

Interview with STAN FELSON
Holocaust Oral History Project
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Transcriber: Sharon Broderidge

Q OKAY. MY NAME IS BARBARA BERRERA AND TODAY I'M INTERVIEWING MR. STANLEY FELSON.

A Stan.

Q STAN FELSON FROM HAYWARD, CALIFORNIA. IT'S FEBRUARY 12TH, 1989, AND WE ARE IN OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA. I'D LIKE TO START, MR. FELSON, JUST BY ASKING YOU SOME BACKGROUND QUESTIONS. MOSTLY WE'RE GOING TO TALK ABOUT WHAT IT WAS LIKE DURING THE WAR FOR YOU. BUT HOW OLD ARE YOU NOW?

A How old?

Q YEAH.

A Let's see. 65.

Q YOU'RE 65 YEARS OLD NOW?

A Uh-huh.

Q AND WHERE WERE YOU BORN?

A I was born in Glubokoye, Poland. That was Poland before '39, between the First World War and Second World War. And now it's in Russia. It's part of White Russia.

Q PART OF WHITE RUSSIA, BUT FOR YOU IT WAS POLAND?

A Uh-huh.

Q AND WHAT KIND OF WORK DID YOUR FATHER DO?

A He was a businessman. He was a grain merchant -- a merchant. He used to buy grain and he used to process it, make flour, the meal, and then sell the different -- the flour and related products.

Q AND HOW MANY CHILDREN WERE IN YOUR FAMILY?

A Three brothers.

Q THREE BROTHERS. WHICH ONE ARE YOU?

A I'm the oldest.

Q THE OLDEST OF THREE BROTHERS?

A Uh-huh.

Q AND WHAT OTHER FAMILY DID YOU HAVE IN THE CITY? DID YOU HAVE AUNTS AND UNCLES AND COUSINS?

A Well, my father had a sister, so that was my aunt. And cousin -- and two cousins. She -- My aunt had the son and a daughter. But my -- That was the closest relatives.

My mother's family, they all lived across the border in Russia, part of White Russia, which she never saw them. They were -- they were very close to each other, like within 50 -- maybe 50 kilometers or less, but they never saw them because there was very -- the relations between Poland and Russia were very bad between -- in those days.

And even in '39 when the Russians came to us, and one sister of hers came to visit us, and her husband, but then the rest never came. She had a father and brothers and sisters, and they all perished. And she never saw them. She didn't see them for 20 years between the First World War and Second, but then there was a period of two years between '39 and '41 that the Russians were in our city. But she never could see them and they never came to see us.

Q SO DO YOU KIND OF REMEMBER THEM?

A I never knew them.

Q YOU NEVER KNEW THEM?

A Yeah. My grandfather lived very close from us. I never saw him. Never knew them.

Q SO WHAT WAS YOUR CHILDHOOD LIKE? WHAT WAS YOUR FAMILY LIFE LIKE THAT YOU REMEMBER AS A LITTLE BOY?

A We had the normal life, good family, good parents. I liked to work, help my father from childhood in the business. And I used to go to school.

Q DID YOU GO TO A PUBLIC SCHOOL?

A Yeah, it was I think maybe from five year old till seven I went to heder. And then I went to first grade -- I went to second grade. It was a private day school. And then from third till seventh grade I went to public, Polish school.

Q AND DID YOU GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL?

A No, I just graduated from grade school when I was 13. And then I went one year to business school, for one year. So at 14 I already start looking for a job.

Q YOU STARTED TO LOOK FOR A JOB?

A Yes, a bookkeeper, uh-huh.

Q UH-HUH. WHEN DID YOU FIRST BECOME AWARE OF YOUR LIFE CHANGING OR THINGS NOT BEING NORMAL FOR YOUR FAMILY?

A (No oral response.)

Q THAT'S ALL RIGHT.

A Well, actually even in the thirties, like in '35, '37, I was a small boy. My mother wrote a letter to -- she had a sister in San Francisco that she appealed to to save at least one member of the family; that she had the feeling already that, you know, the danger of war or Hitler is coming.

Q HOW DO YOU THINK -- WHERE DO YOU THINK SHE GOT THAT FEELING FROM? HOW DID SHE KNOW?

A Well, because Hitler came to power in '33. She just had that fear, that feeling that the danger is coming because, you know, it -- it was before the war even, but she just -- maybe

she had different memories from the First World War. Not so much -- more of hunger, I think. Not personally, but of some other people. But somehow she felt like -- and I had affidavits in '36 to come to San Francisco.

Q YOU DID?

A Uh-huh. My aunt sent me from San Francisco. But then there was a quota, you know. You had to wait five years, so --

Q SO WHAT WAS THAT FIVE YEARS LIKE THAT YOU WERE WAITING?

A Well, I just didn't think too much about it because we just lived a normal life.

Q AT HOME?

A Yeah, at home with the family. And, you know, life was going on, to school and different things, work after school. And I had a couple big lakes in our city. We used to go swimming. And life was pretty normal, I think, up 'til '39.

Q AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED?

A in '39 the Russians came to us, so at that time my father had to quit the business. But -- and then I --

Q WAS THE BUSINESS TAKEN AWAY FROM HIM?

A No, he just sold out, you know, because being a businessman, no matter how rich or poor he was, under the Russian system he figures is not too -- it's considered -- like even on the passport there was a stamp, "Ex-businessman." It wasn't such a fashionable thing.

And so he sold out. I mean the whole business was maybe sold out. And then we had the taxes that were -- that we had to pay was almost everything we had. But we had our own house, and we had the garden and --

Q WAS THAT BECAUSE YOU WERE JEWISH?

A No, it had nothing to do with Jewish, no. Actually, under the Russians I got the job as bookkeeper.

Q UH-HUH.

A So I'd say my mother was very hopeful that she will eventually, after waiting 20 years, see her family, see her brothers and sisters and father. So really things were not, I mean, not so bad.

Q SO IT LOOKED --

A Yeah. There was a time of fear that I remember. Once I was getting burlap bags ready to pack in case if they send us to Siberia, because there was a rumor that some businessmen might be sent away to Siberia. But a few were sent away, but the majority, you know, mostly for political reasons, or for some very rich people. But some of them -- so at that time it looked like a calamity, but then they survived the war.

Q SO WHAT HAPPENED IN 1939?

A Not -- Really not much, just life was going on, you know.

Q AND THEN YOU SAID YOU WAITED FIVE YEARS?

A Oh, no, the five years, nothing came out of that because the war -- the affidavits had no meaning already because in '39 the system changed. So really I mean if times would be been normal, probably in '41 I would have probably come to the United States.

Q THAT'S WHAT YOU WERE EXPECTING TO DO?

A Yeah. But then really at that time already other things were more important. Survival was more important and just

to stay alive, you know. So really that -- I didn't - the affidavits had lost their value really.

Q UH-HUH.

A But then from '39 to '41 the Russians were in our town. And then in '41 the war, Germany attacked Russia.

Q AND SO WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FAMILY AT THAT TIME?

A Well, we were in our town. We stayed in our town. We didn't go anyplace.

Q YOU STAYED IN THE SAME HOUSE THAT YOU GREW UP IN WITH YOUR THREE BROTHERS AND YOUR PARENTS?

A Uh-huh. Yeah.

Q SO WHEN DID IT CHANGE?

A Well, in '41 when the Germans came. Let's see, a few of them -- in our town the population was about 10,000 people, but among the 10,000, 6,000 were Jewish people. And very few run away, maybe 200 from the 6,000. The majority of people, people just stayed. They didn't realize how bad the future will be, you know. And then in '41, after when the Germans came, everything changed.

Q HOW DID IT CHANGE FOR YOU? WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?

A Well, first of all, let's see, it was just you could see the way they were treating us -- treating us. I went to work, you know. Well, work wasn't so bad. We didn't get paid for it, but just as long as we came home alive --

Q HOW DID YOU LIVE IF YOU WEREN'T PAID?

A Well, first, you didn't need too much. You see like we had maybe saved some flour. And then also we had an order -- there was an order once, the first year, anybody who is not a

farmer and doesn't own land, he can't keep more than 10, I think, kilograms of flour or grain. So that night -- that day I first -- excuse me. First I thought maybe -- so that night I hid the flour under the floor in a -- dug a ditch, a hole in the ground, and hid it in a box.

Q WHO WERE YOU HIDING IT FROM?

A From the Germans.

Q THEY USED TO COME AND --

A Well, we thought they will go and take it, because the penalty was death if you don't give away the flour.

Q I SEE.

A But next day they caught some family, some Jewish family who were taking their own flour to a farmer to hide. So they killed -- They shot the Jewish family and the Christian family.

