. [Pause]

Q. STILL, HAVE YOU DONE YOUR SHAFT OF LIGHT?

A. Yeah. But it, it's all one story. It's all a part, you know. The shaft of light is not separate from this. Life is, my life is all of this together, and the -- yeah. The heirloom which remains of it, of that time, is something that's still to be, that I am still at work integrating. There is a demand that I hope I'll rise to and I'll not let pass. There is still the demand for me to transform and -- to transform all of that past into something that I can leave behind as my, as my gift, as my, as the product of my existence that would be, that will serve somehow to raise and encourage and maybe entertain.

I'm not quite sure just what its, what its shape should be, could be, can be, but that that concern,

(that demand, has been a force in my life. It's been the force in my life. It has been the constructive force in my life, and this is what has led me in subsequent years to work as a chemical process engineer on the propulsion system, jet propulsion management system, of the Atlas missile so that the missile could not -- could be used for other means than delivery of weapons. [Pause, wiping eyes]

(I don't know how I got to work on that piece of equipment in 1958, between 1958 and 1960. I was doing that. I was doing -- I mean that was made, that piece, all of this missilery was made by thousands of ants, technically engineered. You know we had gone through universities, but they were still ants, university-trained aunts.

(But there. It was God's -- I mean it. My instinct and my willingness to stay, to stay, to be willing to listen to that inner guidance, that is without being sacrilegious, God's voice. And it was that same inner stuff that enabled my father to stay tuned to that voice, which brought him from Russia back to Poland in 1940. My father had escaped the advance of the German army by going into Russia and escaped. The Russian secret police were deporting non-residents to Siberia by going back to the Germans

and to us. And I think he was as important as my mother, who was also very important in preserving us and my being here, so we all lived through this war because they submitted to God's guidance. Ask the other people who submitted to God's guidance and ended up in the crematorium.

But my religious philosophy is, I don't think, what we should be -- I mean I don't know that this stage of the interview that you want to be talking about that or not. I -- I don't know.

Q. IF YOU FEEL IT FITS IN AT THIS POINT, I SAY GO AHEAD.

A. We'll see. All right. I feel, I feel very comfortable about being allowed to just sort of paint or describe or tell, to tell that's the only word, to tell my story in my way which is not lineal. I think that anybody who wants to or for anyone who would like to, I could just draw a time line, put it on the chart, you know, and it may help them through the interview if they want to listen to it. And if you, after whatever you do with these afterwards, if we have another meeting and you like me to draw a time line, then maybe we'll take some chart paper or whatever and do it. I might as well make it useful to the listener, more useful to the listener.

I was about to get me out, get us out of that

hole and before we're done today, I promise I will do that. How much time do we have?

Q. FORTY-FIVE MINUTES.

A. Okay. I had to start -- you still want to stay there? Please don't answer.

I was saying that the war rumbled on and we felt the rumbling of the earth. And the rumbling stopped and the Russians shot some cannon across the river into Warsaw, but it was that for the fall months of 1944. And they crossed the river and they started moving again in December or January, and we didn't know where the war, where the front was, where the shooting. I mean things don't move like they do on a map. They move actually on the terrain and they move as the bullet flies and as the soldier carrying the rifle walks or rides, walks mostly.

So they had walked through and the Germans had walked back or ridden back, and we didn't even know where things were. But we had heard shooting and the shooting got a little distant, and then we didn't hear shooting and maybe they just stopped firing the bullets but they were still there. But we knew that we, that this was done for. My father was rather sick. It was the first case of sickness that we had of the four of us in those two years. It was

(frightening, frightening for my mother especially. Frankly just about when we were to make it, he was getting sicker and it was dangerous because the Germans were gone. The Russians had passed, true, but the Poles were still there. And we had to come out and face the Poles, and the Poles were, as people still say, they are sorry that they didn't kill, kill them all.

