

Interview with AARON KOBEL  
Holocaust Oral History Project  
Date: 12/10/88 Place: San Francisco, CA  
Interviewer: Sandra Bendayan  
Transcriber: Shelia Young, PLS, CCLS

Places on tape where words or phrases could not be understood:

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Begin Tape 1, Side 1

Q: I am Sandra Bendayan and I am here for the Oral History Project from the Holocaust Center of San Francisco and today is the 10th of December 1988. Now, would you introduce yourself?

A: My name is Aaron Kobel. I was born November 5, 1932, in Lithuania.

Q: What town?

A: I was born in a city -- it's on the German-Lithuanian border, city named Tilsit, in Germany, on the other side of the river across from the -- like San Francisco and Oakland, the bridge, across the river -- so, that's where I was born.

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?

A: No, I was the only child. My parents were married and the war broke out quite shortly after that, so I think they decided not to have any more, fortunately, I guess, for that.

Q: And what kind of business was your father in?

A: I believe my father was in the retail grocery business or wholesale grocery business, but I can't remember. I was very young at the time, but I can't really remember what he did. Had a grocery type store out in the area where we lived.

Q: Were your parents religious?

A: Not really. They were little bit conservative but they were never fanatic religious, they were not.

Q: Not orthodox?

A: Not orthodox.

Q: Did you have other relatives in the town?

A: I'd say (Inaudible) we did. My father came from a large family. He had, I believe, there were 13 children on his side. There were 12 boys and 1 girl. They were all married and had their own families. On my mother's side, she had herself and three brothers, and all of them didn't survive the war.

Q: And did you have grandparents in the area?

A: Yes, we had my mother's parents, lived in Lithuania; also my father's parents. Both grandparents lived until the war broke out.

Q: Did you know whether there was a large Jewish community in this town?

A: Lithuania has a (Inaudible) large Jewish community. I believe there was 10 percent of the population in Lithuania was Jewish. I think out of about 3 million population in Lithuania, about 10 percent were Jewish.

Q: Do you have any memories or knowledge of anti-Semitism in your--

A: Oh, sure, great ones. There was a kid playing in the backyard -- we lived in the city of Kauness -- used to go out and play in the yard after school and other kids -- and I didn't even know the meaning of it in those days -- they'd

say, "well, Jew, why don't you go to Palestine? Why are you here?" This is the way it started -- from the Lithuania kids.

Q: How old were you then?

A: This was about, age of 6 or 7.

Q: And do you remember your reaction or what you did?

A: Not really, not in the beginning. Later on -- if you notice my eyes, I have like large pupils, like cats.

Q: Oh, yes.

A: And they sort of kind of teased me because my eyes have lost the combination of Jew with the Palestine -- we used to get in a lot of fights.

Q: Yeah, that's a very bitter thing for a young child to (Inaudible)

A: So we had a lot of fights.

Q: Can you ever remember talking to your parents about this?

A: No, not really, because this is about the year before the war broke out, before the Germans took over Lithuania. I don't remember talking to them about it, no.

Q: What was your first memories of real danger from the Nazis?

A: First memory was when the Germans first came into Lithuania -- I must have been about 8 when they took over the city of Kauness.

Q: What year was that?

A: That was in 19-- I believe late 40's or early -- late 40's or 41, I'm not quite sure. And, I overheard a lot of remarks about Jews and stuff like that, and this was -- they started to rounding up Jews and (Inaudible) hide in the house. Memories of anti-Semitism.

Q: How did your parents react, when the Nazis were taking over?

A: They -- my father was arrested right in the beginning, soon as the Germans came in, actually the Germans weren't even in town. My father was arrested by the Lithuanian Militia, the kind of self-appointed militia. They arrested him right away. He was in jail, just for being a Jew. He was released a little bit later on. Then they round up all the Jews and they were put in the ghetto.

Q: How did your family react when he was just yanked up?

A: There was only my mother and myself. We were close. We had nobody else in the area at the time. Naturally, my mother was upset and crying and carrying on and stuff like that.

Q: How long do you think he was in jail? Days? Weeks?

A: Couple of months. Couple of months. To my memory. Might be -- at that age -- the time -- as important as I guess as when you grow up, you realize time more.

Q: Right. Did he ever describe his experiences in jail?

A: No, he never did. He was -- never really said too much. He was released from jail but maybe a few days later or a week later we were moved to the ghetto.

Q: Could you describe the ghetto?

A: Ghetto was a part of town, the outside of town, oh, like a suburb, but not like we know a suburb over here. Different type of suburb. It was fenced off, with fences, barbed wire, and there were small houses, but there were not apartment houses in that area anyway. Lot of German soldiers guarding us, the SS and others, and they were all of them -- none of them German soldiers. They were Lithuanian guards, there were Ukranian guards. Ukranian, Lithuanian and German is what I can remember of being in the ghetto at that time.

Q: So, were people evacuated from their houses so that the Jews could be --

A: In the beginning we had to be -- from Kauness into the ghetto, we more or less voluntarily moved in, so to speak, but after the population had moved into the ghetto, oh, several months later, they started to evacuate groups from the ghetto and nobody knew where to, but -- to death camps or to different areas where they were just shot and buried and stuff like that.

Q: So the people who had originally lived in that area that became the ghetto, were they Jews too, or were they sent out for the Jews to come in?

A: The ones that lived in the area that were not Jews I guess were able to move into the area where the Jews used to live and we moved from a nicer area into a, so to speak, non -- it wasn't a slum area, but it was not a nice area of town. So when the Jews were, I guess, left their homes, where they used to live, I guess the Gentiles moved in there. I'm assuming.

Q: Now, what kind of conditions was it. I mean, how many people to a house?

A: Well, we lived in one house where there was about two or three families lived in one house, we had to share.

Q: About how many rooms?

A: Gee, I don't remember.

Q: What about food? Was it difficult to get food by then?

A: Yes. We were rationed. I remember basically just bread, nothing plentiful, just on rations; and some potatoes and miscellaneous stuff. And for the few months we were in the ghetto, I think about a year, or less than a year, we grew in the backyard and we grew our own, like vegetables, or potatoes, or carrots, or miscellaneous stuff. We grew our own.

Q: Could you leave the ghetto?

A: No. The only time we could leave the ghetto was when we had to go to work. The children of my age, I was about 8, did not have to go to work, but the adults had to go out to work. We did miscellaneous jobs. I remember my mother worked as a seamstress for some German soldiers, I

guess, for their high command, to do some repairs with their uniforms, stuff like that. What my father did I don't remember.

Q: You don't remember him simply being at home?

A: Oh, no, he worked, he went out to work. Everybody had to go out to work; the exception the children. Then later on, where they just rounded up all the children. Every so often, they said come in; they round up the children; when the adults get home, the children were gone. The children were evacuated to different death camps.

Q: Meanwhile, were the children having any schooling?

A: No, no schooling. We did some, like makeshift schooling. We had -- I remember during a particular year we went to Heider, and it's amazing, I remember lot I learned in those days, when I was a kid. I really didn't want to go to school and learn, because I told my mother that. She remembers that too. She told me one day I said to her, I said, "why should I go and learn. Because I'll die in a matter of time anyway. So why go through all that torment or learning and all that. It's not going to be useful." I guess she didn't have any arguments.

Q: So you were only probably what, 8 or 9?

A: Between 8 and 9. We go to Heider -- we lived in a portion of, where the ghetto was, was called Slabotka. In Slabotka they have all the biggest \_\_\_\_\_ in the world. They had \_\_\_\_\_ for the Slabotka for the Orthodox people. And this was at Heider.



Q: And if you weren't occupied like that, who took care of the children while all the parents were working?

A: Nobody.

Q: Even the little ones?

A: Even the little ones, nobody. I guess maybe some of the bigger children took care of the little children. It wasn't, oh, I remember shortly after that when they used to round up the children every time -- one incident I remember where all the people were at work and the children were there, and the Germans rounded them up in back of the truck, regular dump truck. Just rounded up the children, just threw them in there like throwing in hay -- sack of potatoes.

Q: And you saw these things?

A: I saw these things. I was hiding out.

Q: Where were you hiding?

A: In the basement, different house or close by.

Q: You mean that if you sensed that the Germans were in any way entering to round up the children, you went to hide?

A: That's right.

Q: So had you and your parents and others, I suppose, had you heard rumors then already about the death camps.

A: They were rumor. Information was coming back to us, you know, but we didn't know what to do. And I guess we couldn't do anything. Just hoping to survive another day or two, maybe the war was going to come to an end and we were going to get liberated. But, as soon as the war was turning

the other way in the allies favor, we were evacuated from Lithuania deeper into Germany, away from the front.

Q: Do you think your parents ever considered leaving, I mean, even before all going into the ghetto?