Q AND YOU REMEMBER THAT?

A Yeah, that's right. So when that happened, then we took out the flour from underneath the floor and took it to wherever they told us to take it.

Q YOU WERE AFRAID TO HIDE IT?

A Yeah. But then they didn't search in the houses. If we take a chance, probably we would, you know, we would get away with it. But it was a matter, you know --

Q YOU DIDN'T KNOW THAT AT THE TIME.

A Right. Right. Then that winter of '41 to '42, I heard my father say that one farmer who lived about seven kilometers from our town, he orders -- my father gave him a suit of clothing, so he owed us some. And they didn't pay with money,

but with food. So I took -- I already wore a Star of David, I had on my --

Q WHEN DID THAT HAPPEN?

A Right in the beginning they told us to start wearing a Star of David.

Q BUT BACK TO THE BEGINNING, YOU SAID --

A That was in '41.

Q YOU SAID SOMETHING ABOUT THE WAY THEY TREATED YOU, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS, THE WAY THEY TREATED YOU.

A Well, it's hard to describe. Like when you used to go to work, sometimes some soldiers used to stay and when you cross they try to hit or beat you with something. But then if you run fast -- we were young at that time, so they didn't hit us. So I don't remember ever being hit.

So it was more like, you know -- But there was that fear because right in the beginning, I think the first summer, they took some people, a small group, and they shot them. So there was --

Q IN YOUR TOWN?

A Yeah, right.

Q THEY WERE SHOT IN THE TOWN?

A Well, they took them outside of the town, but -- they took them out, right. The town was a small town. I mean the whole town was maybe two kilometers long and two kilometers wide, so no matter what happened, everybody knew about it.

Q AND THESE WERE ALL JEWISH PEOPLE THERE?

A Yeah.

Q YEAH.

A And so there was that fear.

Q HOW DID THEY KNOW YOU WERE JEWISH?

A That's a good question. Well, first of all, all Jewish people had to wear a Star of David. That's number one. And second, in a small town everybody knows each other. So even if you can get away someplace else, somebody, some Christian who cooperates with the Germans -- and not all Christians cooperated, but some, who they would say it, point out. And then everybody had to have a document, an affidavit, so -- And most Jewish people lived in the same area. So --

Q WHEN DID YOU HAVE TO SHOW THAT DOCUMENT?

A Oh, if they asked you for it. But you had to wear a Star of David because without wearing it, that was also a penalty. And so somehow we knew it. So there was no place to hide.

Q SO THERE WAS A PERIOD OF TIME WHEN YOU WERE GOING TO WORK AND COMING HOME?

A Yeah.

Q AND THEN WHEN DID IT CHANGE?

A Well, then in '42, in June '42, they killed about 2,500 people in our town. See that was a big -- a big massacre. Because before that, they killed once a small group then, under ten. And then all of a sudden that day, that day when they killed the 2,500, people had to come in the marketplace like an assembly place. And I didn't go to that place. My family didn't go.

Q WAS IT JUST BY CHANCE THAT PEOPLE DIDN'T GO OR --

A Well, no.

Q HOW DID THEY CHOOSE THE 2,500?

A They told everybody has to come in the marketplace and they will select, like some people they'll send to work outside the city some place, to some factories, see. But I didn't trust them. So that day --

Q SO NO ONE IN YOUR FAMILY --

A No. My mother and father and younger brother stayed in their own house, in the attic. They didn't go to the marketplace. My brother worked for a -- in a German clinic, like for a doctor, so he didn't go. And I worked next door. The night before, I didn't go home to sleep. I slept where my brother was.

And then in the morning I came to work, and the people that worked with me, they didn't come to work. So like 8:00 o'clock -- this was like a kilometer from our house in the suburb. So -- And they didn't come to work, let's say 8:00 o'clock. There was a couple boys and girls, Jewish people.

So I could feel it that something is happening in the city because the day before we saw some new faces, like SS is there, you know, new policeman. So I actually hid in that building. I worked outside the building. I did just labor work, you know, chopping wood, but in that building, before the war it was a public school. It was just a brick building. And then at that time SS were stationed in it.

And so I went in that same building where they were stationed, in the attic. And I climbed up in the second floor in the attic, and there were two girls that I knew also. I didn't know that, but after I got there I found that there was two --

no, three girls. So we were there all day and the night.

Q AND DID YOU KNOW WHAT YOUR BROTHER WAS DOING? DID --

A During the -- No, I didn't know anything. But that day we heard the shooting, so we knew that. And we didn't know if they shoot everybody, or just -- And then the second -- so we were there like a day and a night, and then at noontime, most soldiers they lay down for a rest. And so I got -- I came down because I was hungry. And I saw Germans. It was like a truck driver. He had a horse and wagons and I knew him. He was friendly to us. His name was Franz Zilenger. He was from Sudet in Deutchland. It's like part of Germany that Germans took away from Czechoslovakia, I think.

So he saw me and he asked me what I'm doing here. So I told him I'm hungry, and the girls are in the attic. And he took me in the ghetto, actually, in the horse and wagon.

Q TO THE --

A To the ghetto.

Q SO YOUR FAMILY WASN'T IN THE GHETTO?

A Yeah, they were in the ghetto. We were already living in the ghetto.

Q WHEN DID THAT HAPPEN?

A Well, that happened I think maybe in -- I don't remember, like maybe in early -- either in '41 or maybe -- yeah, we had to move.

Q WAS YOUR HOME TAKEN AWAY FROM YOU?

A Yeah, but then we moved -- they took away -- they gave us maybe 10 minutes, or half an hour to just move, so we couldn't move any furniture. So we moved to a house, where my aunt's

house was the end of that garden, in back a couple hundred feet. There was another street. So we lived in her house. It was a small house. Maybe in that house was one bedroom, and there maybe was five, six --

Q WAS THAT PART OF THE GHETTO?

A Yeah. Five families. We had a little room just for our family, maybe a room about six by 10.

Q FOR THE FIVE OF YOU?

A Yeah, but that still was better than a concentration camp, you know, because in comparison to a concentration camp that was already luxury, see, because we had water. There was wells in our town, so we never -- we always had enough water.

Q DID YOU KNOW ABOUT CONCENTRATION CAMPS AT THAT TIME?

A No, not too much.

Q SO THERE WEREN'T ANYTHING IN --

A Not where we lived, yeah.

Q WHEN DID YOU GO FROM BEING A BOOKKEEPER TO CHOPPING WOOD?

A No, the bookkeeper was under the German -- under the Russian occupation. Under the -- when the Germans came I did whatever, any work, labor work.

Q THERE WAS NO JOB?

A Right. There was no job, right. You did whatever they told you to do. So that's like from '41.

Q SO FRANZ TOOK YOU INTO THE GHETTO?

A Who?

Q THE GERMAN GUY?

A No, you just by yourself went.

Q YOU JUST WENT?

A Yeah, I was actually maybe at work that day, and all of a sudden I come and we are already not in our house. We are in the next house.

Q I SEE.

A See, so there was no -- we couldn't move hardly anything, you know.

Q I WAS GOING BACK TO THE DAY WHEN YOU CAME OUT OF YOUR HIDING AND --

A Oh, that hiding was --

Q YEAH.

A That was in spring of -- in June of '41 when they killed -- no, June '42 when they killed 2,500 people. Well, I hid just one day and one night, then I came home. Yeah, I came home -- well, the German truck driver took me over in his car, in his truck -- I mean not truck; wagon.

Q YEAH.

A And I came and I saw my mother. I saw -- I found out that my mother is alive, and father. They were very scared, but they were alive.

Q WHERE WERE YOUR BROTHERS?

A Well, my younger brother was with them.

Q UH-HUH.

A But my middle brother, the one who is alive, worked next door to me, so I found out he was okay too. But that was a big catastrophe that day when so many people got killed. In other words, when they came to the assembly place, they were kind of like sorted left or right depending on -- there was like a

secret sign, the stamp was on -- I guess they prepared before that, the Germans, so the stamp -- we had documents. Certain jobs, they stamped the stamp on the left side; some on the right side.

So like if I would have been that day on the marketplace, I wouldn't have been here today. They would have -- they would kill us. See some jobs were more important to them. Like if you worked in maybe in some factories, and did some -- or maybe shoemakers and did leather work or something, because they didn't want to kill everybody. They maybe had a quota, only 2,500, because after they killed them, they had in the newspaper and the radio they said they killed 2,500 partisans, you know. And they didn't say Jews or anything like that.

Q WAS IT JUST YOUR INSTINCT NOT TO GO THAT DAY?

