

I want to just skip around and ask [INAUDIBLE].

OK, tell me what-- OK, are we rolling?

Yes we are.

OK, when you were in Moscow did you go to the opera or the ballet?

Yes, the first night I came to Moscow. The first night I came to Moscow the Russian Intourist gave us tickets to the Moscow opera. And at that time they put Carmen was going. And I came there but we were so tired and Carmen was beautiful and the music was beautiful, but we fell asleep. We were tired from being on the train all day.

So we were so tired that we fell asleep. Till this day, I regretted that I couldn't see all of Carmen there. It was the most beautiful opera I ever saw my life.

OK, now coming to Japan and stuff were you able to keep in touch with your parents and how did you keep in touch?

In Japan I have two postcards from my father in Lithuania from--

Start--

While being in Lithuania--

No, while in Japan.

Japan. While in Japan I got one postcard. That was the last postcard that I had from my hometown that they heard that I am going to the United States and they are very happy for me and they hope that I'll-- and it was written in Russian because that was Russia at that time and the sender was always looking for foreign languages that they would be able to either destroy it or send. But in Russian the postcard they let it through. They didn't think of it much.

Did they receive anything from you while you were in Japan?

No, from Japan they-- I don't believe it. I don't know if they did get it because I was writing every time. But I have no idea if they got to-- done that.

Let see. Could you tell me again why you were so motivated to get out of Russia?

As I told you, I was born into--

You can't say [INAUDIBLE]

Sorry.

And don't go all the way back. Just say because you hated the Russians or--

Because I was a Zionist.

OK, no. You wanted to get out of Russia or you wanted to get out from under Russian rule.

All my life I was a Zionist and my dream was to go to Israel, at that time was Palestine. Once the Russian occupied our country I knew in time we couldn't get out from them because we knew what's going on there. And in a way we were very well informed and I knew that after a while they'll close all the avenues of escape. You couldn't go out.

So I look for ways to get out of Russia out from under the-- Not of Russia but from under the communist regime. And the only way was open was Vilnius. And Vilnius never supposed to be given back to the Lithuanians which the Lithuanians made it later for their capital city.

Why do you think it's important for you to tell this story?

Why. You see, as a matter of fact, I should have written down everything but I didn't, that the closest way to leave some legacy for my grandchildren and for future generations. If I can contribute a little bit, if everybody could contribute just one letter that would leave some history that people wouldn't come later and say, no, nothing happened. It was just a figment of your imagination, or something.

I've never been a refugee. I've never had to run from anything. I've never had to--

Lucky you.

Yes, very lucky. What is it like? Do you live day to day or do you make big plans or is it full of risk or-- what's it like to be a refugee?

To be a refugee is like any normal people. They live from day to day mostly except that they have their problems where to go and live permanently without any threat for your life or for your family or for-- So most of the day so you are trying to make a living, you're trying to injure yourself because you are young. At this age all you think is of having enough to eat and shelter and enjoy yourself. But the longer you're looking of ways to get out to get back whatever you can put your roots in.

My idea was Israel. I wasn't thinking of the United States or of any other country in the world. Only love Israel. But the trouble was hard to get there. So you start to make plans and you tried all the avenues. But you weren't always successful in it.

What was your lowest point during this period and what was your highest point?

The lowest point to my period was on the way from Lithuania to Vladivostok to get a visa, a Japanese visa because if I don't get it I go to Siberia. One country was open for me, that's Siberia. The second lowest time was in Shanghai after the American bombardment of Shanghai, which was in 1945 I believe. The rumors came to us that the Japanese want to put us on leaky ships and take us out to the Yellow Sea and sink us, let the ship sink or to leave us on Ban Islands which [? a rock?] only birds used to stop there, and let us die there.

We were making plans to run away into the interior of China to Chiang Kai-Shek. But it was a dream only because among the Chinese you stuck out like a sore thumb. But we tried to do whatever we could. We were talking hard where to run and how run and-- but things got the world. The America started to bombard, and all of a sudden we had about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And the rumours were dead.

What were some of your high points in this journey overall picture of going from Poland all the way to the US? What was some of the--

The high points when the war was finished.

Sorry, I still talking.

The high points of my being a refugee was the minute we heard that the war was finished. We didn't know about the Holocaust. There rumors were only coming through the Russian news which we didn't trust and believe. And then that was for us terrible, and our feeling was very bad about it. But we didn't have the details. We didn't know what to believe and what not to believe. Our minds couldn't comprehend it.

So we said maybe it's just rumours. We still hope maybe it's not true. How could it be a whole population to be

annihilated?

Do you ever wonder why you made it and others didn't?

Luck. Most of it anyway is luck. Your thinking, a lot of people were thinking about it the same way, but you had also to have a little initiative. But I ascribe it mostly to luck. Initiative helps. If you don't do anything, you don't get anything. But with all this you have to be lucky.

And do you have any questions or topics that I haven't touched?

I can tell you an episode.

Excuse me, I--

I want to tell you one episode in Shanghai. If you want you can record it or not. You want to hear it first and then-- while being in Shanghai, in Japan there was a Japanese consulate still. He constantly was working from some neutral country. And they were recruiting young people in the Polish army which were in London at that time. And they recruited young people to send them to Canada to train for the Polish army.

So of course in order to get out of Japan not to go to Shanghai I will go in the army gladly. So we went to register. When I came to register there was a Jewish fellow which is the secretary or the secretary of the consulate who was sent by London. And he was a Jewish fellow who was in the lumber business, the same as my father when said the name.