A: I'm not sure I even remember what happened. I don't...I never thought about it. Because they did move from the German/Lithuanian border deeper into Lithuania, while other people migrated from that area into the United States or to Israel -- Palestine in those days -- or to Canada or another part of the world. While my parents they just moved away deeper into Lithuania, hoping, I guess, this would not follow.

Q: To maybe hide by being more anonymous, or something?

A: Well, not simply to be anonymous, but just that they were hoping that Lithuania would not get into the war, you know, so they didn't think that Germany would attack the whole world, especially Europe.

Q: Did any of your relatives or close friends go with you into the ghetto?

A: Yes, some of my aunts and uncles were in the ghetto, I can't remember. They lived not far from...the ghetto itself was not big. It was maybe three or four miles square, approximately. I used to see them on occasions, but not quite frequently. You were preoccupied with your own self. Because the adults worked, and the children stayed behind and did whatever they could. You had to kind of hide

yourself from the occasions when...if trucks came in and tried to have evacuations. On one occasion they called a big evacuation where they put everybody into a square, and they lined people up. One went left, one went right, one right, one left. The German with a stick pointed at each individual to go right, left, right, left. And then we were separated from our parents and then I, and then somebody we knew, they put us back together again, and put us in the right side of the group, and the left was evacuated. The next day, or whatever, we remained...another breath of fresh air...told to remain in the ghetto. This happened several times. But one particular point -- we kind of lucked out and we stayed in the ghetto until the end, when they evacuated the ghetto completely, and we were sent to Germany.

A: You were sent to Germany?

Q: Yes.

A: All of you together?

Q: The whole family. And then, a couple of days later -- I'm not sure of the time frame involved -- the train was stopped and they removed all of the women off the train, women and children. My father kept me with him, and there was some bigger kid...so the children that went with the women, I guess they were automatically destroyed. Some of them lived. My mother did -- she survived. And from there we were sent to Dachau.

Q: So, finally, you got rounded up -- your whole family?

A: Right.

Q: You were put on the train, one of the cattle cars?

A: Yes, that is correct.

Q: Do you remember, at all, the conditions in the train?

A: Yes, I do remember the conditions in the train. I don't know how many people were in the train, and each boxcar was packed, just hardly any room to move...and without food and in unsanitary conditions for days. I remember just one small window in each boxcar. I remember a few people jumped through the window, and I don't know if they survived, or got killed by just jumping out, or got killed by the guards guarding the train. But these are the memories that stick with me, but exact details...in this particular case, I don't have any. Maybe it's a good thing they were kind of wiped out. Only, I remember being in a boxcar with people jumping out through the window, several people during that trip.

Q: And so, it came to a point where, as you say, the train was stopped, and \_\_\_\_\_ to get out. What was your mother's experience? There you were, in the train with your father; your mother's taken off, you know this...

A: Now, looking back, she went to Stutthof, was another concentration camp. Most of the women...

Q: I see.

A: And then we, when I say "we" -- the men -- and the rest of the children that were left, were sent to Dachau. When we came to Dachau, we were disembarked in a labor camp outside of Dachau itself -- a place called Landsberg -- and it was, I guess, 7 or 11 different camps, like an annex of Dachau, because Dachau was really full to the point that it couldn't take any more people. We were there for almost the rest of the war.

Q: Do you remember arriving there?

A: Yes, I remember arriving there in the train, and we had to walk, I guess, from here...a five or ten mile walk, until we came into this camp. I remember the camp...it's like it happened yesterday.

Q: Could you describe it though? Whatever you do remember?

A: You approached there in a dirt road, and walked down. Buildings that were built very low to the ground, and you slept on the ground, and there's like a pitched roof, like a tent, was right over the ground, with a two-foot wide by three-foot deep ditch inside for walking. There was some straw on the ground, and the little roof had like a pitch tent covered with dirt and grass grew on it, I guess, for camouflage or maybe for warmth. I think it was several thousand people at that particular camp. It was called

\_\_\_\_\_, this was Camp Number 1. But there were 11 of those in the area.

Q: And how were the barracks arranged for sleeping?

A: You slept on the ground. There were about 50, I believe, in each barrack, and there was a little stove, but there was hardly to get any wood...a little metal stove, only a few occasions that we were able to bring some wood into the camp in the winter time to keep the little stove going to keep us warm. The arrangements...there was no certain spot where you slept, I mean, most of us kind of adopted a spot on the straw.

Q: Were you with your father there?

A: I was with my father at that time. Later on, my father was transferred to another camp. He was transferred to a camp called \_\_\_\_\_, Number 2, and shortly, oh, about several months later...I had an uncle that lived, or actually worked also near the camp...had one uncle with me in Camp Number 1. He used to kind of go back and forth to move supplies, and he came to this camp one day, and told my uncle that stayed in my camp that he found out that my father died. This was about late in '44, December 1944.

Q: Do you know what he died of?

A: My father had cerebral ulcers. He was supposed to be operated on his ulcer just before the war broke out in Lithuania, and the surgeon that was supposed to operate on him had an infected finger and he couldn't operate on him.

About two weeks later, the war broke out. I remember details where he had (Inaudible) above the stomach with a rubber hose, and all those kind of cruel details, so he could survive. He had a bad stomach ulcer, but I guess he lived through about four years, four bad years, since December '44. I think that, according to directors of the \_\_\_\_\_, he died December 12, 1944.

Q: Probably working very hard, and everything else...

A: Oh, naturally, that's without saying. We did a lot of manual, physical work. Construction work, digging ditches, for construction, we did a lot of work as far as removing stumps of trees, and using the wood for the German soldiers for the barracks, for our guards. The harder jobs we worked on was an underground factory they were building, and I did miscellaneous jobs, from unloading cement sacks off trains to digging ditches...whatever had to be done.

Q: What was the usual work day? How long?

A: From 4 o'clock in the morning, where they used to wake us up, and we had to walk to the job site, about several miles, and then until dark, and walk back. They had two shifts. One shift worked days, and one shift worked... We worked the day shift. Then they would work the night shift, from midnight to morning. About 12-hour days.

Q: 12-hour days. What were to tools like, the working tools?

A: The working tools were basically hammers and shovels and axes. The Germans themselves, they did all the

fine mechanical work or any work other than hard labor work. Primitive conditions. We dug big holes and we had to fill them up with cement. A lot of people -- kind of walking on rails -- and they fell into the cement, and they would get buried and covered over with cement. I don't know how many bodies...I remember a few that I remember seeing that fell in, and that were covered over. I don't know how many, other than what I have seen, that got buried in the cement.

Q: What about toilet facilities, or washing facilities?

A: In the camp, they had some outhouses, like they have in the middle of the camp, they dug a hole and covered over with some boards, was what you used. And washing facilities, we had a similar situation with a hose with -- actually a pipe, and some water running through there -- and you wash your face. We had no medical, we had no facilities for getting no baths, no showers, no soap, nothing like that. We had a typhoid epidemic in our camp, where quite a few people did perish only from the typhoid epidemic. Lice and other situations were very common. They did, finally, I guess, later towards the end, I guess they were afraid that they themselves might get infected, so they put us through some disinfectant-type...took our clothes and had them disinfected and also our barracks. The sanitation facilities were awful. I mean, the one that really does (Inaudible) but the only place we had was, as I mentioned earlier, the big hole in the ground and it was covered with



some boards. It was kind of closed in, like an outhouse -- a big, huge outhouse, because it was several thousand people using it.

Q: So I imagine there must have been lines?

A: Yes, basically there were lines. Well, we didn't get that much food, so we didn't...

Q: Didn't need to use it that much.

A: [laughing] That's right.

Q: So what about the food? What was a daily ration of food?

A: A daily ration of food, I remember, was like a, let's say, a two-pound loaf of bread -- dark bread, whatever it was, probably rye, or whatever else they used those days -- divided into twelve, and this was a daily ration.

Q: Among twelve people?

A: Among twelve people. That piece...and we were kind of cutting it up. The person that was appointed to cut the bread, to divide it into twelve equal portions, he had to measure it, like, with a microscope, because if there had been one person gets to have more than the other...and then they take a person, one of the twelve, and he had to turn his back towards the other eleven, and each person...the guy who's in charge of the bread, he says, "O.K., who's this for?" and they call another name, so he couldn't see who gets which piece, and this was how the bread was divided.

Q: Every day, that ritual?

A: Every morning. And then there was coffee, we used to get the coffee, black coffee, \_\_\_\_\_ coffee. We came from work, we used to get soup, and the soup was mostly hot water, but they put some potatoes in there, maybe some barley once in a while...that kind of disintegrated into... basically it was...hot water tasted like potato soup.

Q: What do you think kept you going, especially after your father had gone?