(That's one reason why I don't know that -- I have a certain obligation to go back and meet with the man who saved us, but I'm also very reluctant to go back and be among people who are sorry that they didn't kill us all. Just reluctant. So they had gone backward and the shooting had stopped and it was a dark night. I think it was a moonless night. It was probably -- I could find out, but I'm curious whether January 18th, 1945 was moonless, but that's when we decided that at night we could sneak out and we couldn't, needn't fear being attacked and killed by Poles, because also in 1945 our intuition wasn't out of line. The Poles had killed people of Jewish, group of Jewish that had come back to (Kelsar). We were quite realistic.

(But I had another agenda different than the rest of the family. I wanted to get away. I had had my

parents for two years. I don't, I don't think there is a kid that wanted to get away as much as I wanted to get away. I didn't want to have anything to do with them. And I don't care how frightened my mother had made me about what is out there and how frightening it really was. And it didn't matter that I hadn't walked for two years and so I didn't know how to walk. I mean I didn't have the -- and I didn't know how far a walk it would be, but so they gathered outside, crawled out. You know, we were together and they were going some place. I'm not sure right now where it was. I mean to (Porchnow), to the town, to the village. They named the village (Volasoldays). That was the name of the village.

But anyway, I split. I sneaked away on a dark night and I split. And I don't know how I knew, but I knew where to go, yeah, because we didn't get there in the daytime either. I mean there were no, no landmarks and I'd only been there, gotten there, once in my life and it was two years before, but I went. I went out on that night, and I went alone. And I think that -- you know, the way I look at it, it's not -- I think I'd like to see it through someone else's eyes, but I would say that I don't think I've ever had such a strength of will and such a state of courage since

(that time when I was ten years old and I ran away from my parents in the very first opportunity I had.

There are things that I'd like to go back to and know more deeply, more fully, and one of them is that night. It's not really, not really available to me, but it's still available to the degree that I can tell you about it and in these terms. It seems to me that I went back into the ghetto into my grandfather's house, into the sheds that were behind the public garage. And I really loved to draw things because I went there, and I went back. I told you I'd been looking for [tearful], I'd been looking for (Hillel) Adler in '83. Well, I went looking for him in 19, on January 18th, 1945, as well as for my grandfather and the rest of the family. And my grandfather and my cousin, I don't know if I'm still looking for him 45 years later. I know that -- that was seven years ago, but I think it may, this sort of seeking has, I think, many wonderful levels.

And in some, on some level, I stopped seeking him when I was in Washington. And in some level I imagine I am still seeking him, but I haven't articulated it, voiced it and come to terms and grasped the meaning of my seeking him. I think that that's something that I hope to -- that I'd like to investigate what does it

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mean. This interview is helpful to me now, because it helps to identify things that I need to get done, and like I identified it, I need to get done with this enormous, humongous whatever these words are, of making my life into something that's, that serves men, and in some, in some residue of my life it should serve.

And another thing is on a different scale is to identify what it means to be seeking, to be looking for (Hillik), to be looking for (Hillik) Adler, because I think that I still am looking for. And another thing I identified not very long ago that I may still do, though it's losing some of its energy, I told you that I smelled, that I found out what the smell of blood was. And one of the things -- and I would like to do a piece of, a series of representations, of what the smell of blood looks like and feels like. I may have the time to do it. I don't know.

Money has, somehow money has been something that's a problem for me. I just keep ignoring it, and sometimes that's a big constraint. Just you can't do things without money. I don't want to be talking about money in my life right now. I'd like to take a break.

Q. LET'S ROLL.

(Break)

Q. SO ANY TIME YOU'D LIKE TO START.

A. Yes. Perhaps you can ask a question, and we can see where that goes.

Q. WELL, YOU GOT OUT OF THE HOLE. YOU GOT US INTO (PORCHNOW) AND THE STONE HOUSE OF YOUR GRANDFATHER. WHO WAS THERE AND WHAT WERE YOU THINKING, AND WHEN DID YOUR PARENTS FIND YOU OR YOU FOUND THEM?