A Well, yeah, I guess you -- yeah. It happened before, too. Any time I felt danger I just, you know, I just -- specially when I was -- that morning I wasn't in the ghetto. I was at work. When the friends of mine didn't come to work, you know, I felt like -- I felt that something was happening.

Q BUT DID YOU EVER GO BACK TO WORK AGAIN?

A Yeah, and then the next day everything goes back to normal, just like -- like a hurricane.

Q HUH.

A Then everybody goes back to work, because by working, see, we used to get some food that was left over from the soldiers. And you didn't -- at least you were occupied. You didn't have time to worry that much. So then I went back to work. But then after that, I had -- I felt that I have to do

something to get out because if I stay in town, next -- I will be next in line.

Q SO WHAT COULD YOU DO?

A Well, first I thought maybe to -- I was considering first about getting a document, like make a false passport. And somebody in our town printed pass -- you know, just the blank and then you can fill in any name you want. So I bought one, but then I didn't -- because I was -- I look blond, my hair was blond, and I thought I could go away someplace, live on the Polish passport. But then my accent would give me away. And I didn't know where to go, so that route was out.

Then while I worked for the Germans, I saw sometimes -- lunch time I used to have to walk -- carry wood inside the rooms. In the lobby there, right when you walk in the building, there was some -- like a bulletin, news bulletin. So one day I happen to read it. I could read German. So I read that there is thousands of partisans in the forests, and not too far from us. So already, you know, I start thinking of that way, to get away in the forest.

Q TO RUN AWAY?

A Yeah, into the forest. I mean to go, but not -- most people didn't go. They didn't know where to go. And then one group left right after this massacre of 2,500. But one day in November '42, after work, I came from work, and I came near the Judenrat. Judenrat was -- you heard about Judenrat?

Q TELL ME ABOUT IT.

A Well, Judenrat was like -- almost like a Jewish administration in the ghetto. And I think it was necessary

because the Germans wanted the Jewish people should kind of rule themselves, like supply a labor force. And even they needed -- sometimes they used to make a whole list of things they wanted, like gold or different furniture. So the Judenrat, actually they were Jewish policeman. They had no guns, but they had the power.

And some of them were very cruel, too, because in order to get the things, they had to beat some people. So some of them were not too, you know -- what do you call it -- gentle. And so -- but every city wherever there was a ghetto, was a Judenrat.

Q LIKE A GOVERNMENT?

A Self-government, yeah. And they also had control over the ration cards, because we used to get -- in order to -- we used to get like cards for bread and oil. And we didn't have too much food, but sometimes -- like I remember one day while I was going to work and I had to go outside the ghetto. So some farmer went over to me and asked me if I had -- he's got like some dried peas, I'm talking like maybe 50 kilograms. And so I told him I have -- I brought him like a piece of leather sole. That was valuable. And he give me some -- lots of peas, maybe 50 -- big bag of peas.

So by going outside the ghetto, you were able sometimes to get food in. And they were not too strict. It wasn't like a concentration camp. So you could go in and out without anybody almost controlling you. But you were -- there was a big fence around the ghetto.

Q WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE INSIDE THE GHETTO?

A I'll tell you, it's hard to say. It wasn't like in

Warsaw, see. It wasn't like that. In the smaller towns, I think, things were not as bad. I don't know if anybody was -- as long as you had bread and water, sometimes you used to take bread and onions, mix it, and fry it in oil. That was like -- they called it "Stalinski cutlet," like cutlets, you know, but --

Q OH, YES.

A -- not from meat, but bread. And today they would call it vegetarian.

Q RIGHT.

A And so then also we used to take some -- I already -- up until the war, I always kept Kosher. But then at that time already even I think maybe under the Russians if I had to be outside my city, I ate whatever. I didn't eat pork until later. I ate pork, too, during the war.

So -- But you asked me how life was in the ghetto. People used to go around talking to each other, trying to find out some news. There was lots of hope I think. People somehow couldn't believe that -- you know, there was faith, I think, and hope that something, a miracle will happen and so people will survive.

Q SO WAS THERE EVER ANY FEELING IN THE GHETTO OF TRYING TO RESIST WHAT WAS HAPPENING?

A The resistance, it's a hard thing to describe. Like I had an opportunity to resist and fight, but that was later when I was outside the ghetto. But when you were in the ghetto, the resistance maybe could -- was more in the way people lived. They didn't give up. There was hope. Survival was the resistance. But there was no -- Actually, what do you mean by resistance?

Fighting?

Q WAS THERE RELIGIOUSITY?

A What?

Q DID THEY PRACTICE JUDAISM?

A Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. The religion was strong, yeah, because most people were Orthodox.

Q DID YOU GROW UP IN --

A Yeah, right. Right. There was no reformed or -- yeah, people, their faith was strong. I would say it was stronger than even before, in normal times. People prayed in houses, especially after the massacre. Almost every second house they had like millions of people were praying, saying kaddish. As far as that, you didn't have to identify -- there was no problem of -- everything -- life was -- everybody knew we were Jewish. There was nothing to --

Q SO HOW DID YOU GET OUT OF THE GHETTO?

A So that time once in the November I happened to be near the Judenrat. And somebody told me, a friend of mine somebody told me there was -- right across the street there was somebody came in, a partisan, from outside the ghetto. He was from another town. I went in and talked to him. And then he told me, you know, he accepted me. I mean I was very determined to get out.

Q WHAT ABOUT -- DID YOU HAVE CONCERN FOR LIKE BEING WITH YOUR BROTHERS OR WAS IT JUST YOUR OWN INDEPENDENT --

A I think at that moment it was just --

Q ONLY THINKING FOR YOURSELF?

A Thinking for yourself, right. I came home -- Because I

had once a chance to get away before and my mother discouraged me, or my parents. It's hard to -- see, in normal times usually you look up to your parents.

Q YEAH.

A Parents protect you. In those days, the parents or the smart -- actually the majority were helpless. So sometimes the younger people, providing you really decide to go and think just of yourself, you had more a chance maybe of survival.

Q SO WHEN YOU SAY THAT THIS PARTISAN WHO CAME ACCEPTED YOU --

A Yeah.

Q -- WHAT WAS HE ACCEPTING YOU FOR?

A Just told me to -- see I went there and said, "I want to go with you."

Q YEAH.

A And I didn't know where I was going.

Q I SEE.

A So then he asked me if I had a gun or -- a gun or money. And I didn't have a gun and I didn't have money, but I had a piece of leather sole. Again, leather sole, like I said before. And so I told them. And that was valuable, like boots were valuable. But I was very determined. And the way I spoke to him -- I didn't actually beg, it just was so he couldn't say no to me.

And he said to me to come at 8:00 o'clock at night near the fence at a certain point. We will go out. So that's -- I came home and I said, "I'm going away." I didn't ask permission.

Q YOU TOLD THEM?

A Yeah. And I -- I was walking towards the fence. You see my brother, the one who is alive, walked with me, but not to go away, just I guess like to accompany me. And then he disappeared. And later I asked him what happened, and he said the Jewish policemen pushed him away. I don't know, I must have been so excited I didn't see what happened.

Q YOU JUST KEPT GOING?

A I kept going. And then I came to that fence, and it was night. It was dark, at nighttime. And we waited for the whole group to assemble. And then there were two people, two or three: the one who came from -- who already knew where we were going, the man I met, and two others. And then we came to a village. And then first we got bread. We went around from house to house.

Q WAS IT ALL YOUNG MEN IN THE GROUP?

A Yeah.

Q ALL YOUNG MEN?

A And women too. Men and women.

Q LIKE HOW MANY?

A Oh, maybe 20, 25. And we came to the village, the first village next to our town, and we got bread, loaves of bread, you know.

Q WHO GAVE THEM TO YOU?

A We just went around from house to house and said, "We need bread." And you ask, but it's almost like it's a combination asking and ordering, and they give you. And then so we had enough bread for everybody. Then we came -- then we asked

-- I think we told the farmers to get horses and wagons, and we went by horse and wagon, in the wagons, because it was faster.

We came to a certain point, and then we had to -- it got to be before daylight. We had to stay over. There was a dangerous area still. So we were there in a stable where there was hay. We were there all day. And then but I think the fellow who had the stable must have been a friend of ours.

Q UH-HUH.

A And then we came to some area -- I'm not sure how far it was from our town, maybe 50 kilometers, or 60. It was a swampy area, and there were partisans already there. So then also we were staying and someone, commander, walked in and he picked me up, you know, chose -- took me.

Q HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE A PARTISAN?

A Partisans, it's kind of like semi -- it's like a soldier, but you are not dressed in a uniform. You are dressed in anything you can get. It's, you know, the Germans called us bandits, see, but we considered ourselves partisans. We were fighting -- we were fighting for our lives, and also to revenge. And it was part of the struggle of survival and fighting against the Germans. But being a partisan, you had the chance to fight.