A: The will just to survive, we always talked about it. We didn't mind dying tomorrow, the day after the war...but we wanted to see the war to kinda, to see the completion...we knew that they were losing the war. It was just a matter of time for us, if you could survive, when actually many people did not. They died daily by the hundreds and thousands, but even (inaudible) we were like fifty to a barrack and you woke up in the morning and you hardly...a day didn't go by where you found next to you one or two that died. Actually, out of the fifty, you probably had, oh, at least half a dozen dead on a daily basis. Died from malnutrition, from no hygiene, or illnesses, but didn't dare complain and go to a sick bay because if you complained about the sick bay, they send you to sick camp, and you never came back from there.

Q: You never knew anyone to come back from sick camp?

A: No one came back from there. So you didn't go.

Q: Any you never had any medical care at your camp?

A: None at all. If you had any problems, you kinda figured it out for yourself, any remedies or whatever, if you could, among your own. But if you didn't, you just...

Q: Do you ever remember being sick at all?

A: Yes, I remember being sick, but I don't remember what I did. I know it went by, I did go to work, I had to go work; if you did not go to work, they sent you to sick bay, and the camp was...I remember the camp was Camp Number Seven, \_\_\_\_\_, if you went over there, nobody came out of there. So nobody went there. The few that really couldn't go to work were sent over there, like, might as well give up, you know? Nobody wanted to give up. The drive to...for life was so great, to see the demise of the German army, the German people. We're going to survive that, we gotta make it.

Q: (Inaudible) in the face of all that horror? Did you ever think you would see your parents again?

A: No, I never did. I knew that my father died, and that was in the Forties. I knew my mother was still alive, but I didn't know if she'd survived or not.

Q: How did you know she was still alive?

A: I found out later, after the war. Through some people I met later on. But during the war, I didn't know if she was alive or not. We had no idea. We hoped. When my

father died, this was in the late Forties...even during all that time, I never...either too busy, or so occupied with the work and just the survival, that you didn't take that next step to take: where is your family, where are your relatives? You just didn't think about it.

Q: Did you feel that people cooperated with each other at all?

A: There was some cooperation among the people...

Q: So you're saying there was some cooperation?

Q: There was some cooperation among each individual, but there was also some, on the other hand, people that just looked out for their own use or their own selfishness, and naturally understandable. I had an uncle who was very lucky who was with me in camp, and I was very young at the time, and he was about fifteen years older than I am, and he was able to manipulate things more than I could, and he helped me out quite a bit. In fact, he was just here recently. He lives in Brazil, at the present.

Q: In what way did he help you?

A: Oh, he worked in the kitchen, and every so often he was able to bring me some food, some scraps of food that were left over in the kitchen after cleanup was over. Didn't happen often, but whenever it happened it was a big help.

Q: That was a prize job, to be in the kitchen?

A: That was a prize job working in the kitchen, yes, it was.

Q: And what about your jobs? It sounds like you had pretty hard work.

A: Yes, I had hard work. Working...like carrying a sack of cement that weighs fifty, seventy-five, a hundred pounds, at the age of nine or ten, and I think I only weighed no more than seventy or eighty pounds myself, so it was a difficult job. This was not the only one job -- we had different...every time we were needed somewhere else, we were taken from one place to the other, from digging or cleaning or moving machineries or...there was a million and one jobs, mostly all hard labor, hard work. That Germans felt that it was free labor, so why not let the Jews do it? And, there was an occasion, there were one or two nice people you met among the German people, but that was maybe two out of all the ones that I have come across.

Q: Yes, I was going to ask you whether you had any good relationships...

A: There were, like I said, one or two. One time, I had a job where we used to, I mentioned it earlier, we used to dig up the stumps from trees, so we could clean up the landscape, and take the wood from these stumps and put them in the guard's camps and their barracks. They had a little stove they had to keep their barracks warm. All the German men, to me, looked like he was in his seventies, but looking in retrospect, maybe he was fifty. He was grayish, with gray hair. The Germans didn't eat the crust of their bread, they just cut the crust of the bread around. He used to put

in a little sack the crust and, instead of putting it in the garbage which would be taken out, put it in the little box where I was putting the wood in, so whenever I came in once a week I used to find some scraps of bread that he used over there. Once I found a piece of...they used to call the German specht, that's the hard...the skin of the pig and of the fat...I don't know what they call it in English, but so he left it there with the bread so that it had some nutritious value, and the grease and the fat are from it.

Q: So was he, I presume, taking a risk to do this?

A: Well, I don't think he took a risk, but he just threw it in the garbage or threw it in the box of the wood that was coming that particular day. So he probably took a risk, but maybe if somebody caught him, he threw it in the wrong bucket, you know? I don't think he took that much of a risk, no. But, still, it was nice of him to do that, because he could have just thrown it out into the garbage, although we did go through the garbage to look for food there, too. But at least I didn't have to go into the garbage to look for food and there it was more risky for me because the guards were watching and if I was caught in the garbage I would get some beatings. Once I stole a couple of potatoes already trucked -- it wasn't a truck, it was a wagon. A German was driving a horse and wagon with a truck full of potatoes and I stole two potatoes from the back of the truck, the wagon. I put it into my pockets.

Q: How did you manage to do that? How did you manage to get on to the truck?

A: Well, he was on the low wagon. I ran from work alongside the highway and he was driving through this and I kinda snuck behind the wagon and I stole two potatoes and put them in my pockets. The German saw me do that...one German guard...but he did see me, he kind of beat me up with a rubber hose and then he took me to the German commandant, the camp commandant, and my luck he wasn't there. So we waited about half hour there outside his office and I guess he got tired waiting so he let me go. But I was still beaten up and he took my potatoes away from me.

Q: He took the potatoes, too?

A: Oh, sure.

Q: So it sounds as though you were pretty injured by this beating?

A: Well...I was not injured like physically, I was not injured to the point of no blood showing. They used a rubber hose with a metal insert and we had no meat on our bodies anyway, so every beating you got was very painful. A couple of other times I was able to steal...go through the garbage...and find some potato peels. The job that I had, what I described to you earlier, to go to different barracks and to supply them with the wood, so I used to go by the garbage cans and take some handfuls of those potatoes and put them into my pockets and put them in the oven if I was

lucky to sneak them through to the guards and the skins of the potatoes...I guess today are a delicacy. Go to restaurants, and that's what they serve you, skins.

But the skins were real thin shavings and you put them on the stove and they kinda stick to the hot stove, the metal stove, and when they get cooked they fell off, so it was a little delicacy in itself. So I got caught several times doing that and I got beaten for that.

Q: Caught by the guards?

A: Caught by the guards. As you came back into camp they would frisk you to make sure you didn't bring anything in. I don't know...they were afraid of you bringing in weapons or you bringing in food. Whatever you had, they took it away from you and they beat you up.

Q: So was this the kind of extra delicacy that you would share with other people? Would you need to share it?

A: We did not share. No. You only shared if you wanted to share. But there wasn't that much. I mean, I couldn't bring enough in because if they would see a bulge in my pockets, so I made like a handful and kind of divided it into both pockets and as you walked through it wasn't visible.

Q: What about clothing?

A: Clothing? We wore the famous uniform that they had that was made like out of tissue paper, just about. It was very cold. Walked without socks...hard wooden shoes...and we used to steal every so often, a sack of cement, an empty



sack, and make some holes through that and put it over your body and then cover with your uniform so that it wouldn't be detected. But if you did that they found that you were destroying government property and they beat you up for that, although they were very warm type clothing, the sack of cement paper was warm, especially in the winter time in the snow and cold and freezing.

Q: You had no other covering excepting that thin uniform?

A: That's right. No underwear or socks. One night I was working late, and I guess I took a break at midnight, and I guess I was tired and cold. I was sitting, on the construction job site, on a big barrel, it was wooden like a metal barrel, a fifty-gallon drum, and the barrel was getting so hot and red and I was getting so close and comfortable that I fell asleep and my shoes were wooden shoes and they burned and my feet -- toes -- two of my toes got burned. I was so close to the...

Q: And you were so tired that you couldn't even wake up...

A: And when I woke up I was hurting and my shoes were burning.

Q: Oh, really?

A: Those were some experiences.

Q: Did you think that other people there were sustained by religious ideas or was that not ...?

A: I don't know. Maybe. But maybe not, you know, because I was not religious, my parents were not religious. So maybe some of the orthodox, I think maybe, but even then they probably, everything they went through, personally I don't think they worshiped during those days. They worshiped God, to say "Gee, thank you for the daily bread," or "thank you for the sustaining" or "thank you for the survival for another day." I don't think so. Maybe. I was not raised in a religious family, although my father used to go to the synagogue on Saturday and other...very little upbringing I had in Jewish upbringing. It wasn't an orthodox upbringing. It was a kind of relaxed atmosphere.

Q: Culturally Jewish?