A. Uh-huh. I really brought it up to a melodramatic high. Okay. Yeah. That's a good thing. The strange thing is I don't really know. I mean I don't really -- you know, some things I recall. I can visually recall running away, I mean sneaking away from them, and then -- and I've got this quasi-solid recall of being at my grandfather's house, but what I am told is that they found me not there. They found me somewhere else.

What I found at the house in my sort of quasi-substantial recall, what I found at the house was just an empty place, shadows and ghosts and nothing. And I didn't make a big deal out of it. I, I took it in. I had the strength, I had the strength when I'm ten years old to, to just see things. My ten-year-old son, (Ismael), also has that kind of

unusual strength just to see it, just to be willing to see it and not be shattered by it. And so I saw it and I wasn't shattered by it. And I made it to the home when we escaped from (Porchnow) through the Ukraine and town, border guards in 1943, November of '43 to, to this farmer's house.

We stayed at some house, some -- I don't know quite where in relation to town, but some place where we rested for the night or rested for I don't know for how long. It was a certain safe house on the way. And I don't know how we ever found the farmer. This is not my story. It's my mother's story and her memory is gone, at least today it was gone. And my parents found me at that house. They went out looking for me, and I don't know just how, what they did. I hope I drove them nuts. They were driving me nuts.

Q. HOW FAR AWAY WAS THIS TOWN?

A. If I make it to the Ukraine for Rosh Hashanah, if I make it to Ukraine for Rosh Hashanah, I'll stop and find out. I mean I'll walk it. I'll take a rest in Poland for a day or two, and I'll walk from that because I haven't been there for 45 years, but I think it was two or three miles. No. Not more. Less than five miles, I think.

Q. WAS THIS FARMER THE SAME MAN YOU REFERRED TO BEFORE AS

THE MAN WHO SAVED YOU?

A. Uh-huh. Yes.

Q. WAS HE THERE?

A. Was he there?

Q. WHEN YOU GOT THERE.

A. He -- okay. The farm family that saved us was just a sort of figured in history. The woman named (Caroleena Rubell), she was the mother of the household. She was the eldest -- no. She was the most powerful member of the family. Her husband was only known as Father (Rubell) or (Orchess)(Rubell), to me only known by that name, was older than she by ten or 15 years and one of her sons, (Stanislaw) (Rubell) and their maid, who's first name is (Louza) Rose, who's last name I don't know. The old man has died. He was (Stanislaw) (Rubell's) father. (Caroleena Rubell) had three or four sons by a former husband who had died, and I think one of those sons knew about us, but he didn't live in the house. So four people risked their lives for us.

She, she most principally, she was our, as my mother put it, guardian angel. And my mother had a great love for her. My mother had a great fear of (Stanislaw) (Rubell). She, and I think all the adults, my mother, my aunt and my father, but my

mother was most vocal, thought that he had the greatest propensity to expose us. And he found us to be the most uncomfortable burden, and he was the least motivated for humanitarian or ethical or moral reasons, partly because he was a young man, a man in his twenties, and just not matured enough or developed enough for whatever reasons.

And so I developed a certain, not developed. I acquired immediately a certain apprehension of him, and I still have it. I haven't gotten -- that was the last time I saw him was in the dark night of January 18th. I've written, I've had some correspondence with him. It's not very real writing. So that was the family, their people, and when I left them that was there. I never saw them again or went back. There may have been some time that he may have joined us for a short period of time. I'll come to that.

I left. I went to (Porchnow), and I went to my grandfather's house and visited there in the dawn, I think, pre-dawn hours. I went to this family's house who took me in and were glad to see that this little Jew boy didn't get wiped out. And I must have felt a great deal of safety and warmth to those people, though I don't remember a thing about them. I don't remember being, getting there to that house. I don't

(remember walking the road from the village from (Vilazaligna) to (Porchnow). I don't remember anything except leaving my parents, which was the great thing of that night.