Q UH-HUH.

A But being in the ghetto -- because if something, you'll do something, you'll jeopardize everybody, not only your family but everyone. Because there were cases someplace it happened, not even with Jewish people, I think in Czechoslovakia some high German officer was killed near a village. And they came, they took the whole village of Christians, and they burned the

village. They killed everybody.

Q SO ONCE YOU LEFT THE GHETTO, YOU BECAME A PARTISAN?

A Right.

Q I SEE.

A Because I remember even a couple days after I left the ghetto, it was at daytime, we were someplace in some fields and surrounded by forces. I felt like a free man. It was a wonderful feeling.

Q SO WHERE DID THAT BRING YOU TO?

A To what?

Q WHEN YOU HID IN THE FOREST, AND WHERE DID YOU END UP BEING?

A Actually we didn't have to hide. We were just -- we used to kind of stay in one house and then move. We were organized. So we used to -- we didn't stay in one area. And then later, it was getting towards the winter of '42 --

Q DID YOU KNOW WHERE YOU WERE GOING?

A No. We were in one area. We were not too far, because everything was mostly by foot. So then we built like bunkers in the forest, kind of -- not like bunker; it's more like -- I don't know what you would call them. Like huts.

Q UH-HUH.

A In Russian it's called zimlanka. Zimla means earth. We dug out an area, like the space maybe six by 20, you know.

Q JUST TO --

A You know, dug out the dirt maybe two, three feet deep. Then you take young -- the trunks of young trees and you make like an A-frame, like that's the roof, that's the walls and the

roof, everything. Then you put straw and then dirt, and here you got a place to sleep, you know. So it's protected, as from rain, sort of, from cold weather.

And also we made manmade stoves. You take a barrel, metal barrels, and from a barrel you can make a stove and with a chimney, you know. So we had -- so it was pretty warm. You slept in the clothing. You never got undressed in case of danger. So you had one pair of underwear. You never had much changes. But then we used to go, you know -- food, we had plenty of food to eat. Food was no problem.

Q PEOPLE GAVE YOU --

A No, we didn't -- we used to go to richer farmers and take it.

Q SO HOW LONG DID YOU LIVE LIKE THAT?

A Well, not exactly -- every day was different.

Q YEAH.

A Oh, about from November '42 'til we were liberated in '44, so maybe a year and a half.

Q IN HIDING?

A Well, it wasn't hiding. It was a way of life.

Q A GROUP OF --

A Not a group. We were lots of them, hundreds or thousands of us see.

Q AND HOW IS IT THAT YOU WERE SAFE THERE?

A It was not safe. Every day was a matter -- you could get killed every day. There was no safety. But there was still -- it's no -- it's like day and night being in a ghetto.

Q WHAT WAS A TYPICAL DAY THEN LIKE?

A Oh, in the beginning --

Q DAYLIGHT WOULD COME?

A Yeah, you get up early. Then you go outside. In the -- when wintertime was, I would used to use snow, or I'm not sure how we washed ourselves. I don't remember now. And then sometimes, some days -- I'm not sure. I don't remember exactly. Sometimes we used to go out at nighttime on certain missions.

Actually even at that time, after I was in that place for maybe a month, everything was pretty -- it was getting to be boring almost, and there was not that much to do. Then one day they asked -- they needed volunteers to go, to send I think four or five across the front. See the front at that time was near Moscow. We were far from Moscow. This was -- I have a map someplace, I could show you. Maybe a couple hundred kilometers, 200, 300 kilometers from Moscow. And so I volunteered to go.

And so it was me and another Jewish boy and I think three Christian boys. And then we had to -- we walked -- in the beginning we walked by night and kind of slept at daytime. It was a normal -- it was nothing normal. It was just a matter of survival. As long as you had enough to eat and a place to sleep, that --

Q WHAT WAS THE MISSION?

A The mission was to go across the front, see, and then I think we had to get either ammunition or something. I'm not sure. But we never made it. We were on the street for like maybe a month or longer. See, after you crossed -- well, the old Russian-German-Polish border, Polish-Russian border -- that was before '39 -- all the villages there on the east were occupied by

the partisans. So there already we didn't have to hide. We could walk at daytime because the Germans were in the big cities, see, in the garrisons. And the partisans controlled all -- like maybe like in Viet Nam, the Viet Cong. I never was in Viet Nam, but I kind of think the same idea.

So I was in the villages now. And then we used to come and walk -- the day took off -- the time we spent was walking from one village to another, getting something to eat, because without a car and without a wagon, you know, how much can you walk a day? Twenty kilometers? And that's how we used to spend the time. And then actually while we were in one of the villages, one of my friends, even, they wanted -- I had good slacks because I got them when I left the ghetto. And so two of my buddies, they wanted my slacks. But I wouldn't give it to them.

So one day they said to me -- there was another Jewish boy with me. His name was Yehuda. So they said one day to me, you know, "We killed him." Just like that. And they said it to scare me. And then they said to me, "I want your slacks." So they caught me off guard and I gave them the slacks. And then they gave me another pair of older slacks, so, you know. But then I found out they didn't kill him, but they bluffed it. They bluffed it to scare me. So really -- But then we came -- we had to cross railroads. And the railroads were paroled by the Germans, see, so you never knew where the patrol is or the ambush. So that was part of the mission.

Finally we came to one area, and there was lots of us because some partisans they mobilized local young people to take

them across the front. So there must have been maybe 500 of us. But we couldn't cross the railroad because -- so everybody start running back. And then it took us -- we spent maybe a couple weeks or a month one way going, and another two, three weeks back. So that's how you spent the time.

Q AND YOU CAME BACK --

A Back with nothing. We didn't accomplish anything. Then after that, so that was like before the -- maybe February '43. So the Germans in that area, that was in the Polish White Russia, not maybe 50, 60 kilometers from our town. They came -- they used to fly with small airplanes, and they knew where we were in the forest. So they used to go with machine guns, fly and shoot at us. And then they used to send out an army.

So one day it happened I was on the post outside the -- our camp in the village, but the houses were all burned out --

Q DID YOU HAVE ANY WEAPONS OR --

A At that time -- Later I had. At that time I still didn't have. Sometimes when I had to go on the post, they gave me a rifle because we didn't have enough for everybody. And then in the morning I came -- see we heard shooting, and I -- actually I thought the Germans were behind me. And I was running towards the camp not knowing that they also came in our camp. So they were behind me and also in front of me. So it was already morning, like beautiful, it was snow on the ground. It was like a clearance in the woods.

And I was running to them. And they could have taken me alive because they saw me, and I saw them, but I thought they were my friends.

Q WHAT HAPPENED?

A They started shooting at me, but not from machine gun. If they would open fire from a machine gun, they would get me right away, but they were from a rifle. And the way in winter time you walk -- there is no road. You walk one behind the other, like in a line, so that one man must have been shooting at me.

So I start running back in the woods. And I ran and I even wasn't injured. So I was really -- that day, that was the closest time. They didn't have to shoot me. They could have taken me alive, but I was lucky.

After that, after -- I'm skipping maybe a week, two weeks -- we had lots of injured people among us. And we decided we have to get away from here, from that area. So we all -- we took the injured. We put them on sleighs. The snow at that time started melting. And we came east to the village. That's where I was a few months before when I was going across the front, where the partisans controlled all the villages.

So we came there in the village, not far from the Polish border. We were there maybe a month, you know, and then we had to go back west, you see.

Can I get more water?

Q HERE.

A Thank you.

Q YOU DO A LOT OF TALKING. IT'S HARD.

A So after a being a month up there in these villages -- and we were in a village not far from the village that my grandfather used to live, but he was dead by that time, because I

mean I found out that the Russian Jews were killed even before. They just took them outside the cities and they shot them all. So I was within walking distance of the village where my grandfather lived.

Q AND YOU EXPECTED HIM TO BE --

A No, I already knew there was nobody. I found out from the farmers that nobody lived there now. So after being there a month, I got permission -- see we had to go back west. So I got permission, I asked the commander permission to go to out -- to the ghetto because I wasn't in contact with the ghetto. I lived this life for about six months, you know, like from November '42 until spring of '43. And I didn't know anything about for six months --

Q ABOUT YOUR FAMILY?

A It's not like today; you have a telephone. There was no contact. But I knew that the ghetto still exists, so I got permission to go into the ghetto. So I went by myself. Well, first I didn't have a definite plan how to do it. I just played it by ear, you know. So I came to a village about seven kilometers from the ghetto, from the town, and that same village where I went once to get the sack of flour from that farmer.