A: Culturally Jewish, right. Like I told you earlier, the heider(?), I went to the Hebrew school. The school I went to in Lithuania, between the period before the Germans came into Lithuania, I went to a heider in the afternoon, and also Hebrew school where they taught Hebrew. The Russians came in after this and it stopped. So I learned Yiddish, so I can read and write and then the war was over, and I was able to read and write Hebrew a little bit. I understood Hebrew, not fluently, but I knew quite a bit of it. So that when I went to Israel later on, I had a good start.

Q: Did you speak German, by the way?

A: Yes. I spoke German, I spoke Lithuanian, Yiddish. Where I was born in Tuzet(?), it was like a border town. We spoke German and Lithuanian, and at home Yiddish. I did not

speaking Yiddish until the age of six, until we moved from that part of the border where we lived deeper into \_\_\_\_\_ into the City of \_\_\_\_\_, this is then I first started to learn Yiddish. We had a maid in the house that spoke German and my parents, the streets, both spoke Lithuanian, so basically what I started out with was Lithuanian and German. And later on it was Yiddish and Hebrew, and then the Russians came in 1941, I believe --- no, 1940, the Russians came in in '40 --- and I learned a little Russian, just picking it up. We learned a little Russian in school at that time. Maybe a little bit, I don't remember learning that much of it, but more in the streets than anything else.

Q: I guess it was an advantage to know the German when you got to the camps?

A: Yes, it was. But I took it for granted because I grew up in German, so German was no big deal for me. But I guess it was. But most of the people who lived in the area understood German, probably. One more, one less, you know, they understood. Believe me, you didn't have to understand much, they made you understand it, like it or not. They had ways about it and they didn't talk to you that much anyway. Go to the left or right or straight, or call you dirty names, "Dirty Jew" or whatever.

Q: You understood that.

A: Oh, yeah. But my German was, I guess, quite good, or much better than the average person that didn't come from Germany.

Q: Did you have to go through these regular role calls?

A: Oh, yeah, every morning.

Q: Every morning?

A: Every morning. See, you had to morning and night. We left camp with forty people, we had to come back with forty...I mean, each in groups of maybe a hundred, five abreast and whatever deep, and that many had to come back. But you left your work place, you were counted before you started back to camp. They counted you in the morning, they counted you in the day, they counted you at night.

Q: Did you ever know of instances where anyone escaped?

A: Yes, I did. They were missing, I didn't know anybody had escaped, but there was really no place to go. I thought about escaping, I figured "Where would I go?" You are in Germany, and Germans are not going to hide you. You cannot sustain yourself in the forest, because there is no food. You have no clothing, you have no ammunition, you have no weapons even to kill a rabbit. So where are you gonna run? Really, there was no place of escape. Some of the people that escaped from Poland, from the ghetto, at least had a chance. They had some Polish underground, but still, they had something. They had the woods, and they had somewhere to go. At least some of the Poles were sympathetic, some of them, very few -- the underground. But in Germany itself, where would you go? Because really, there

was no place to run. It was like a closed section of the country where if you didn't go from one part of the woods that you were in, there was no place to go to another country, because you were all surrounded by Germany. So, really, there was no place to run away. And, oh, you died.

Q: So, you felt that very few people did try to escape?

A: Some did...when it came role call to come back to camp, they weren't there, so...you concluded two conclusions: that they were dead somewhere, or they ran away.

Q: And what happened at that point, when they realized there weren't enough people back?

A: Well, you stayed there and they looked around the area, and they yelled and screamed, and tried to scare us to...maybe if we knew, to tell them where the people are, and they beat some of us.

End of Tape 1, Side A

Begin Tape 1, Side B

A: (continued from side A) They left us a couple of hours, standing out in the cold.

Q: So, we were talking about what happened to the punishment (inaudible) at the end of the day.

A: We stayed there a couple of hours, in the cold and the wind, and we were cold to begin with and we almost froze to death. Finally, they realized that they had to take us back, because they wanted to go back themselves. So that

was it. They just signed us in as one or two missing.

And...

(THIS FIRST HALF OF SIDE B OF THE TAPE IS ALMOST INAUDIBLE. THERE IS TOO MUCH HISS TO TRANSCRIBE MUCH OF ANYTHING UP TO TAPE COUNTER 209)

Resume Tape 1, Side B, Tape Counter 209

Q: Had you, by this time, given any time to what you wanted to do next?

A: No, at that time I would just look and see if I could try to find my mother -- see if she was...that was the only relative I really had left. We planned to go back to Lithuania to look for the rest of the family. This was about July, maybe in August, after about three months of liberation. We left, my uncle and I and a couple of other people, we started out across the American zone of Germany, and came to the border of Russia -- the Russian sector of Germany -- and my uncle decided that he was going back. And he left me, saying "You go on, and I'm going back."

Q: Back where?

A: To the American side of Germany, because I guess he decided that he didn't want to go...I guess instinct or whatever. Well, he was older than I am and he knew more what was going on, so he kind of left, and he decided he would go back, and he did go back. He went up in Italy and other places. But I went on and moved on, and I came as far as Poland, and I ran into some people in Poland and I heard that a former neighbor of ours from Lithuania had...knew my

mother...he said he saw her in Germany and she was in Berlin. She survived.

Q: That must have been really exciting.

A: That was exciting, yes. More so, most unbelievable. I mean, you look back at the time where nothing really fazed you. You didn't excite as much. Well, I was not excitable person anyway. Nothing excited you, you went, "Oh, O.K., we'll see what happens." You never took things for granted, until you got there. So, I got on the train going to Berlin, took me a couple of days to get there. And I came to Berlin, and did find the place where my mother was supposed to be, and she was there, and was in the hospital at that time, she had surgery -- she had to get a breast removed, cancer, I don't know exactly why -- and it was a big reunion. I had to wait a couple of days until they prepared her. They didn't want to shock her that I was here and I was alive, and all that. They prepared her a couple of days...they heard that I was alive, there might be a chance they might find me, stuff like that. So, that was an exciting time in life. We were together for a while. We left the Russian sector of Berlin after a couple of months later, and went back to the American sector.

Q: How were you managing all this time for food and money and what all?

A: During the time I was in Berlin, I did a little wheeling and dealing, you know, for food. But...

Q: Wheeling and dealing? Is it something you can talk about?

A: Well, it's like bartering, exchanging one thing for another. We...

Q: I mean, it's to be understood that morality was different in those times.

A: Yes, there was no morality. One time, I worked in the factory, the Russian sector of Berlin, and I used to steal from there food. I worked in a meat factory, for cows, and make different foods out of them. I used to steal salamies out of there, and would sell it on the black market, and make some money that way. And then I used to go out and buy some chocolate and sell it to the American soldiers and sell it to the Russians, and back and forth. So this is how I made money. When I left that time, I had a bit of money, I had about...there were Allied marks, and I kind of...by going back and forth, wheeling...stealing from here and selling here, and selling back and forth. I had a bit of money, at that time about 20,000 German marks, Allied marks. It was quite a bit of money.

Q: How much would that be...?

A: Equal today? Probably twenty, thirty thousand dollars, probably.

Q: Yeah, that's pretty good.

A: And I took off from there and went deeper into the other side of Germany, into the American zone. I had a chance to take the convoys, taking people from there and



other parts of Germany, to Munich. And I went there, and I wound up in a D.P. camp called Feldafang(?) and I stayed there for several months. Later on, I evacuated, and I decided to go to Israel. Why a D.P. camp -- the Unerog(?), the American \_\_\_\_\_ organization, they furnished you with minimum food, and the rest you managed to barter, or to beg, steal, borrow, whatever it took. Or to exchange for different types of food. Or to get food, you exchanged for cigarettes. Cigarettes you exchanged for something else. I guess life taught you how to survive and manage. I decided in 1946, I decided to go to Israel.

Q: Did your mother decide to go too?

A: No. She met that man that she would marry and she stayed in Germany, and I left for Israel.

Q: How was your life together? I mean, you had been separated and had gone through such terrible separate experiences...I mean, your mother and you getting back together again. Was that difficult?

A: It was difficult. In a lot of ways, she was still treating me as a child, and I had gone through those experiences and thought I was no longer a child, although I still was...

Q: In one sense.

A: In one sense, yeah. But experiences taught me a lot of different things, and I was kind of...didn't want to stay in Germany. I wanted to leave and go to Israel,

although maybe it wasn't the smartest thing. I had to make a decision myself. I felt...

Q: So you realized that you and your mother had to part ways?

A: We had to part ways. We had different lives. I wanted to go back to Israel. I wanted to go a Jewish state, and fight for a Jewish state. And also, after the war, I did meet some people who were Zionists, and got a little indoctrinated also. But I felt that this Holocaust wouldn't have happened if there were to have been an Israel before the war...that somebody would have listened to the Jews of Europe, to the plight...that all of this Holocaust would not have happened. So I decided to go to Israel, to live in Israel. I went to Israel. We stopped off in France, we boarded one of the illegal boats that went from France to Israel, Palestine in those days, and we were caught by the British. I spent almost a year in Cypress.