And the [INAUDIBLE] says, I knew a guy by the name of Goldberg. We had some business dealings with him. And he took down my-- And I told him, that's my father. Took down all the details and says, wait, we'll let you know. That was in Tokyo we went. And we came especially overnight by train to Tokyo from Kobe.

I went back to Kobe and I waited, and of course we went there for a day to the seashore to swim and there was nothing else to do. When I came in the evening I came to the Jewish committee. I take a look. My name is on the list, but the train left an hour ago.

So what did I do? I went next day I went to Tokyo and I came in, and the fellow that I knew my father looked at me and says, Goldberg, what are you doing here? The ship left today, this morning. So I say, I came late in the evening-- I mean, late in the day and I saw the list, but the time was left already. So I didn't know. He says, your name is approved. And looks in the list. He says, but you are on the ship. You are on the steamship now. He says, no, it couldn't be.

What came out is that another guy with the same name as mine and the same age saw the name and he went and that was meant for me. So he says, now you have to wait for the next boat, which of course never came because it was odd in November. And the American ship started to call on Japanese ports.

So that guy went to Canada and he had a hard time in the army because of the anti-Semitism in the army. And I had a good life in Shanghai comparatively to everybody. We had a nice life in Shanghai.

So yeah. Yeah, do you have any questions or--

I didn't go into the army. It was a very anti-Semitic army which they gave you the hardest time possible. And I lived a good life in Shanghai.

How did you feel-- when you were in Vladivostok and you didn't have a--

A visa.

A visa to Shanghai or to Japan--

To Japan yeah.

How did you have faith, how did you know that you were going to get through?

I didn't. I did my best that I could. As I told you, if that wouldn't go through then we'd go to Siberia. I knew it.

And Siberia would have been better than staying in Vilnius?

Of course, the people in Siberia, a lot of them came out alive.

Were you surprised that your resourcefulness? I mean--

No. You see, my father was a merchant and my grandfather was a merchant, though he lived in a village, my grandfather. So we had initiative always. We always looked to better our lives. So I wasn't surprised. But the luck held out for me. You see, every little thing could have gone wrong. They could have refused, the Russians, to let me out because I have to give them a history my life, a cockamamie story how did I wind up in Warsaw to get a temporary passport and this and that.

So everything was-- I could have said right away it's a falsified paper. The seal was new, everything. So he took this finger if it will come off or not. But it didn't come off. They had good ink there.

Why do you think that guard let you through?

He might have been Jewish. He might have been a liberal. He might have hated the Russian government. You see, there was a lot of things like this because there was also a lot of Jewish in the army officers, Jewish officer. So sometimes he knew the truth from them what's going on in Russia.

When I came to the hotel in Chelyushkin after a beautiful dinner they gave us tea with lemon. But what did they do? They give us one piece of sugar [INAUDIBLE] cubes of sugar. You need three. For big glass of tea you need at least three. So used to call them [INAUDIBLE] we need some sugar. So he used to bring us. I need another two pieces of sugar. He brought us. And then said, nobody should here. He says, we drink three glasses of tea with one piece of sugar, not three pieces with one. And he was a Jewish fellow and knew right away.

We're still shooting. Let's see. Was your trip on the train extremely stressful? I mean, you're hiding from the NKVD the whole time.

But wasn't stressful because in every car we had people that was looking out for them. When they saw them coming to this car right away they told us where he is and we waited until the last minute, then we went into the next and hid in that one of the bathrooms.

But there was an episode which I have to tell you, and if you put it on or not I don't know. When we came to have Khabarovsk, which is the Baikal, the beginning of Siberia. It was 30 below 0, very cold but the sun was shining. When we stopped there he said we have an hour. We came go off the train to the station. And there is rest and with food.

So of course, we have pretty good food on the train but fresh food and everything if you go down. We came down. There was table served with the meat and borscht and bread, white bread and dark bread. And in Russia it looked like you fell into paradise. So we sat down and then we ate.

And then at the door was standing militiamen. And a big guy comes in, about 30 years old maybe 6 foot 3, tall, beautiful. And he wants to come in. So he said, where are you going, the policeman asked. Says, I want to eat lunch. Dinner they call it there. So he says, no you cannot now. Let the foreigners finish eating and then you'll be able to go in.

So he says, I know you what you are doing. After they leave [INAUDIBLE] you have to clean up and we'll never get anything to eat. So another two guys came over, took him under the arm, and took him out from there. This is what

Russia was at that time.

A second episode, we went through Siberia to Birobidzhan. Birobidzhan was supposed to be a Jewish autonomous region. And we stopped at the station called Biro, which was part of it. We came down to the station. We see there's a kiosk or a newspaper stand and a fellow standing there, and we knew right away that he's Jewish. And we started to look at the books.

There was two scroungy books and a couple scroungy magazines and a newspaper by the name of Emmis which is Pravda in Yiddish. And he looks at us, says, You are Jewish? Yes. Where are you going? We say, we are going to America. All we knew is America. He looks at us and smiles he says, you are going to Siberia. You are not going to America. Nobody comes out of Russia. This is the episode if you want to include it.

No, that's good. Good. OK, I think that's it. [INAUDIBLE]

That's it.

That's right.

That's what I have.

We need to roll for about 20 seconds of just silence of the room.

Shall I go out?

No, no please join us.

Just sit there and--

[INAUDIBLE] rolling.

Room tone. End room tone.

Thank you.