So I came to the farmer and I wanted -- I wrote a note to my brother who worked for the doctor, see, and I thought he'll take over the note and tell him I'm waiting there for the family. I thought, maybe, you know, I was going to take him, then, someplace. But the farmer was afraid to deliver the note.

So then I decided to go in the city, but I was afraid to go in the ghetto because there were cases that you couldn't

trust even Jewish people. They felt like if you are a partisan and you come in the ghetto, you jeopardize the majority, see. I think they felt like --

Q LIKE THEY WERE FOLLOWING THE RULES?

A Right. As long as you follow the rules, there is more chance of survival. But it didn't work like that in those days. For a while maybe, in the short-term, but not in the long-term.

Anyway I just -- I was dressed like a farmer and I came in the middle of the day. I just walked in the city. And I -- first of all, there were two things against me: one was being Jewish, that's one crime; and second, partisan. So if they'd catch me, that would be the end.

Q YEAH.

A But I was lucky. I walked in the town. I didn't see a policeman. I wasn't afraid of the German soldiers. I was more afraid of the local policeman, because the local policeman can recognize you, just even -- just by the face.

Q THEY WOULD KNOW WHO YOU ARE?

A Yeah, they can tell sometimes. So nobody recognized me. I walked on the sidewalk. Jewish people couldn't walk on the sidewalk. They had to walk in the middle of the road with Star of Davids. So I saw Jewish people, but I just kind of turned my head and blew my nose, you know, they shouldn't -- I saw them, they didn't see me.

And then I came -- first I went into some Polish people that their brother helped me when I was walking from the villages toward the town. Her brother showed me where to cross the railroad. So I went in to her, and instead of going to her

house, you know, I knocked at the door next door. And it was a policeman opened the door. And I said to him in Polish, you see, I said -- and I knew the name of this lady, which Horowitz was her name, the last name. And I asked him -- And I had to be careful of my "R". You see "R" is -- they can recognize. My brother, he can say the "R" and they couldn't tell it's Jewish, you know. So I was -- so I had to speak without using "R."

So I said something in Polish, "Where does she live?"

And he said, "Next door." And he didn't recognize, so I was lucky. And I walked in and I told her who I was, that I saw her brother, regards from her brother, and maybe you can help me. All I wanted is she should deliver the message. They were afraid to do it. So all I said to them, in Polish, I said, "There is a war. Just keep your mouth shut." As long as they don't squeal or report me, you know.

Then I went to where my brother worked. There was lots of soldiers there. And he wasn't at work. He went someplace on an errand. So then I went to another family in a different part of town. It was Russian people, and they were not scared. And I got scared of myself looking in the mirror because in these last few months in the village we had no salt and without salt we had something -- you used bleed, you used to get the gums were bleeding.

Anyway, I left a message with this Russian family. Then I went back where my brother worked, and he saw me, you know. The first time I was there a hour or two hours before, some girl that knew me -- I talked to her, see. And I told her I'm -- I played the role of a farmer. And I said I have some

bread for him. But she recognized me, I think. So then when my brother saw me coming -- because he worked in the basement, but they had like windows above the ground -- he came. Out and I haven't seen him for six months, you know. And here I'm risking my life to rescue them, and he looked -- he looked very good because he lived a more normal life. And he felt -- I wanted to save them, and he felt sorry for me, the way maybe I looked.

Q YEAH.

A So I thought he'll be glad that I came, I have a place, you know, where to take him. He said to me maybe I want to come back in the ghetto. So that was really a shock to me.

Q YEAH.

A And I was very upset about it. So I said to him, after you tasted the life of freedom and being out away from the ghetto -- I just couldn't believe it.

Q IS THIS YOUR YOUNGEST BROTHER?

A No, the middle one, the one who is alive in Hayward. Because later I ask him once at Passover, we had a Seder together, and we all join and maybe 10 years ago or so, I don't know how long ago. I ask him once about this. I can't forget it. So he says, well he felt sorry the way I looked, you know.

Q SO HE WOULDN'T COME WITH YOU?

A No. So then I told him I am going to wait -- he says to me, wait about two or three days there at that farmer's house. And the farmer was scared too, that's that farmer -- his name was MARKA. And GLASDORA was the village. Because what he said to me, he said like that it's faith and whatever is meant to be -- he spoke almost like so many Jewish or even -- the majority

of the Jews were Orthodox. Many Jewish people used to talk like this, very fatalistic.

Q LIKE IT'S IN GOD'S HANDS?

A Like in God hands. You can't run away from that. He says, "Whatever is meant to be," you know. And so the farmer spoke like that too. But he didn't do anything to hurt me, see, because if somebody -- if the Germans find out I'm hiding and he is not reporting me, they could take his whole family and shoot them too.

So I waited two or three days in around there. And then what happened is one morning, I think maybe it was a Sunday morning, my brother -- Don is his name, the one who is alive in Hayward -- and my younger brother and my mother, see they walked out from the ghetto pretending to go to work, you know, just through the gate. Because we had the gate already, and there maybe was a policeman. But everybody went to work on their own and came home on their own.

My father was afraid to leave. So my father said, "I was born here and I will die here," or whatever. He was afraid. My mother used to take chances more than my father, I think. Anyway, I met them. I didn't know if they will come or they won't come, you know. But after waiting -- and it was nighttime actually. All of a sudden, I saw them. Then I took them to a village east where I came from. See from my past experience, of the six months experience, it was always safer there.

Q SO YOUR MOTHER CAME WITH YOU TOO?

A Yeah. So I took them to a village east. And see then I had to go west to my group. And in the meantime in that

village I met a new group. And at that time I think if I would -- see I was planning to go with the new group west, but to join back my old group. But later it turned out I got permission to stay with the new group. So I had a lot more freedom than I had before with the old group. The old group didn't want families.

So at that time I -- I had no doubts that it was the best thing to leave my mother and my younger brother in the village there. But later it turned -- because after we left them, you know, maybe a week later when we started going west we were surrounded once in the forest by shooting. And that night I thought to myself, "I'm glad my mother and younger brother are safe."

But later it turned out the opposite. Where I went, we survived. And where I left my mother and younger brother, what happened after we left -- I don't know how long after, maybe a couple weeks or a month -- they burned all the villages. And then --

Q SO IT --

A My mother and younger brother got killed. The way they got killed, one of the farmers actually squealed to the Germans that there's a Jewish woman with a boy. So they got shot. And my father also got killed in our town, my father and his sister and my cousin. They got shot too because what happened when I went away six months before in the partisans, somehow they didn't miss me because I worked with others, like there were three or four others. If I didn't come to work, nobody missed me.

My brother, when he left, see he was the only Jewish boy who worked for the doctor. And he told the doctor before --

he knew already after I contacted him that he knew that he might go away. So he told them something that he is going to have some surgery in the ghetto because we had actually a hospital in the ghetto. But he didn't come to work, so then they came to look for him. And they arrested the whole -- everybody in that house. But then they let some go, but they shot my father and my aunt and cousin. That was in '43.

Q HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THAT?

A Well, a few months later -- that happened like in spring of '43. August 20th, '43, they liquidated -- they killed everybody in our ghetto. So our ghetto in our town was actually for over two years, from '41 to '43.

Q THEN IT WAS TOTALLY WIPED OUT?

A Yeah. They surrounded the whole -- and people knew already.

Q THEY SHOT THEM?

A Yeah. And people -- they even put all the houses on fire. Some of them were hiding under -- we had hiding places, and so they were burned alive. A few maybe from the whole city, from our ghetto, maybe 50 survived. Some ran through the fire and came in the forest. Some built a very ingenious type of hiding place in a brick building between two walls, and nobody could find them and then a few days later after all the shooting stopped, they sneaked out at nighttime and came. And so I knew from them what happened. Because later when we were liberated, like in '44 --

Q WHERE WERE YOU WHEN YOU WERE LIBERATED?

A Not far from our town. Maybe 50 kilometers from our --

close to our town, in the forest. But after we were liberated, we came to your town, see.

Q YOU AND YOUR BROTHER?

A Yeah. And then -- then later, maybe six months later, I don't remember the date --

Q YEAH.

A -- but I went back to that village where my mother and brother were killed, and the farmer showed me, you know. So I --

Q SHOWED YOU WHAT?

A Where they were -- Where the grave was.

Q UH-HUH.

A So I moved them like to a small town where there was a Jewish cemetery. But there was -- I couldn't -- there was no graves any more because the Germans took away all the stones, you know. So -- but I reburied -- how you say -- reburied?

Q YEAH, REBURIED THEM.

A I reburied them. But now, that -- that's -- now, during the partisans, beside -- I would say besides survival, getting food and just staying alive, we also used to go -- that was the last year about, before we were liberated. We used to go at night and blow up -- we used to blow up railroads, the railroad, where we had material like pieces of soap. I don't know what you call it. And we used to put some --

Q YOU MEAN LIKE A GRENADE?