Q: Cypress -- a camp?

A: A camp.

Q: What was the camp like at Cypress?

A: It was unlike the camps in Germany. The climate was entirely different. It was a nice, warm climate. There were tents, there were tents surrounded by barbed wire. We had a daily ration of food, much better than what we had in Germany. But you were still locked up, and you couldn't do your thing.

Q: Was there male and female together?

A: Oh yeah, both male and female together. At the time, I remember, on the way to Israel I joined a group of kids my age, called a kibbutz, and we went to go live in the kibbutz, and went to Israel. So we, kind of, were a bunch of kids together were...the boys slept in one tent, the girls in another tent.

Q: Sounds like a time when you were discussing a lot of ideas, and..

A: Well, you were discussing a lot of things: what you were going to do with your future, where you're going to go, and...

Q: Developing a political point of view?

A: Right, growing up...a growing up type of situation. My political views were already made up, because before we left, mine was made up, and I didn't want to join the extreme left, and I joined the members of the Pop(?) Party. So we came to camp, learning a little Hebrew, some additional Hebrew, learning the language, some other classes we had we were able to participate... Not an exciting time of life, because you were sitting there waiting, you know, what's going to be tomorrow, when will you be released. Because you never knew when we were going to be released. Tomorrow, the next day, or six months or ten months, or whatever.

Q: How ironic, after all those years of camp and liberation, to end up...

A: End up in a camp like that. So, just before they declared the state of Israel, the U.N. in 1947 they declared the state of Israel, it was November...I'm not sure. Did we leave the camp before or after? And we came to Israel. I think it was before, because when I came to Israel, the British were still there. Then I went to kibbutz, to live in kibbutz for, oh, six months, till about the beginning of when the war broke out in May of 1948. I guess history got repeated again because I was a taller kid, a bigger kid, like I was to survive the German camps and the German occupation. I was assigned to...well, during this day we also had some military training, as well we had...you worked on the farm, we had some Hebrew education, and, again, in kibbutz we had some military training. When the war broke out, I was assigned by the kibbutz to participate in the war.

Q: How old were you then?

A: I was then about fifteen, fifteen and a half. Well, they needed people, so as long as you could handle a rifle, and knew how to handle yourself... For about six months on and off, I was sent out on different missions, military missions, and then I decided that I'd like to join the army, because I was, like, the militia, I was part of the militia. And the credit for the time that you were putting in, I decided, was going to the kibbutz and not to myself. I decided, well, in October of forty-eight, I left the kibbutz and went to Hyphae(?), and I hitchhiked. I didn't have enough money to pay for bus fair. And I joined the army.

Q: What had happened to all this money you made before?

A: Oh, I gambled that away.

Q: You gambled that away...

A: ...money I gambled away. I got into a crowd of people, much sharper than I was. We played blackjack, 21, and some I lost, some was stolen from me. A couple of months later, about six months, I was broke. You see, money was not everything. Today, money means more to me than... O.K., it was a challenge to have it, and it was a challenge to survive, and to get me from point A to point B. But I didn't need that much. Clothes on my back that I got, a place to sleep, and food was there, was provided for me, comfortable, so if I had a hundred dollars or five thousand dollars, it didn't make that much difference. The gambling was more, kind of, a pastime. I mean, it didn't...

Q: A bit of fun, finally.

A: Yeah, a final bit of fun. So this is what happened. I lost it in six months and I was penniless. By the time I joined the kibbutz and went to Israel, I was broke. But there was no need for money anyway, because most of us provided...while we were in the D.P. camp, we were provided with a daily ration of food; when I joined the kibbutz and went to Israel, the Israeli authorities already kind of sent their representatives and they took over. They helped for your provisions. We came to France and we were provided there. We were on the ship, on the ship called

\_\_\_\_\_, that went from France to Israel, that was one of the ships that was captured. We had a little food over there, we had some experiences over there, was kind of like the days in the camp, in the ghetto, or in other camps before we came to Dachau.

Q: In what ways?

A: Cramped conditions, you know, like bunks one on top of each other. Different conditions than there were in that little camp where we lived. Before that, we also lived in another part of the camp, another part of the ghetto, called the Shatzah(?) ghetto, it was also in Lithuania, actually one step before...I left out. There were barracks, four high, and when you slid into your slot, you couldn't turn around. You had to slide out so you could turn around, and move back...

Q: It was so narrow.

A: So narrow. Maybe about a foot and a half high, something like that, two feet high. So the boat was the same conditions. We had an old freighter that was converted into a ship, to ship two thousand people from France to Israel, just to cross the Mediterranean. We were just like sardines. People used to get sick on top of you, and...

Q: And throw up down.

A: Down. And you couldn't have your shoes on because if you had your shoes on you couldn't turn over, so you left your shoes out there and people used to throw up on your

shoes. (laughs) But you took it in stride, you know, if you're O.K., it'd be another couple of days, another week...

Q: But what about bathing facilities?

A: On the ship there were none.

Q: None?

A: On the ship, none. Because there was no room, there was barely room. They were trying to cramp as many people as they possibly could. Yes, there was salt water, and they had some showers with salt water if you wanted to bathe in salt water. I think some of us did. I can't remember if I did or not. Once we came to Cypress, we had shower facilities, and stuff to clean up. Conditions were entirely different than they were in Germany. The experiences on the ship were quite an experience itself. You were trying to hide out from the British Air Force, because they were watching us. We saw a couple of planes come over us, and so everybody had to hide and duck and go down below. We were supposed to a freighter going... They had some other flag they were flying.

Q: You were the freight?

A: We were the freight, right. And one night we had, in the middle of the night, we had two big, huge ships kind of come up on each side of our ship, and the British with search lights announce that we should stop our ship and they were going to board us. We put up a fight. We threw cans of food that we had left, and everything we possibly could. Put up a fight with as much as we could. I guess one or two

other people on the boat died in that fight. The British were shooting, and we were refusing to board the ship.

Q: The British did open fire?

A: Yes, they did open fire. Didn't take them long to board the ship. Our ship was like a miniature ship compared with the two large, huge military ships. They damaged the engines, so they towed us to Hyphae, and they boarded us in a prison ship and shipped us to Cypress. We spent that year in Cypress fairly...and this is what I mean, you were free, and when I was there, oh, a couple of months, each camp organized their own -- there were several camps over there, because they couldn't put them all into one camp for organizational purposes -- I took a job as a security guard, because we got an extra ration of food, so I joined at night. I had nothing much to do during the day, anyway, so at night we were guarding our own food supply, because we used to get our food supply and we had to divide it by the week, or whatever. So I took the job every night to guard the food supplies, so I could get an extra ration of food.

Q: So, even though you were eating, I gather, O.K., there was still not enough food to where people would want to steal food?

A: That is correct. There was still not enough. Then they used the extra food ration for other things, for cigarettes or...

Q: There was black market trading...

A: Black market trading.



Q: So you needed to guard this food supply?

A: That is correct.

Q: And were you beginning to have any fun during this period?

A: At this period, no, not until later on, until we came to Israel, we started to have a little fun. Before the war broke out, we would have parties and dance groups and a normal life, and that until the war broke out...again, we were in a kibbutz called \_\_\_\_\_, right on the Jordan border, by the southern part of the Gala(?), and I spent there almost close to a year. I was exposed to the Trudean(?) artillery, and the Trudean army and the Syrian army, so we kinda had a lot of bad times because...

Q: So you were again living in a fearful state?

A: Again, living...I was never scared, never a moment that I was really scared of...like saying "Gee, I might die" or this and that. Never dawned on me. I guess at that point, dying was not bad any more, because you survived so much, you know, that dying was...wasn't...you didn't want to get yourself killed or commit suicide, but weren't fearful of your life. Even today, I mean, over the years, I'm not afraid of dying. I am afraid of becoming a cripple or be a vegetable, but I feel at my age of 56 that I have seen or done or accomplished in life more than the average normal human being at the age of 90. So I'm not fearful of...never was. So during those days in battle, we had to go out 40 against 1, a lot of young men my age -- we didn't consider

ourselves men, from fifteen and a half, sixteen, seventeen -- we did a man's job.

Q: This is when you joined the -- actually joined the military?

A: This is when I joined the military. Even then I had different experiences, different jobs I was assigned to. When I was at the age of...I had a very legible Hebrew handwriting, the alphabet and so forth, so when I first joined -- I can't figure out until today why the Israeli government decided they were in a crisis to take census, and they gave me a job, I was in the army, to go to all the front lines and take census. They were shooting at you, you probably survive (inaudible) you wouldn't survive two minutes later, you know? And you had to run with a pad and paper and pencil, and take census, or histories or something like that. This lasted a couple of months, and then I went back to battle again.

