

## **Interview with Harry Alexander October 11, 1995**

Question: So, Mr. Alexander, let's start with how you got into the camp in Algeria.

Answer: I was caught in Nice, France. I was on the run. I was put in jail in Nice. A place called Ka-sem-dee-o-wah (ph). After a few days, I was told that I was going to be handed over to the Gestapo to be shot. I didn't take kindly to it and I was able to break out. I opened most of the cells, they were occupied by Jews, like me. They were \_\_\_\_\_ for they're lives. And I told them, \_\_\_\_\_, may you have a go of it. The answer was, where shall we go? Nobody wants us. Nobody will help us. I didn't accept this. I went over the wall. I now became a fugitive from justice. I became a hunted man. Sure enough, there was no place for me to go. I had no papers, I had no money, I didn't speak the language. I was caught and put into a camp near Kon-dee-ash-la-schi-mier (ph). From there they transported us together. They put us on a cattle boat, about 400 or 500 of us. And they transported us to North Africa. Algiers. There we were put in jail with several months solitary confinement and then transported to a camp. Two hundred and fifty files outside Algiers. There is a high desert at the foot of the Apls (ph) Mountains. There in the middle of the desert was the camp, barbed wire, tents and that's all. We were put in there and I remained there in this Hell for two years. From 1941 to 1943. I was liberated by the Polish who advanced at that time and I was taken to a hospital, the 96 General Hospital outside Algiers. And after several weeks of convalescence, they asked me what I wanted to do.

Q: Let's stay with the camp a little bit and talk about the camp itself. Tell me, did

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you work in the camp?

A: The camp, we worked in the camp ten hours a day. And they were trying to build a train through the Sahara called the Transcontinental. Of course, they never succeeded. The conditions, they were very bad. We had 75 grams by the day, 2 cups of water and the heat that came up to 110 degrees. At night it was so cold our teeth would chatter. We had no blankets, we had nothing to sleep on. Like I said, we slept in the tents, they were made for ten people. Fifty people in the tent. We were eaten up with lice. We dealt with desert rats, snakes, scorpions, malaria, malnutrition, beatings. The camp commander would come in who was a drunkard and a sadist. He would come in every day, pick out ten men and beat them up. Tie them to a pole, naked, and whip them with his horse whip, the whip he used for his horse. Just to show the rest of us. We were about 4,000 in there. To show the rest of us what would happen if we tried to escape or if we didn't behave ourselves. Or if we refused to work, or whatever. Infraction of the rules. This is going to happen to us. We were buried up to our heads in the sand, you couldn't move the head. There were a lot of bugs in the sand, they would bite. We wouldn't move, if we did they would crack our heads. The guards that would guard us were Spa-hees (ph), called Spa-hees (ph). The \_\_\_\_\_ was the Arab elite troops. They were very brutal. It was a brutal camp and I say, we survived, we really didn't. Out of the camp, 330 or 340 were still alive from 4,000 when we were liberated. So after a

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while, we got use to the punishment, we got use to taking very little water, we got use to taking, eating very little food. We utilized, the rats we use to eat, we use to catch and eat. Snakes we would eat. Dogs that passed by, wandering perhaps, that lost they're way into the barb wire. We would eat them. Anything edible, just to stay alive. We got use to all this. It's amazing how people get use to these things. We always had hope of getting out some day, of surviving. But more or less, we talked ourselves into that hope. We never didn't really have hope anymore. After two years, you begin to lose your hope. The work was very tough. We had to carry sand from a mile down the road to the desert, back to the desert. We had to clean the dunes up so they could lay the tracks for the railroad train. But a day later or two days later, they went blue. The mist-al (ph) it came, mist-al (ph) is a sandstorm, and put the dunes right back where we took it away from. So it was a hopeless situation. We walked along and we sunk into the sand. We got beaten, the guards use to be on horseback and they would whip us with their, what do you call these? Whips, there. Then we got up, either got up or died. Like a friend of mine said, who was before me, he says, you know? I can never get use to this. I'm trying very hard but I can never get use to this life. It was said in humor but I never forgot that phrase. I can never get use to it. Well, he died too, in the camp. They would take us to a \_\_\_\_\_ from the French Foreign Legion. And any infraction of the rules we would spend 14 days at the fort. Now, 14 days meant you hang on your arms

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every other day for 24 hours. We had very little food, we had very little water and beatings every night. And you did good if you came out alive. I was in there a few times. It was a bad situation. But we survived it, a few of us.