A No, it's not grenades. It's -- What do you call the -- it's a yellow material.

Q DYNAMITE?

A Dynamite, some type and --

BACKGROUND VOICE: SULFUR.

A Sulfur. And then we used to put some type of long, like some kind of -- something like a cloth -- not a cloth, but --

Q LIKE A WICK OR SOMETHING?

A Yeah, a wick. And then you can get, you know, started and we used to start the blowing up. So we had -- we had different missions we used to do. So we were pretty, you know, we were young and healthy.

Q SO YOU WERE FIGHTING BACK?

A Oh, yeah. Right, I was. But the biggest thing really is the family. It's almost --

Q ONLY YOU AND YOUR BROTHER --

A Survived, yeah. Well, if I wouldn't have gone in the ghetto, he probably wouldn't have been alive too, my brother. But all this --

Q SO FROM THAT TIME WERE YOU AND YOUR BROTHER ALWAYS TOGETHER?

A We were most of the time together. Well, we were separated for awhile. He was away in the army for awhile, my brother.

Q WHICH ARMY?

A It was the Russian army. I'm talking after we were liberated. He was away for maybe a year.

Q WHO WERE YOU LIBERATED BY?

A By the Russians.

Q THE RUSSIANS LIBERATED YOU?

A Yeah. And then after that, after that, maybe a year

later, see, anybody who was a Polish citizen could go back to Poland.

Q AND YOU WERE A POLISH CITIZEN?

A Yes. So we took advantage of it and we went to Poland. And from Poland, then we went -- illegally we went just -- in those days people were going from country to country. Things were still not strict. Then we came to Germany, and from Germany then we contacted the relatives in San Francisco, you know. And then in November '47 we came to San Francisco.

Q SO AT WHAT POINT -- EARLIER YOU SHOWED ME THE PICTURE OF YOU WITH THE GUNS STANDING --

A That was in time of -- that was like in '43. That was '43.

Q AFTER YOU WERE LIBERATED?

A No, that was still in the partisans.

Q THAT'S WHEN YOU WERE LIKE BLOWING UP THINGS --

A Right.

Q YOU AND YOUR BROTHER?

A Right.

Q SO AT WHAT POINT DID HE JOIN THE RUSSIAN ARMY?

A Well, like after we were liberated, like say '44.

Q AND WHAT WERE YOU DOING MEANWHILE?

A Well, I worked as a bookkeeper, I got a job. But then later I --

Q THIS WAS IN RUSSIA BEFORE YOU WENT --

A Yeah, in White Russia, before we went to Poland.

Q AND DID YOU THINK YOU WERE GOING TO GO STAY IN WHITE RUSSIA?

A No. I always, all my life right from childhood, I had the desire --

Q YOU KNEW YOU HAD THIS --

A Right, to get -- especially after I survived the war. See we tried to make contact with them. And actually it's kind of -- it's a long story, but we forgot her last name, you know. And then through a coincidence, through some friends in Brooklyn who during the war were in Shanghai, see, then they came to San Francisco from China, from Shanghai. They contacted -- they had like my mother --

Q THESE ARE FRIENDS FROM YOUR HOME TOWN?

A Yeah, and my mother asked them -- she knew they were going maybe someday come to United States, to America. And we didn't know about it. So on the way to Chicago, they stopped in San Francisco and they contacted my aunt. And then later, after we survived the war, we wrote to a teacher of ours in Chicago. And they knew that they were -- they stopped in San Francisco. And it was a coincidence.

Q JUST BY CHANCE?

A By chance. And that's how they had the address.

Q SO YOU WERE LIBERATED, YOU STAYED IN RUSSIA, YOUR brother was in the army --

A Yeah.

Q AND THEN WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO GO TO POLAND?

A Well, Poland we used as a a vehicle to get further.

Q TO GET FURTHER?

A Yeah, because I'll tell what you I did, when I was in Russia once I read in a Russian newspaper the speech Truman --

President Truman made a speech once and said he should let 100,000 Jews to Palestine. And that I think triggered something in me to get out from Russia, to get to Poland, and then from Poland I knew I would go further. See we had no -- but actually there was lots of risk involved even to go just like -- but --

Q HOW DID YOU GET OUT OF POLAND?

A Poland -- I'll tell you, when we got to Poland, Poland in those days -- that was like '45 or -- there was some Jewish people that was like illegal -- like it's called Brichard. It was illegal Zionists who helped Jews go like towards Palestine, go to -- I didn't know about that at that time. Later I read in a book about it, so I kind of summarized it. I knew somebody is helping us. But then when we came to Germany, we contacted our relatives. We decided to go to the United States and we came in '47.

Q HOW OLD WERE YOU THEN?

A About -- let's see 24. So that's it.

Q SO YOU CAME TO SAN FRANCISCO?

A San Francisco. Relatives were very -- I mean very good to us. Because I had even in Hayward I had a -- my grandfather had a brother run away actually in 1905 or 1904 from Russia, see, and came and hid actually in an American ship in Japan, came just like a stow-away. And I didn't know too much about him. He was a builder. So then I think on account of him my brother went in this, in construction, and eventually I went in that field too.

Q AND THAT'S --

A So that's how I --

Q HOW YOU ENDED UP HERE TODAY AS A REAL ESTATE DEVELOPER

IN HAYWARD, CALIFORNIA?

A Right.

Q WELL, IS THERE ANYTHING I HAVEN'T ASKED YOU ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES DURING THE WAR THAT --

A No. There were many details, I think, that I -- but basically that's probably the story.

Q CAN YOU GIVE ME ONE EXAMPLE OF A DETAIL, A PARTICULAR SITUATION OR EVENT OR SOMETHING YOU REMEMBER THAT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU?

A One I remember that was towards the end, before we were liberated. We even had some cows with us and we had to cross a railroad. And while we were crossing the railroad, they started shooting at us, but we still wouldn't let go of the cows. And then while we were running I remember, you know, I was thirsty and there was no water, but I knew there was a cow. And I didn't even have a glass. I just start milking in my hand to get some milk. So it was funny in a way also. Even in danger there was a certain amount of -- even you stay alive and you make it, I think there was this type of adventure.

Q AND A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF HUMOR?

A Humor, yeah, there was lots of -- let's see, how would you say. See, besides the partisans in the forest there were also family camps where there were Jewish people. Sometimes the partisans who had -- who kept moving places and had a little bit more power to get things used to supply food to the families who were in -- they were depending on help sometimes from the partisans.

So that was -- and once I -- I was injured only once,

also while crossing -- the danger time was either an ambush, when you are caught in an ambush, or once we were crossing the railroad, like I was going east and west, back and forth. And once going that way, right now -- see, the Germans knew we were crossing the railroad because the dogs, see, farmers have dogs. And the dogs start barking. So when they start barking, they knew somebody maybe is walking. And it was dark, you know. Even binoculars wouldn't help. So we used to always cross the railroad at nighttime.

So once while we were crossing, they start shooting at us. And I think one of the fellows started to turn back. He got killed, because I didn't hear from him anymore. I kept running ahead, and then I was -- but I was lucky: a bullet got in like here and over here and came out here, in the soft area.

Q JUST SORT OF SCRAPED THE SKIN?

A Well, yeah. It was painful for a month, but not bones. So just once I got hit.

Q DID YOU HAVE ANY KIND OF MEDICAL CARE?

A Yeah, in the villages we had a nurse, and yeah, I had medical care. So after this, after I was injured, that was already towards maybe in '44 probably, before we were liberated. After that I was a little bit maybe more careful.

Q DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO SOME OF THE OTHER PEOPLE YOU WERE WITH, THE OTHER PARTISANS, OR ANY IDEA?

A Yeah, I keep in touch with -- well, like there was one fellow, his name is David. I keep -- that -- like that was in that winter, '43 to '44, after the ghetto was liquidated. Everybody was killed. And I was in some villages. I used to at

nighttime come. It was not too far from our city. So one day they used to come and stay overnight at somebody's house.

See, some houses were not in a village. They used to have, like, how would you call it, colonies, you know, one house here and another house maybe a kilometer, half a kilometer away. So what happened is in one of these homes there, this David, he survived. He hid in the ghetto -- outside the ghetto in the bakery. He hid and he survived. His parents got killed.

And they had some friends that were Polish, it was a -- there were actually five sisters, spinsters. And they offered actually his father, if his father wants to come -- that was during the ghetto, you know -- wants to come and they will hide them, the father, the mother, and David.

Q IF THEY LEAVE THE GHETTO?