Q: So you were in raging battles?

A: I was in several. Most were skirmishes. The one that stands out in my mind was the one in the Negev desert, and we had -- I forgot the name, what was it -- place was called Latrune(?), where we had the Egyptian president \_\_\_\_\_ Nasser, we had him surrounded at that time and we had to let him go. Plus others. Once, when I was in the Northern Gala area, where the U.N. was coming at that time, I remember Ralph Boch, who was the American Ambassador, and he was with the U.N. at the time, and I...we

didn't know where we were, and a couple of jeeps pulled up. We were in an area we were patrolling and guarding, and they came through and we kinda interrogated him from head to toe, didn't know who he was. Later on, we were told. (Inaudible) ...was trying to protect our own. And he got...made him get out of his jeep and searched him and all that. We had some (inaudible) battles. The one, first one, that stood out in my mind more than any one else, is May the 15th, when the Judean army cut across...came down the mountains, the Jordan Valley, and we came so close that we were able to throw Molotov cocktails at them, you know? We had no artillery, we had nothing. Just rifles and machine guns. We had one tank, still there today, in the Ganyabet(?) or Ganyallah(?), I forgot...where I was there where the battle was going on.

Q: Did they suffer heavy casualties?

A: Yes...we didn't suffer too many, but even one was many. We were about forty of us, I think we suffered maybe two or three. They turned around, they went back. The streets, the whole highway, was literally in dead bodies -- Judean soldiers, the tanks that were supposed to protect them turned around and went back, and (inaudible) the whole highway, and the bodies were laying there for days and days and the place smelled, like, unreal...and you would think that would stand out in my mind. Finally, we were able to clean up later, but at that time, we were realizing, though, what was going on. War is hell...you were not afraid, you

were not hiding any more, you were just out there fighting to defend ourselves. And it was fun. I think the years from being in the army, from a kid's point of view, they were fun years. The best years of my life in those days I had, you know. A group, we were friends, we didn't have any regimented army in that day, the sergeant -- the lieutenant -- he was always more as a friend than he was an officer. He told you to do something, you went and you did it, or you did it together.

Q: Real camaraderie, yeah.

A: Camaraderie, that's right.

Q: And an opportunity to fight for yourself.

A: That's right. And defend yourself. They were fun days. I was wounded several times. Fortunately, not seriously.

Q: Surface wounds?

A: Flesh wounds. Next day I was back. So they were really fun days, but then when the war ended, and then they started to rebuild a regular army, they asked me to stay on, to go to officer's school, and I declined to stay. I think I had enough at that time.

Q: It was fun, but the fun was over?

A: It was fun, but when it started to become a regimented army...you had to be all dressed in uniform and saluting this one, saluting that one. I really didn't want any more of the military life. I think I had enough. Had enough camps in my life. Although a lot of my friends

stayed in. A friend of mine was with me in the ghetto, also with me in the concentration camp, he survived, and we kind of met later. We met, and he was in Israel again, and he stayed in as an artillery officer. So some people did stay on. I just didn't want...all the years since I was a kid, you know, like I told you from the time before, I took an extra job over here, or did a little fenagling over here, an little fenagling over there, a little black market thing or whatever. I decided the kibbutz was not for me because I couldn't really get anywhere in the kibbutz, so that's when I left the kibbutz.

Q: What do you mean "get anywhere"? Because of the communal nature...

A: Yeah, I didn't like the communal nature...I left the kibbutz for different reasons. First, I loved the kibbutz, but I wanted to join the service. Because I knew -- I had an idea --that I would survive the war. But I figured that if everyone's putting in two years in the service, let's say, to being in the kibbutz, once I come out -- leave the kibbutz later -- I'm going to have to put in two years of my own. I figured I might as well if I'm going to do it, let in be on my account.

Q: Oh, so get rid of your military duty?

A: Correct. So when I got rid of my military duty, I didn't want to stay in the kibbutz, because I couldn't see a future. I am a hard worker by nature, and I couldn't really see -- maybe this is the reason why I survived the con-

centration camp and all that, because I worked hard -- so I was used to working hard, and I didn't mind working hard. But I wanted to see something from it. So I figured by being in the kibbutz I'm not really seeing anything from it. As long as I'm there, everything is mine. The minute I leave, nothing is mine. So when I got out of the service, I came away with about thirty Israeli pounds -- talking about maybe they're worth three dollars. But just enough for me to sustain for a little while.

Q: Thirty pounds was how much?

A: About three dollars.

Q: Three dollars?

A: Something like that, value of it...but over there I was able to survive for a couple of months, you know...

Q: On three dollars.

A: Until I got myself an apartment, just a room. I stayed with some friends for a while. I had this friend of mine who was with me in the service and also with me in the concentration camps. He was discharged before I was, so he was in the reserve, so I was able to stay in his place for a while until (inaudible) was in the service, and I found a place I was able to share with another friend. We shared a room. And I got an apartment -- an old Arab house -- where we stayed there for a while, this other guy and myself. It was -- sanitary conditions were a lot to be left to be desired. There was one room, it was a like a court, with four rooms, like an Arab had four wives and they had four

rooms of their own. The bathroom was strictly bathroom facilities -- no faucet, no water...

Q: You mean a hole in the ground?

A: A hole in the ground. And so I stayed there for...couldn't get another apartment. I wasn't making that much money. Besides, there were no apartments, in fact, even if I could pay for it.

Q: Where was this?

A: In Yathel(?). And I had a good job. I did several jobs. I did construction work, and I drove a truck, and I was also a driving instructor. When I left the service, I got a recommendation when I was discharged to into this school...

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGINNING OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

A: ...training school. I was teaching people to drive vehicles. The last six months, the last year, at the military camp I would do miscellaneous jobs...I was active sergeant of the motor pool, and I was teaching them how to drive, and fixing vehicles, repairing them, so forth. I learned on-the-job training, so to speak. I was handy with tools, so they recommended me to, like, go into service. Went to the school, and become a driving instructor. They had a need for people. I hated the job, I really didn't want to be a driving instructor. It's very nerve wracking, it's not like here. There were no dual controls or anything. It was

really just on-the-job type training situation. After I had two or three jobs, construction work, I got pneumonia and I got sick. When I came back, I didn't have a job, I needed a job really bad, and I was too weak to go to construction work. So I took that letter of recommendation, I went to the -- it's called Sarafen(?) Camp in Israel -- and I applied for the job. They had about forty people for two openings, and I got one of the two positions.

Q: Which was this position?

A: As a driving instructor.

Q: Oh, the driving instructor.

A: In Israel. And I worked there for about nine months. It was treacherous work. (Laughs)

Q: (Laughs)

A: They take people that have never seen a vehicle in their life, and teach them how to drive in the traffic in Tel Aviv, stuff like that.

Q: Who were the students?

A: The students were young Yemenites, people that came to Israel or drafted into the service. We had to teach them how to drive vehicles. We had vehicles to drive, we had to them to drive tanks, or teach them...So we start off teaching them to drive trucks. And with manual shifts, no dual controls, and up to the instructor to get everything done in a short period of time. After nine months, my nerves were shot and I quit. I was lucky that I got a job. I met some people that I knew in the service and they recommended me.



I got a job driving a taxi in Tel Aviv, and that was a much, much easier, nicer job, and made more money. So I always kind of managed to make a good living, and I was never afraid to work, I worked long hours.

Q: So, did you have a group of friends, or...?

A: I had a lot of friends in Israel.

Q: Were you going out with young women then?

A: Yes, I had a lady I met...when I left, she married a friend of mine, who I told you earlier was an artillery officer in the army. When I left, I guess he got after her. They got married. I told her "I was going to bring you over here," but by the time I got settled over here, she was supposed to go into the service, at the age of eighteen, and she wanted to avoid the draft and not have to go into the service, so I guess she married my friend. I was back a couple of times and had no luck finding either one of them. I guess it's kind of difficult; I didn't have the address where they lived anymore, or whatever.

Q: Were you in touch with your mother throughout this period, at all?

A: During the days when I was in Israel, yes, we were. I was in touch with her. We wrote to each other, and she remarried and she kept in the United States.

Q: While you were in Israel?

A: While I was in Israel.

Q: Did either you or she...were you unable to find out whatever happened to the rest of your relatives?

A: Well, we knew that her family got killed as the Germans came into Lithuania. They just wiped everybody out.

Q: Just rounded people up in the towns and shot them?

A: Right. Same thing happened to my father's family, more or less, you know, with the exception of a few that survived.

Q: So you were amongst the few in your whole family, you and your mother?

A: I was one amongst the few. I still have an uncle who is still alive, an uncle that was with me in Germany.

Q: Was he in the ghetto also, originally?