Q: Who else was in the camp with you?

A: In the camp? Mostly Jews. But we had arsons, we had people from the brigade, the international brigade, from Spain. The Tale-mon-brigada (ph). From the civil war in Spain. And we had many nationalities in there. Many languages were spoken. And we sort of stuck together. We were all in the same boat and we sort of had people in charge, that told us what to do and how to do. We helped one another. If one was sick, he is weak, all of us gave him a bit of bread, crumb of bread or a drink of water or whatever. Because they could get no rations. We tried to save as many as we could, help as many as we could. There was only so much we could do. It was a real hell. You cannot describe this hell, you were in there for two years. We thought it would never end, but it did. We came out. They took us, we were of course in very bad condition, physical and mentally, psychologically. And they took us to a prison hospital to get us back on our feet. And then it started. I had no place to go. I had no family, I had no home, I had no country. I just didn't know what to do or where to go, now that I was free and back on my feet. I just bided my time. I was about 22, 23 years old, so they asked me, I could have gone any place, to England, to France, to Israel. Is there anywhere in the free world, we

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will take you. You now are a free man. Well, once I felt better, I felt I had to do something, one more thing. Get the \_\_\_\_\_ back, go into the army, which I did. At that time, of course, you must understand, I had a lot of resentment, a lot of hate in me. Towards the people that did all this to me. They took my family, my home. They took away my youth, they took away a part of my life, the best part of my life. My education. So, I joined the British Eighth Army. I couldn't speak a word of English but that didn't stop me. I eventually learned how to handle a gun and I spent 4 years and 3 months in the British Army. Two more years in Africa, that was over. They sent me to England, to the war office in London, and they attached me to the army intelligence. By now I could speak English, I could speak French, I could speak German. They send me to school, intelligence school. Gave me a course and sent me to Germany, they said they needed people to speak German. And they sent me to Germany. Went to Dusseldorf. I went to Half-ort (ph), Field Marshall Montgomery's headquarters. They gave me another schooling and I did the job, whatever they wanted me to do. I hunted war criminals for over 18 months. My job was, they gave me a picture, that's the man or woman you want and we went out to get them. Most of the time we succeeded, we caught some in Holland, some in France. We could travel anyplace, do anything, go anywhere, fly over there. And we got most of them but our job was to arrest them, to bring them in. And headquarters would take care of them, they had their particulars and their

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investigators and we translated the statements and that was the end of our job. What happened afterwards, we don't know. I did that for 18 months and didn't, of course, we were a bit rough, we were a bit hard on them. Because we traveled three at a time, a crew of three. Between us we spoke ten languages. And every one of us had a story to tell. It wasn't a good one. So we, we were the ones they couldn't bribe. We were the one's that had no pity. We were the one's that didn't understand their plight. And we were the one's that went out and did the job. No matter what, no matter what it took. Like, we caught one worker who killed many women and children, I will never forget this. We caught them in Holland and him, he was hiding in a back oven in a bakery. We went, four o'clock in the morning, we went in there and we told him, he wouldn't come out, we told him, he has a choice. Either we would put the back oven on and burn him to death or we will shoot him. That was more of a choice than he gave our people. Our people had no choice at all. They just killed them. They just gassed them or hanged them or burned them alive, and shot them and starved them. We gave him a choice. In fact, we gave him time to talk to his maker. This is the kind of situations we had. We were all in agreement with the way we did things and how we did it, and after 18 months they called me into the office and just said, we are as bad as the Germans, we are no better. We have to rebuild. We have to be better than they are. We have to show them how civilized people live, how civilized people do things. I looked at the

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captain, I said, are we uncivilized? He says, well, the way you do things is not just the right thing anymore. The war is ended. We can't go on doing this anymore. God will pay them back. I said, with my help. And I'll tell you what he says, you've had enough. We discharge you. Send you to England and you'll start a whole, new life. The war is over. And I said to him, the war may be over for you, the war isn't over for me. And as far as starting a new life, how do you do that? How do you start with no family, no home, no country, no money, no trade, no skill, no education? How do you start a new life? They had taken all this away from me and they haven't given me, any of them back. How do you start a new life?

Q: When you were investigating war criminals, were you also trying to find out what had happened to your own family?

A: Yes. They gave me a jeep and I could travel into British zones and the American Zone of Germany. I traveled for three weeks, I went to one DP camp to another. Nothing. Nothing from my three sisters, three brothers, my mother, my father. Nothing. I came back empty. But I have never stopped looking to this day. I still write to organizations and places, but there is very little hope, if there is any at all, to find any of them. I don't really have any hope anymore. I've been looking for fifty years.