A Yeah, they would hide them. But the father wouldn't do it. He said -- David told me that, because the father had a brother who lived next door and he was afraid that maybe his brother will suffer for it, you see. So anyway they got killed. And David survived and he came to these Polish people. They were hiding him there in their attic. See there was no husbands or no brothers, so they had outside laborer who used to come to work on their farm.

So at nighttime -- at daytime he used to be in the attic, and at nighttime he used to come down. So the sister-in-law of this ladies is where I used to stop, and she knew where I was from. And so one day -- and I had a horse and a sleigh. So one night she said to me something, she wants to show me something, like she said to me she has a passport from our

town, but actually she meant a leaving passport. So and then she took me over to that house, you know.

And as I start talking, David recognized my voice. He was a good friend of my brother, and they lived next door to our house. So at night when he came down and I saw him, I broke down and I start crying, just -- and I took him with me, see. So he was with me until we were liberated.

Q WHERE IS HE NOW?

A So he is in Brooklyn. David DEGAS. So I -- a couple times a year maybe he calls me, I call him. He's more the age of my brother, about nine -- six years younger. So I keep in touch with him?

Q WHEN THEY LIQUIDATE THE GHETTO, WHAT DO THEY DO WITH THE BODIES?

A Well, I'll tell you, the bodies, what they did -- first of all, some people were hiding, hiding in the houses. Even when I lived in the ghetto before I went in the partisans I build a tunnel. It was -- when I look back at that, it wouldn't help a thing. It --

Q HOW DID YOU BUILD IT?

A You build a tunnel from like -- there was a -- every house had like almost two ovens, one were used to bake bread, the big oven, and the smaller one. Anyway, and then underneath the oven in wintertime some people used to keep their chickens, not on our house but on farms they kept them. It's like a crawl space. So I dug a tunnel from that, underneath that to the bedroom. And then you go in the bedroom and then you cover it.

But when they start burning -- when the houses were,

burning lots of them burned alive, people like that. And then lots of them were dead bodies. So the dead bodies, the people who were -- who they surrounded and were alive, they took them outside the forest -- that might -- outside the forest -- outside the city in the forest where they shot that time the 2,500 people in '43 -- '42, and they shot them there. But then all the other bodies that they found, they just -- they had help, farmers and stuff, and they took them all, all the bodies and they just buried them in big ditches.

For that matter, my brother was last year -- or this year he went to our town. The city, the big city from our town is called Vilna. So then they went -- they drove up to our town, and he didn't recognize even our street where we lived, you know, but -- let's see, what did I do with it? He took a picture. He took some pictures of -- let's see, in the forest.

Q UH-HUH.

A I think I have them somewhere. Of where the mass graves are. I think I have them here.

(Looking through photographs.)

Q IT'S ALWAYS LIKE THAT, WHEN YOU'RE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING YOU CAN'T FIND IT AT THAT MOMENT.

A Right. Maybe it's here. I thought I had it. I have a few pictures. Let's see. Maybe in this. I think I put it here someplace. No, it's not here.

Q SO HE WENT BACK?

A Yeah, he went back and he found some -- yeah, he took pictures of the graves.

Q WELL, IF YOU COME ACROSS THEM --

A Yeah, I'll show them to you, right.

Q -- YOU CAN HOLD THEM OUT IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA. I'M SURE THEY'RE THERE SOMEPLACE.

A Yeah. It reminds me when I was in Israel last year I had some pictures in here, and I forgot that I had a pocket on the left side too. And so I start looking, I couldn't find them, and then I didn't look on the other side, you know. But I thought I took a few pictures from --

Q WE WILL LOOK.

A Okay.

Q I REALLY APPRECIATE YOUR SHARING ALL THIS WITH US. IT'S VERY IMPORTANT.

A Yeah.

Q IT'S NOT EASY TO TALK ABOUT.

A Well, I've been talking about it. I think -- I think that, you see, in my case I know it's hard to look back because at that time nobody knew what is the right thing to do, you know. At that time when I left the ghetto -- I never regretted that I left, because I knew that -- that --

Q IT MUST HAVE BEEN HARD TO LEAVE YOUR PARENTS.

A Yeah, but I was just -- I was ready to leave. And it's too bad more people couldn't have done it, because you see we had a ghetto until -- for a long time. And lots of small towns, the ghettos were -- everybody was killed before there were even partisans, so there was no place to go. But in our town there was a ghetto until there was already many partisans in the forest. So but there were not too many -- some went, but very few.

But when -- so when I left, I don't regret that because then I had the chance to come back to save them. But it -- it's been -- it's been now almost -- let's see, '43, you know, 30, 40, 45 years ago, 46 years ago. And many times I have a certain guilt feeling, you know, of leaving my mother and younger brother in the village, you know. At that time I felt that was the -- I did the right thing because if I'd had doubt, I would take them with me. But somehow --

Q BUT NO WAY TO KNOW.

A No way to know, right. But still I live with that.

Kind of --

Q IT HAUNTS YOU?

A It haunts me, yeah.

Q IT HAUNTS YOU.

A But overall, you know, I have a pretty good life here in this country and, you know, and a good family.

Q IT'S NICE THAT YOU AND YOUR BROTHER SETTLED IN THE SAME COMMUNITY.

A Right. And also being in the same business, you know. There's enough for both of us.

Q AND NOW YOU HAVE THREE SONS OF YOUR OWN?

A Right. So it's -- I enjoy the work I'm doing. And I have a good wife and good -- and I have now two grandchildren and we expect a third one in April.

Q THAT'S NICE.

A So --

Q AND LIFE GOES ON.

A Yeah, life goes on. There is times when I do go

through -- I have a certain -- I go through some certain type of depression.

Q AND HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH THAT?

A Well, sometimes it takes time until it goes away. I sometimes take medicine. And work seems to me -- when I'm busy at work it seems for me the best medicine.

Q THE BEST MEDICINE.

A Uh-huh. And so I take trips. I've been in Israel about five times.

Q DO YOU TALK WITH OTHER PEOPLE ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES?

A Yeah, sometimes --

Q OR REALLY NOTHING IN COMMON?

A Yeah -- no -- sometimes. It depends, like this time I was in HEIFA and I looked up some people who were with me in the same group and we were actually going on the same missions like once. So I hadn't seen them since '45.

Q AND YOU FOUND THEM?

A I found them. Yeah, I'm good in finding people, you know, I enjoy searching.

Q SO THEN YOU TALKED ABOUT WHAT YOU'D BEEN THROUGH TOGETHER?

A Yeah, yeah -- no, I don't know if we talked too much about that time, but there is a certain bond there.

Q YES, I'M SURE.

A Yeah. But we were just glad to see each other. So that man I saw that time, he was like maybe thirties, now he is over -- you know, it was kind of a shock. You don't see it in yourself.

Q OH, YOU DON'T. YOU DON'T.

A Yes. So I looked up -- I even looked up some people that left our town as pioneers.

Q BEFORE --

A They were neighbors. Yeah, they left in the thirties. So I haven't seen them like for over 50 years, and I found them because some of them were near Hypha in a Kibbutz. So I found them because there were some people in Tele Viv who -- from our town who also came as pioneers, and so through them I keep contact and any time I can find somebody, I keep in touch.

Q WHAT LANGUAGE DO YOU SPEAK WHEN YOU ARE TOGETHER?

A Yiddish.

Q YIDDISH.

A Yeah.

Q WELL, THANK YOU, MR. FELSON, VERY MUCH. THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

(Break in tape, then resume in mid-answer.)

A One of the villages, there was a farmer, a Polish man, who said he is a photographer, and he must have had some film. So all I did is ask him if he can take a picture.

Q AND YOU KEPT THE PICTURE?

A Yeah. Well, the picture -- the original picture, I'm afraid to touch. It's falling apart. So we went and took and made copies, but it still didn't fall apart. It kept --

Q BUT YOU KEPT IT WITH YOU?

A Yeah, I had it. I had it, yeah, it survived. Here is a map that -- I don't think you can see this on -- let's see if I can show you. This is before my brother went on his trip to

Russia, I went to the Berkley, to the University of California. There is a room, it's called the map room. And I found maps from that whole area, see, from White Russia. And so he took them with him.

And at first I said to him, "Maybe you shouldn't take the maps. They might think you are a spy." But it was helpful to him. This is actually -- this is in Russian. That's a map like a tourist map, so you can see it's like for tourists. Well I had to take it, make the copies in a hurry. I made it in sections and then I glued them together. But you can actually -- there's a room, a photography room where you can, for a fee, get a nice map. So like here is the capital of White Russia, Minsk.

Q YES.

A Have you heard of Minsk?

Q YES, I HAVE.