And I'm told when I retold the story, I'm told by my mother that I was found in that family house, in that house. I hope to learn, you know, who that was and who they were, but that's -- I have among the agendas that I carry around and some that I may have identified a little while ago, one is to appropriately and properly honor and reciprocate, if that's possible, to (Rubell), to their family and to that woman with maid. (Stanislaw) (Rubell), as I recall, has two daughters, maybe three, and they have children of their own and maybe two of the three have children of their own. And I have in our -- and I am linked to that family in some not, not yet clear way, not clear to me as to what it is that I should do next.

(I know there are things to do, but I don't know what the next thing to do is. And my mother's disability is a -- I've taken it up with our family. This is one of those touchy areas that's more embarrassing and I am not sure if this gets into public media or that you ask me to sign it off or release, I'm not ready to make that. But just what,

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(how our, how my aunt, you know, my mother has dealt with that responsibility that we have to the (Rubell's) is something I'm not quite, I'm certainly not willing to talk with, tell a bunch of strangers about it. And I'm not sure that I want to talk about it now or not. I think it's okay, but you've got to ask me some questions if you want to know more about it.

(Other remainders of residues from -- we got out to (Porchnow) -- I tell you, I keep returning to the theme that survivors, that among my relation to other Holocaust survivors is that great repulsion, that's an attraction and there's a repulsion, something that keeps us apart. And I'm among those that experienced the repulsive forces and there are also attractive forces, but I am more dominated by -- I'm not sure, but I certainly experienced both. And there is a community and I think that they're the dearest people in my life, among people who are dear in my life, and they're the other inhabitants of the town. We just looked at the book, the memorial book, of (Porchnow).

(Well, I haven't really taken the steps to make -- I have not taken the steps to make contact. Their center of density, their most active place, is in Israel. I lived with my family, my present family, my

wife and at that time three of our children, in Israel for two months. Before I left, I wrote to the head of that community that I'm coming and would like to meet with them, but I didn't follow it up. That's the repulsive forces.

I think listening to this tape, viewing it, is going to be a great help to me. It will -- you know, I'm writing out the agenda of things I need to take care of, by naming it, identifying it. You've been helpful to me by being listeners and being so interested and involved, concerned. What would you like to know?

Q. COULD YOU TALK A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT YOUR AUNT'S AND YOUR MOTHER'S OBLIGATIONS AND THE WAY THEY FULFILLED THEM TO THE (RUBELLS)?

A. I'll start a little earlier. Yes. I'll speak about that.

When we left my grandfather, we took with us gold. We buried the household silver. We buried valuable dyes, because my father is a dyer and those were -- and when we came, the gold and silver -- yeah. We took with us gold and money with us, and we gave it to the (Rubells) in, I don't know in how many payments but in certain number of lump transfers we gave them while we were in hiding. And then we had run out of

everything, and as far as -- and I'm trying to speak to the obligation of it, how we were going about building the obligation, and by that time, at that time by monetary tracks, they could have kicked us out. They didn't.

And according to my mother at least, well, there's some parts -- let me, I am doing a little bit of editing. I just, a small bit of stuff that I don't want to get into but not very, just -- you know, the (Rubells) didn't kick us out and we had nothing more to offer them, and they kept us, though I don't know with how much ambivalence. But I suspect more on (Stanislaw's) part and less on the mother's part because she was just doing it out of her great heart.

I felt an enormous spiritual connection to her, and when I learned of her death, it was one of the crises of my adult life. They kept us and they kept us with just knowing that we had no more. What we promised, but what we did was we did have promises, and we promised first to turn over to them my grandfather's -- since we were the only surviving heirs of my grandfather -- my grandfather's property after we got out. He had a couple of buildings, a factory and whatever else might have been left, but he certainly had a home and an apartment house that he

(had built, you know, built up these things, besides the cellar and the soda pop factory. He also had a knitting plant and an apartment house that he built.