Q: What about just finding information about people that you knew?

A: Nothing. So, I went to England. What other place could I go? France wasn't

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very good to me. Italy wasn't very good to me. Switzerland wasn't, no body helped.

So, I went to England. And that's where my life started, my so-called new life. There I roomed with another guy, I couldn't afford it on my own. And I waited, I didn't know what to do. As I said, I had to experience. It was the first time I had lived on my own. I didn't have a place to go for lunch or dinner. I didn't have a place, any place to go, I had no body to talk to. At least in the army, you have some people, some friends. Here I had no one. I was all on my own, all alone in a strange land. A land that didn't even want me. Let's face it. If you don't speak English like the English do, you're an outsider. They don't like you and they show it. I had no other place to go, what could I do? I got into a lot of fist fights. I was bitter. I was disappointed. I was hurt. Inexperienced to stand on my own two feet. For a year, I wandered around. Did odd jobs. And then I decided I'd go to America. I'm going to leave it all behind. All the nightmares. All the bad experiences. All the bad times. I get all out of my system, I want to start a whole new life somewhere else. It can't get any worse than it is. What do I have to lose? I was able to get the money together. I got a visa immediately. I went to the American Consulate in Liverpool and I got the visa immediately.

Q: What year was this?

A: That was in 1947. And I went in. After three days, he called me in, the American Ambassador, and he knew more about me than I knew myself. It's amazing what



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these people know. And he says, I wish you good luck in your new home. And I got the visa and I went to America. I ended up in New York. Now, here's the story. I ended up in New York with three cents in my pocket. I said to myself, this \_\_\_\_\_ me down. I befriended the cook, on the ship, on the Britannic, that one \_\_\_\_\_ jumped it a couple of years ago. And I befriended him and when I left the boat he gave me a shoe box. He said, you'll need it. Well, I needed it. He put some food in there for me. Like roast chicken and hard boiled eggs, milk, sandwiches, and all kinds of things. And I sat at a dock in New York and I opened up this shoe box and I ate and I said to myself, you know, you had it worse than this. At least you are a free man. No body behind you with a gun and a bayonet. No body behind you threatening to punish you, to beat you, to shoot you, or bury you alive. At least you breath fresh air, free air. It's not that bad. Then I went to a bus and I asked the bus driver where he was going. He says, he's going to Newark. I didn't know what Newark was. I says, I'll go there too. He looked at me and he said to me, where you come from? I said, just stepped off the boat. Do you have money? I said, yes, three cents. He laughed at me, he says, get in the back, I'll take you. Where do you want to get off? I figured I needed a job. I needed something. I had no place to go, no place to sleep, none to eat. I had to do something to sustain myself. I said, leave me over there by the gas stations. In the Eighth Army I was part of a tanker so I knew things about gas. So he says, all right.

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He left me off at the street there. One gas station after another. And I went to the first station, I think I went to the second station. They were two young Jewish guys, partners. He said to me, why should I give you a job? I says, I tell you, you should give me a job because I have no money, no place to go. I just stepped off the boat. I don't know any body and I need help. And furthermore, I can change a tire faster than you. He looked at me, was a nice guy, he looked at me and he says, well, you're good with cars? I tell you what. If you have a lot of math, let's see if you can back it up, they give me a chance. He says, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you \$40 right now, so you can at least get something to eat. Then, you can sleep in the back of the station. There's a cot there. And we'll see tomorrow, get you some papers. The next day, he came for me, we went to Manhattan and all over the place and got me the papers and whatever I needed. I don't remember exactly what he did. He was nice. That's how I started my day. Got myself a room in an attic and I worked for him. After a while I got myself a job in a factory that paid more money. I was making about \$35 or \$40 a week, there I was making \$60 a week. And I was the machine maintenance man. And loaded on the platform, I was loading trucks and I said, this is not for me. I can do a lot better than that. And I started looking for schools. Now here's the first time in my life I went to a school. When I got thrown out of, back home from the school, I was about 11-years-old, 12-years-old. That's all the learning I had, I had no other learning. I went to school and I looked through

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the papers and I saw watchmaking. Now, that's not exactly what I wanted. I always wanted to do surgical instruments, make them. I'd lost ten years of schooling. I didn't have near the means nor the time, I was not a young man anymore. By this time I was 27 or 28-years-old, I have no time. And this had to be the right move. I couldn't change any more. Not moving here, moving there, I had to, that was it. I go in, I had to do it. I went to school. The head instructor looked at me and I saw the blueprints on the wall and people working, around eighty students. I said, I can never do that. I could never do that. And I was on the way out and he grabbed me by the neck and pulled me back, he says, you can do it. If you say you can do it. Give it a chance.