A: He was in the ghetto, and also with me in the camp. I had another uncle, but I really don't discuss much about him, but we were...he just died last year. When we were liberated, we were -- the three of us, the my two uncles and myself -- were together, and then my uncle decided to stay in Germany in the American zone, not to go to Lithuania to find the rest of the family. My other uncle and myself decided to go to Lithuania, and after a couple of days -- him and I being together, plus a couple of other people -- he left me in the middle of nowhere and took off.

Q: Is this the one you don't discuss, you mean?

A: He kind of left me, and the worst part was that he took everything that belonged to me and everything that belonged to him, and took off on his own. I guess he was afraid I was going to be a burden to him. So, it's

(Inaudible) died nineteen forty-five, before that, so I didn't discuss him any more.

Q: I see what you mean. He was somebody you didn't feel very proud of.

A: Not at all...I didn't like much.

Q: Yes, yes.

A: Yeah, I was -- what? -- twelve years, twelve and a half when the war was over, and this uncle, who is in Brazil today, he was the go-getter of the family. He accumulated the food, the clothing, and all that and basically provided for us. And turned everything over to us. He said, "I'm going to go back, and I know where to get some other stuff. This is for you guys, and you take it with you."

Q: Quite different than the other... Were they brothers?

A: They were brothers. And this guy, he took everything. I was out in the street one day, walking in the little town where we were at, kinda sight seeing, and I saw some people out in the street that said, "Shoot, how come you didn't go with your uncle?" And I says, "Well, where?" Well, he moved on. Packed his wagon, and had like a little, small little like a doll carriage from two, 'bout three feet, four feet. And they said, "Well, he moved on this morning." The other person who was traveling with us, I guess, was an uncle or brother-in-law of his or something and they took off.

Q: This was when you were on the way to Lithuania? Was his personality like that before the camps or do you think the camps...?

A: I don't really know. I never knew him that well. He was with my father in the same camp. My father was separated from me then. He was in another camp. At least they were together, my uncle and my father. And so we don't talk much about him. So he left on his own, he took off, and I didn't (Inaudible). Although I did run into him later on in life in Germany.

Q: How did you run into him?

A: Oh, you know, when I came to Berlin to find my mother, and I guess he stopped off at one of those camps. He was a tailor by trade, and I guess they needed a tailor, and he was working at the camp where my mother was. So, that's how I ran into him. The world is small, you know. You never know who you're going to run into.

Q: It is strange. But anyway, so there you came to a point in Israel, I guess, when you were driving a taxi.

A: I was driving a taxi over there. Making a good living, but I was waiting to... My mother wrote to me several times, that I should come to the States, we should get reunited, see each other. Because we hadn't seen each other for quite a few years before the war. I mean, before the Israeli war. The last time I saw her, I guess, was in forty-five, when I left to Germany. And so I decided, "Oh, apply for a visa. I'm going to apply for a visa." And I

came to the United States, and got reunited. I lived with my stepfather and my mother for about...just about a year.

Q: How did that go?

A: Was O.K., but not great. I was independent, was kind of hard to move in to live and listen to your mother say "Do this, and then do that." As I told you earlier, I had no education, very little education. All the education I had was kind of self-taught. I went to night school, and she wanted me to go on to college, or something like that. I didn't have the patience for it. When I came here was nineteen and start all over again, was kind of difficult. So after a while, I think I stayed there for about a year, maybe two years at the most. I moved out on my own. And I had a job, right from the beginning.

Q: Where was this?

A: In New York. I was here about two weeks in this country, and I got a job for some people I knew. Relatives of my stepfather. I was looking for a job as a mechanic, because I had mechanical ability. And I went to get a job and they said, "Well, you have to go join the Union." So I went to join the Union and they said, "Well, you have to get a job first." And before I knew I realized it, it was Catch Twenty-Two. I didn't know that expression before that, but I learned that quick-like. And I couldn't speak the language at all, and it was very difficult. So, one day this man, relative of my stepfather, said, "Well, can you put in glass in cars?" I can do anything to make a living.

So I went to work for them, and I worked for them for about eight weeks, and was sheer humiliation. They humiliated me because I couldn't speak the language. They did everything, you know, to undermine me whatever I did, and they didn't give me a chance to learn. So, I worked there for eight weeks, and I wouldn't have stayed even that long, and one thing that kind of broke the camel's back was one day when he -- one of the employees over there, the manager of the shop, who was his son-in-law -- asked me for some penetrating oil. And the word "penetrating oil"...

"Penetrating" is a long word, very difficult to pronounce for somebody who doesn't speak English, and I asked him to repeat it and he, in front of the customer, kind of humiliated me, "You dumb so-and-so." So I took my paycheck that day, the week was over, and I quit the job. All they were paying me at that time was twenty-five dollars a week for forty-eight hours. It wasn't even money even at that time. And Monday I went out and started looking for another job. I called on several places, and by Wednesday I got the job. I worked for this man forty-eight hours. I didn't ask him what he'll pay me. First I told him what I do, and I did whatever I could. And he said, "Well, I really didn't need any..." he says, but he'll pay me fifteen dollars a week. But during those four days I worked I came into about five dollars in tips.

Q: What kind of work was it?

A: Installing auto glass. In the glass shop. The same thing what I did for those people. And I said, "No, thank you." And he drove me home that night, Saturday night at eight o'clock. He closed the shop and drove me home, and I'm thinking, "Well, I'll go out Monday and look for another job." During the couple of days I went looking for a job, that man told me to come back next week, so I'm thinking, "Well, I'll go back, what have I got to lose? He told me to come back." So I went over there and knocked on the door, and he said, "What are you doing with your work clothes?" I said, "I work in the clothes I'm in." And he said, "O.K., go to work." So I worked for him for three years. I started off with forty dollars a week.

Q: He raised you right away from fifteen to forty?

A: To forty. I started with forty. I told him, "Don't pay me until you see what I can do." And he started me at forty dollars a week. And every two months I would have a raise automatically, and when I left him three years later I was the foreman, basically. I was running, almost running his shop. But I had different ideas. I had a thousand dollars saved up. I had a car of my own. And I opened up my own business. Away from him. He was in Brooklyn, and I went to Queens. I opened up a shop in Queens, right by the Kennedy Airport. With a partner, we each had a thousand dollars. He was a young man who was born here in this country, who just came out of the Korean

war. And he was my apprentice at this shop where I was working. So we both started, and we worked for about six and a half years together. I was trying to expand and grow and do more, and he was the type of fellow that was happy with doing really nothing. He said, "Gee, I can't work late today because my mother has my steak on the fire, it's five o'clock and I got to be home." And you can't run a business that way. So, after six and a half years, I gave him... We tried to expand, and he resisted expansion. I decided, well, never going to get anywhere. So I decided, call him up Monday and said, "Look, we need to talk." And I gave him the option to buy me out, or buy him out. So I gave him three months, and he decided O.K., he'll buy me out. He took his brother in to buy me out, and I came to California and I started from scratch.

Q: Why did you decide on California?

A: Well, he said he wanted a thirty-mile radius of non-compete.

Q: Well, California's more than thirty miles...

A: Well, yeah, but if you think thirty miles, all of New York City, thirty-mile radius. I said, "You know what? I'll give you better than that. I'll give you three thousand miles." And I came to California. At that time my mother was in California.

Q: Oh, I see. So you had...

A: My mother and my stepfather.

Q: California, at least your mother was here.



A: Right, so I decided to come to California. Came out here in nineteen...married in New York.

Q: You married in New York during this period?

A: Just before I left, I decided to get married, so the lady I was dating, I got married. I came to California, and I started my own business all over again.

Q: Did you have any children by then?

A: We didn't have any in the beginning, no. Then later on we had... We were here about six months or so. She came up with the good news, then we had our first son, Howard. About six years later we had another son, Paul. And I got divorced, and started all over again.

Q: Start all over again once again.

A: Yeah.

Q: Had you discussed with your wife your experiences, your... ?

A: My life history? Sure, a little bit. I never really elaborate on those experiences. I kind of...

Q: Push them out of your mind.

A: Yes, exactly. More or less. I don't forget them, but I don't discuss them.

Q: You don't dwell on them.

A: Yeah, I don't dwell on them, right. So, I got divorced.

Q: Did she have the children?

A: She got custody of the children, right.

California, in those days, nineteen-seventy, there was no other way.

Q: Right.

A: And, that kind of put me almost in bankruptcy, my divorce. She got the house, and she got everything that I'd worked for all those years to accumulate. And I started all over again, and I was very fortunate enough to work hard, and I kept the business.

Q: You had a glass business?

A: Yeah, same business.

Q: But, was it auto glass at the time?

A: Auto glass at the time, and then I expanded to mirrors and everything related to glass. And, with a few investments and a few lucky breaks, I'm independent.

Q: And I see you've married again.