We promised to turn that over to them or most of it or some substantial part of it. And my father offered to teach (Stanislaw) (Rubell) how to run a dyeing business and the business of coloring fabric or cloth of wool. And that was, that was a -- we thought and he thought that was a very valuable thing that we were, to him because he was ambitious and restless and not wanting to spend his life as a poor farmer. And it was an education in practical and valuable trades like that wasn't easy to come by in Poland. There was no system of community colleges.

(So that's what we promised them. My father promised to train them and teach them and property and when the war ended, we turned over to them all that, all that we could. I don't know what -- there may have been government obstacles in making the transfer, but I think that all things, those things were transferred to them and my father dug up his dyes and whatever were useful, he used and whatever wasn't useful, he somehow acquired, despite the shortage of everything after the war. And he set up a dyeing site, a plant with (Tomasic Tomaslefski) in the town

of his birth and the larger more central town of (Porchnow) and had a functioning business that produced an income.

And that's the only thing that we had to live on. The farmers brought wool and the word of his being there and of his work spread out, and it's a very basic trade. I mean wool is produced by sheep and sheep continue to produce wool no matter who's winning the war, and so there is always wool and farmers can always do their weaving so there is, a dyer is needed. So father did dyeing and (Stash) came in to (Tomasalefski) and learned to do dyeing work from my father. And my father and my mother and I lived in the city experienced and conscious always of the hostility of the Poles.

And we got out of there within the year in 1946. I expect very early in '46 and made it, sneaked across the border to Berlin. And from Berlin my father and I first and my mother followed and from Berlin we made it again through a sneaky sort of way out of Berlin to West Germany where we settled in one of the Displaced Persons Camp in (Salzheim) near Frankfurt am Main.

And from there this was a staging place for where we go next, and we either were going to go direct to Israel, where things sounded very dicey and full of

hostility. And we had enough war-like situations for awhile or -- my father located a brother who was in Belgium who had survived in his own way. Somehow God had protected the Frankiels even far into the, so many members -- these members not so -- many, many died. Many of my brothers and father's brothers died and their children and their wives, but Uncle David survived in Belgium and one brother lived in New York and so we did not go to (Erikichstral). We came to New York. Frightened sort of, really very, very, immigrants bereft of really with just whatever pluck we had.

We were going to be making it in the United States. We didn't have any resources. My father acquired some additional resources while in Germany in the transition camp and the D.P. Camp. He studied at a technical institute, additional technical knowledge in his field. And we came to New York and there he made, found some work, just some labor, in his field of dyeing at this time now because of what he had learned in the Germany textile printing.

Then my parents moved to Los Angeles. First my mother came over and scouted Los Angeles and checked out while my father continued working in New York, and then -- or maybe I and my mother came and then my

father followed. And in time, not very long time afterwards, he set up an independent shop where he could do his work, the printing plant and dyeing plant.

I don't know just how, but they stayed in communication with the (Rubells) through letters. That was time of shortages in Poland and Poland, I think there is always shortages. There is never anything else than a shortage of something really. They sent packages of food and money and continued that for, I don't know for how long. Some of these were taken away or commandeered by the government or by officials and some arrived. I don't know at what point they stopped. I imagine that after (Caroleena) (Rubell) died, of which I learned of her death in 1972 -- yeah. I am pretty sure it was in, in the summer of '72. I was teaching a seminar in Canada at the time, and I got a letter. I don't know when she, the date of her death but at that time I learned about it.

I didn't do anything on my own and I'm ashamed, but I still had a certain paralysis and I guess undeveloped sense of responsibility. But I was in Europe on a fellowship in 1965, and I felt at that time that I didn't, no way that I wanted to be in Poland. My work took me to France and Italy, but I

did arrange to send some money, which never was delivered. And I didn't do anything else, so that's -- I don't know how completely an answer that is.

Q. I JUST GOT THE WORD THIS NEXT GROUP IS HERE.

A. Okay.

Q. AND IF THIS IS A LITTLE BIT OF A JUNCTURE POINT AT THE END OF THAT ANECDOTE THERE AND --

(End of tape)

--ooOoo--