Q: At that point, how well could you read and write?

A: Oh yes, by that time I could read and write in English, I had learned. Oh yes.

Q: You had learned, along the way?

A: Oh yes. Along the way, picked it up here and there. In the army I was the only foreigner in the whole outfit, 300 men, I was the only foreigner. All I could speak was German. And the guys really helped me. Whenever they took \_\_\_\_\_ they translated it for me. \_\_\_\_\_ table, chair, spoon, fork, eat, meat. And I use to remember, they use to, it didn't take me long to pick it up. By the time I picked it up I could have sentences and they were talking to me all the time and, really big help. I went to that school, it was \$80 a month. I have no \$80 a month. I

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went to the instructor, I said, look, let's face it, I don't have \$80 a month to pay for this, I made \$60 a week. I had to pay all the rent, I had to pay rent by the week. By the time I pay all my bills, I have no money left to eat. He said, tell you what. You take care of the tool grip, take care of the tools at the end of the session, of all the guys, and you can come to school for \$40 a month because I can't let you go. You're good. I said, you know, I really only want to do surgical instruments. The course was eighteen months, the watchmaking course. He says, you told me that, I know, but go through with this. At least you have something in your hands. So, I worked. I started at 7 o'clock in the morning, I got up at 6 o'clock, by 7 o'clock I was at the factory in Kurdy, New Jersey, in the factory. I worked there until 4 in the afternoon, by 5 o'clock I had to be in school until 10 o'clock at night. 10 o'clock I cleaned everything up, tool grip and everything for the other guys. There's no subway in Newark. I'd wait for a bus. I didn't get home until 1:30 or 2 o'clock in the morning. When I get home, I studied books. I studied books. Ratios, mathematics, algebra. You had to know this if you want to be a good watchmaker.

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Q: You were talking about the hours you were working.

A: Yeah, and it was not easy because I also forgot how to read. In the neighborhood, by the grocery store, they use to roast chicken on a rotisserie and after 12 o'clock at night they would give it to me for half price. Well, that was a sell.

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I was a good customer. Now I wasn't allowed to take any food into my furnished room so I had to put the greasy chicken under my shirt and smuggle it in. I was good at that anyway, smuggling things in. And I go upstairs to my room and I sat on the bed and I use to eat the pieces of chicken and a piece of potato that I bought also, old \_\_\_\_\_, you know, that didn't sell. And, now how would I refrigerate the rest of it? There was no refrigerator, so I put a nail on the outside wall of the house and I put the stuff into a cloth and I hang it outside the wall so it should stay fresh somehow. And I ate that chicken all week. I was happy to have it. I was use to this kind of eating anyway, so a piece of bread and a piece of chicken. So my instructor knew about that and every now and then he would take me out to lunch. He said, you cannot study on an empty stomach. And he always knew I had an empty stomach. So, until you get on you're feet, he says, we will keep you going. Out of, there we are, three sessions in school, the morning, the afternoon and the night. Now these were all guys that came out of the GI Bill of Rights. Now, they didn't \_\_\_\_\_, they played flaps in the back, they played cards, just to put in the time and they use to go home. They didn't really want to be watchmakers. There were only two guys that really took it serious. That was another German and me. After some fourteen months, he called me into the office. And he said to me, I tell you what. There's nothing more we can teach you in this school. Go out into the field. So, I was scared. Out into the field, what does that mean? I'm on my own

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again. I wasn't, I was too good to be in school and not good enough to be out in the field. So he said to me, look, if you get stuck on anything you can always come and ask me, but go out into the field. He said, I know I'm throwing the puppy out into the woods to fend for itself, but you have to learn to walk on your own two feet and fend for yourself. And that's the only way I know how to do it. I know it sounds cruel, it's cruel, but I'm always there for you. And that's what I did. I went out into the field. I got myself a job and what I couldn't do on the job, I would take home. I had to produce so much and if I didn't produce it they wouldn't keep me. So what I couldn't produce I would take home and do it at night on my own time.

Q: Was it hard to get a job?

A: No, I was cheap. As long as they could get me for cheap.

Q: And where did you work at first?