A Okay. Now, we -- before -- this is Vilna, but in Lithuanian it's Vilnius. This is now the capital of Lithuania, but before the war it was part of Poland. So this was the big city from -- we belonged to this --

Q IS THAT CONSIDERED GALITSIYA?

A No.

Q NO.

A No, Galitsiya is south of Ukrainian, west south of Ukrainian. So, for example, you have to go below -- this doesn't show here, Galitsiya, on this map. This is White Russia.

Q OKAY. SO THIS IS VILNA. WHERE WAS YOUR VILLAGE?

A It wasn't a village actually. It was a big city, to us it was considered a -- the population was 10,000. Now they say

it's 15,000, but my brother say he can't see where the people are. So where is hair is. This is Minsk, Glubokoye, so right here.

Q UH-HUH.

A And when I was in the partisans, I was -- when I left the first time we went to some like swamps around here.

Q UH-HUH.

A So that's on this scale is about -- inch is I think 10 kilometers, so from here to here may be is six inches -- not inches, centimeters. A centimeter is I think 10 kilometers. So that's where I was most of the time. Most of the time in the partisans I was around here, and around here, see, so I was not to far from our town when we were liberated. Let's see, yeah, I was right around here. And when we went east where my mother -- where I left my mother, is some villages in around here.

Now, my grandfather lived in Berez hany. This city, this was in Poland and the border was here, see. And after the war I buried my mother and my brother in this DAKSHITZY. It sounds kind of -- but it's the name of the town, DAKSHITZY, right here, so it's not far from our town.

Q WHAT WAS IT LIKE THE DAY YOU WERE LIBERATED?

A Well, it was a good feeling because we were liberated was just -- we knew by the radio, I guess. We knew that the Russian army already came to our town. And the front is further away, so then we came from the forest, we came in town.

Q WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED? I MEAN LIKE WHAT IS THE PROCESS? SOMEBODY COMES IN AND SAYS: EVERYTHING'S OKAY NOW?

A No, no. We knew it from the radio. We knew already

that the Germans are not in that city, that it's safe to go in town. So we just went in. It was a good feeling. I mean it wasn't like you're in jail and you were liberated, see, it means that that area was liberated. So not actually we were liberated, but the area was liberated.

Q THE AREA.

A Yeah. And actually this map, this is a little better map. I even found one map -- let's see -- that was from a different period. It's -- I think that's in Polish. Yeah, it's in Polish. I think that map, the big one, is from '74 I think. This might be from '59. But it was in Polish. So it shows more, like this is swampy area like.

Q DID YOU LEARN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES IN SCHOOL, OR --

A No, well, at home we spoke Yiddish. In heder we had to study Hebrew. At home Yiddish, but in school we spoke Polish. But the farmers spoke White Russian. So Polish, White Russian, so we just had to -- you didn't have to go to school to learn that language.

Q IT WAS JUST AROUND YOU.

A Yeah, around you. And then when the Germans came, we had to speak German. But from Yiddish to German, it's not that -- grammatically it might not be correct, but you know it's close. And then English we had to learn when we came here.

So like that's -- the village is like -- see the border was like here.

Q UH-HUH.

A And when I said I used to go east, that's all the villages here. The west is on that side where Poland was. And I

found even a map in Berkley that the map is called the name of our city.

Q OH, REALLY?

A See it's called Glenborkey that's in Polish. See, in Russia it's called Glubokoye, a little bit different. We pronounce it different. In Polish it's Glenborkey. See they have a sound below the "E" like a little -- it's not an "N" it's half -- it's not Glenborkey, it's not GLEN-borkey, it's something between an N and not a deep N. So here is the town. And so I found that.

Q IT'S SOMETHING TO HAVE FOUND THE MAP.

A Right. And the reason it's called Glubokoye is because our town --

Q WAS THE MAIN CITY --

A Was the main city of the county. So all the rest is villages. When you say little dots here, that's like five, six houses on each side of the street, that's all the village.

Q SO IT REALLY WAS THE CENTRAL PART OF THAT AREA?

A Right.

Q WOULD YOU WANT TO GO BACK AND SEE IT?

A I'll tell you -- Yeah, there is -- I have a certain, I don't know how to explain it, a psychological -- I have a certain fear of going there. And my brother went twice. I would have liked to go, but I don't think I will ever go.

Q SO HE SHOWED YOU PICTURES?

A Yeah, yeah, and stuff like that.

Q YOU DON'T NEED TO GO.

A Well, I'll tell you, when I left that time, when I

buried my mother and my younger brother, at that time I didn't think about putting like a monument or something. And then I -- something happened, I had to get out in a hurry, so I never -- and now I don't know if I go back if I could find it, you know.

Q AND THAT BOTHERS YOU?

A Yeah, I would have liked to have something. So I don't know. I'm thinking maybe to contacting somebody. See I could have made arrangements on going back that time, you know.

Q BUT DO KNOW LIKE AT WHAT TIME THEY WERE KILLED? LIKE CAN YOU SAY KADDISH AT A CERTAIN TIME?

A Well, it doesn't really -- I don't know the exact time, so you can do it any time.

Q YOU PICK A TIME.

A Yeah, right.

Q AND IT --

A You pick a time about that period.

Q AND THE SAME THING WITH YOUR FATHER?

A Yeah. I don't know, it's about -- it's hard to tell. I might know within a month over so.

Q UH-HUH. IT'S NOT EASY.

A Yeah.

Q DO YOU HAVE DREAMS SOMETIMES?

A Yeah, I have. Sometimes I do, yeah. There were times -- and I think it might have to do with that period because I -- like many times I have to -- I have periods that I have to make a decisions, see, even in business, and I went to some doctor and he thought it had to do with the decisions I made at that time.

Q THAT HAUNTS YOU?

A Uh-huh. Because it was some decision, it wasn't a matter of life and death, but it kind of paralyzes me. And finally I make a decision. Sometimes I make decisions fast, too fast, you know, but I do it and it works out. But I find -- I solve it. Like now, like I say this year I've been feeling pretty good because I built some units in Hayward, 17 units, like a development. And it worked out nice, you know.

But like I had different choices, like different designs. And then I thought maybe this design would be better, so then it can go on a year, it can go on between and year to five until I finally solve it. It's a good thing I can afford the luxury of wasting the time like this, you know. But it bothers me when I am -- when I have to -- somehow you feel like you're powerless. You don't have enough --

Q SO MUCH RESPONSIBILITY?

A No, it's kind of that you don't make the decisions, you know. I'm afraid to, I mean in business.

Q UH-HUH.

A It's a gray area. It's not between white and black, you know, it's between different shades maybe. And then you have a choice one way or another way. I mean the design, and nobody -- and people can -- you can ask different people and in the end you got to do it yourself, you know.

Q YOU HAVE TO MAKE THE CHOICE, YEAH.

A Uh-huh.

Q WELL, I CAN UNDERSTAND THAT.

A But finally it worked out. Like I like a certain style, you know, to build. Like I usually build either one-story

or two-stories, you know, because in Hayward you still don't go with really highrises. But then I like to build with garages, you know. So there was a choice I had to make between -- first I had one design and already I even had the floor plans already. So even -- I had even I think the building permits, and then I was going to switch to a different design. So it took me a year, and I started working on a different design, then I went back to that design. Finally I did it. When you get started, then, you know, it takes six months.

Q AND THAT'S A HOLDOVER FROM THE DECISIONS YOU HAD TO MAKE?

A It could be, yeah. It may be, because that's what a doctor told me, and it's possible.

Q IT'S POSSIBLE. ALTHOUGH THEY SHARED IN THE DECISIONS TOO AT THAT TIME.

A For them, no. At that time they probably depended on me at that time. And it looked -- even when I think -- there was somebody, I think I talked to a friend of mine who lives in Toronto who at that time introduced -- was in that village. And he said to me that I -- when I met the new group, and he said that that commander of the new group was a Jewish man, Meyerson. He said, he talked to me, and you know I should leave them there. But I remember myself that I think at that time I felt comfortable. At that time I thought I did the right thing.

Q WELL, MEANWHILE YOU MADE A LOT OF RIGHT DECISIONS.

A Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Q YOU'RE HERE AND YOUR BROTHER IS HERE.

A Oh, yeah, I did. Right, I did. I many times don't

give myself credit for what I did right, you know, but I dwell on some, you know, that went wrong.

Q WHAT IS IT THEY SAY, EVEN JOSE CONSUECO STRIKES OUT SOMETIMES? YOU CAN'T MAKE ALL THE RIGHT DECISIONS.

A Yeah.

Q WELL, THANK YOU AGAIN.

A Fine. Okay.

Q THANK YOU.

(End of interview.)