A: I married again, about twelve years ago. I was seeing one for six years, and then I married that nice lady, and I remarried again.

Q: And, do you talk to your children about your experiences?

A: My oldest son, who is more intuitive to the situation, I believe -- maybe my younger one is, too, but I don't know -- we talked about it, on occasions. He knows, he is more aware of it than, I believe, his... of the Holocaust. He's older, he's about twenty-five, versus

nineteen, today. And I guess maybe also more exposed to my mother, more exposed to me, that to the Holocaust and so forth. Yes, on occasion I kind of talk to them about it, to both of them, but not that much.

Q: So they, as children will do, they'll say, "Well, what were you like when you were young?" and ask you about your history?

A: Well, unfortunately, I never had the children long enough to discuss, because the older one was seven when I got divorced, and my younger one was one, and the only time I had them was for weekends, you know, like a long weekend. A weekend father. So, we really didn't discuss that much. Well, the older one asked on occasions more questions than the younger one. But never really came into, "Gee, how were you when you were a kid?" Maybe they felt funny asking us questions, I don't know.

Q: (Inaudible) sensitive.

A: Yeah, possible.

Q: So, in...how do you feel about doing this interview? I mean, is this something you've been wanting to do?

A: I guess I signed up for it a couple of years ago, I guess, when I was in San Francisco one day. And I felt, all right, I'll do it, just for -- I'm trying to find the right word in English -- just for to preserve the past, and let people know what happened, and that there was really a Holocaust. There were some survivors, especially when you hear the news, "Gee, the Jews made it out, it's a make-up."

So, it's real. It was there, and it happened. And so that's the reason I decided to do it. I hope you get enough out of it, I don't know.

Q: Well, kind of looking over the whole thing, what do you think that was a really strong thing in you that helped you to survive?

A: Will to live, I guess, and, uh, basically that. I mean, I can't find anything else. To see an end to it, and that's the reason I went to Israel, and to help -- I hoped I helped -- to stop the \_\_\_\_\_, and my part was needed there, and I helped them, and I hope I did enough for it, though one person can only help so much, but maybe I contributed to the independence and growth of Israel the years I was there. I know they, Israel, helped me a lot, too. They gave me respect, life, I learned a lot over there while I was there working and learning. I learned a lot over there.

Q: Have you ever gone back to Europe, Germany, \_\_\_\_\_ (frontedet)?

A: No, I have been back to Europe, but not to Germany. I have been back to Israel several times, I loved it. But I never went back to Germany. Maybe someday I might, to see what's happening. I would like to go to, not so much for myself but to see what other people see, to see what happened -- what was left of the concentration camps.

Q: You mean, to take your family?

A: Yeah, take my family. Maybe even by myself. I'd

rather go by myself rather than take my family. 'Cause I don't know how I would react. Maybe I might react worse. I never thought about it. I'm a pretty strong person, but I might react, probably break down and cry.

Q: That would be a normal reaction.

A: Probably. But, survival, basically. To see the next day, is what made me survive, I believe. And also maybe a little bit of luck.

Q: Do you -- what are your feelings now, say, towards the Germans? If you were to meet, you know, modern day Germans?

A: Well, I don't think Germany -- I know there is still a large population of Germans that are still anti-Semites, and if you look what happened with the President, Prime Minister of Austria, with the lying thing that he did and he was able to become in a position to lead the world...

Q: Waldheim.

A: Yeah, Waldheim. And he denied it, you know. So, it wouldn't be so bad if he wouldn't deny it. "Yes, I was a young man. Certain things happened. I followed orders, and I did it, and there's nothing I could have done about it, and..." But he was not telling the truth. He was trying to protect... And the Austrians, to me they're Germans anyway, he tried to protect them all the way down. There were very few that stood up saying, "Hey, wait a minute, what's going on over here?" And I think that the Jews that live in

Germany should not live in Germany. They should move. The Jews throughout Europe should really move and maybe go west, or go to Israel or somewhere, but I think they're not doing themselves a favor by living in Germany or Poland or Lithuania or whatever.

Q: You think the anti-Semitism is so strong that they're in an alien climate?

A: It's strong, and it's going to get stronger. It goes through cycles.

Q: So you're saying you foresee even worse anti-Semitism?

A: Not worse. I mean, I don't think anything worse than this could happen. But you never know.

Q: I mean worse than, say, this moment today?

A: Oh, yes, definitely. As soon as what happened to Europe -- why the anti-Semitism became so big, and why was Hitler so successful. If you look at history, politics, there was a Depression in Germany -- people were unemployed, people didn't have any money. So he took the opportunity. Said, "O.K., who's the lawyer in town? Who's the doctor in town? He's a Jew, right? He took your money. Kill him, it's yours, take it, you know?" And this is what happened. And this could happen again. And maybe some other Recession. Even look what happened in this country. When the farmers had some bad times, they still have bad time -- you saw what happened on "Sixty Minutes" on television. Who are they blaming? They're blaming the Jews, right? The

Jews control the banks, the Jews control this. So, this is happening here, too. You have some Nazis over here, in camps, and all over. Tracy used to be a big, strong German Nazi camp, whatever.

Q: What was?

A: Tracy.

Q: Tracy?

A: Yeah, Tracy, California. A big, strong Nazi group, and the uniforms, and they had some barracks, or whatever, they were demonstrating out of there. So it happens here, it'll happen somewhere else. At least here we have a bigger voice, hopefully, than somewhere else. And I hope it shouldn't happen in anywhere else in Europe or Germany or Lithuania or... Very few Jews left in Lithuania. But even among the Russians, there's been a big anti-Semitism. Among the Poles, the Poles have not been any better than the Lithuanians or the Germans or the Ukranes. All in one pot, we just mix them up in one pot and they're all the same. They were basically raised with that attitude. The Jews killed Christ, and that's how they grew up. Like many, many generations, if ever, or centuries before this'll get wiped out. Just because the Church rescinded and they said, "O.K., we're not going to teach this anymore, that the Jews killed Christ," you know? Or the Vatican decided, well, not to teach that or preach that. That's not going to change much. Because, still, \_\_\_\_\_ "dirty Jew" or "Jew, go to Palestine." Where does that come from? Just

eight year old kids, they didn't know anything about Palestine. I didn't know anything about Palestine. But they learn it from their parents. And as long as their parents know it, and then they pass it on to their children, from their children to the next children. So, anti-Semitism, unfortunately, even here. Look at Jesse Jackson, you know, or Farragut -- here are people that reasoned that the Jews supposedly stood beside them and helped them, and try to gain their respect and freedom during the Sixties, and all that, and I think they are our worst enemies right now in this country.

Q: Did you ever regret leaving Israel?

A: I did not want to leave Israel. I liked it there, I was happy. I didn't have much and I didn't need much. And I was happy with my (Inaudible) at that time, I mean, making a good living, and I had a couple of bucks in my pocket. Hoping to get better accommodations and stuff like that. I first came here the first year, I was very unhappy.

Q: Why did you come? Was it solely because your mother was here?

A: Because my mother, yeah, and economically I wasn't that bad off. I was still young, I was healthy, and I had a good job, so I was doing really well. But to see my mother was worth it, and that's the only reason why I came here. I probably would have stayed in Israel, lived in Israel. I loved Israel, and what it stands for more than anything else.



Q: Did you ever think to go back? I mean, to live?

A: I would love to. Maybe when I retire, I would like to go back and live there. I hope the situation will kind of settle, I hope, soon. I wouldn't mind. I like the warm climate, and especially the cities alongside the ocean are beautiful. And I wouldn't mind living in \_\_\_\_\_, or one of the other cities that they're building up. Every time I go back to it, I like it more and more and more. I always liked Israel. It's a small country, very easy place to live, especially among Jews.

Q: Yes, where you feel at home.

A: Home.

Q: Is your mother still alive?

A: Yes, my mother is still alive. She lives close by here. And I see her a couple of times a week.

Q: You think you might like to add any...?

A: Well, I add that I was a very lucky individual and survived this ordeal, and learned a lot from all of the experiences, I hope. And...

Q: Can you talk about anything in particular that you think you learned from those experiences? How this (Inaudible) any other person that you would see?

A: Well, I'm very sensitive to some, to a lot of issues. To human beings, to the Biblical expression "Don't do to others that you don't want done to yourself." And, I would say that this is one of the things they (tape ends).

BEGINNING OF TAPE 2, SIDE B

A: (continuing from end of side A)... that I possibly can to their needs, and some will agree, some don't, but I just try to do my best. Because I know that I was on the other foot, the shoe was on the other foot, and I was there, and none of them know my background, my experiences, but I do try to be very sensitive and respect their position because I understand where they're coming from.

Q: It sounds like a very positive thing to come out of that.

A: I hope so.

Q: Well, thank you.

A: You're welcome.