A: I had a job with Ableson Jewelers, the biggest jewelry store in Newark. And what the foreman let me do is, do little jobs. \_\_\_\_\_ stems and \_\_\_\_\_ and mainsprings and things like that. Little jobs, and repeat it. Then he gave me to another, he said, he was all right. He helped me. He said, I'm not going to give you complicated jobs, give you easy ones. And then I walk you over to the difficult jobs. I said, all right. And I worked there for two years, after three years I asked for a raise. And he said to me, you're not good enough to get a raise. I wanted the fact of a raise. You're not good enough. I said, all right, now I'll watch. And it was a

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cheap one. And they were all mass produced. So I was in the boss's office with the foreman. I said, do you feel that I am not good enough to get a raise? I'll tell you what I'll do. I looked at the foreman's wrist and he had the same cheap watch that I had. Give me your watch a second. He took it off and gave it to me. I put it on the floor and stepped on it. I said, can you fix that? He said, what is that, a joke? No, it's not a joke. It's what I said, can you fix it? He said, no. I'll take it, tomorrow I'll fix it for you. I fixed it. I went to the supply house, got a brand new one, put his band on it, came back the next day. Here is your watch. You mean you fixed that watch? I said, yup. You said I'm not good enough. The boss said, give the man a \$10 raise. As he walked out, the foreman said to me, you son-of-a-gun, I know what you did. You're a wise guy. I said, yup, the only way I could get a raise. The only way. You got a new watch and I got a raise. We are both happy. So, this is how I had to stop on my way through to get a little more money or to get a little more, better situation, get a better room. Then I started working very hard. I picked it up and I started working very hard. Fifteen, eighteen hours a day and started making a little money. And I liked the touch of money. It was the first time in my life that I found a little independence with money. I found out that money gives me independence. And a full stomach. I hungered so much in the last ten years that I was forced to make me feel good. To make me feel good, that I can eat what I want, when I want, how much I want. And I did better and better. I got better, I got

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to be a better watchmaker as time went on. I got to one job to another, every one was better paying. I even bought a better job. I finally became a manager in a big jewelry store and I stayed there for a while. Then I met my wife. She was born in New York, Brooklyn, Flushing.

Q: You talk about how it felt to have money for the first time. And then, I'm wondering, those first few years in America, or the first years after the war in general, what life was like in general? Just how you felt about it? What was the social life like?

A: I had no social life. What social life? I had no social life. I never had a social life. I was always pushed to one place and to another. I never had, I wasn't in one place long enough to have a social life and the only one's that I met were in my predicament and we were too busy staying alive. And getting something to eat and getting a \_\_\_\_\_, no body had time for the other guy. And all you could talk about was the misery we lived in there. I had my own misery to live with. I didn't need anybody else's. I couldn't take anybody else anymore. I had enough of my own. We never had time to make friends. We were too busy getting someplace. We were too busy getting someplace and having something and going someplace and accomplishing something. We didn't know what to do, we had to do, how to go, we had to go, with whom to go. Once in a while, I have a girlfriend, I would tell her bring me a sandwich, because she knew I was always hungry. You don't want to



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see me, you want to see you eat a sandwich. I said, that's right. I'm hungry. It may sound funny, but if you would be in that predicament, you would understand. No body understands what hunger is until they experience it. No body understands what thirst is. No body really understands what it is to be afraid, to be scared. To want to live and you see that you're going to die. No body understands that. I want to go back for a moment, if I may, the way I broke out of jail. When I was told that I was going to be handed over to the Gestapo and that they are going to shoot me. It was not a happy thing. I was scared. I was frightened. I was desperate. Here I was, in confinement. Here I was in prison and handed over like a scared rabbit. I'm going to die. If I'm going to die, I am going to die, I'm going to go down fighting. I'm not going to go to the slaughter house, inspector. You know, when you have that kind of life and you run, when you smuggle boarders, when you are going place to place and you're hunted like an animal, you learn things. And one of the most important things that you learn is to observe. When you get into a place, the first thing you do, you look around. You observe. Where am I and how can I get out? You learn that very quickly. When they put me in that cell, I noticed there was a little wall, there were only five cells, there wasn't a front wall, the wall boarded on the street. And there was a lamp post right in front of the wall. There was one guard only that marched back and forth outside that wall. I noticed some nuts. There was this loose, sealed door where they shove in the pot that you urinate in. And it was

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only tied up from the outside with a little wire. They didn't even have a lock on them.

Well, it opened a bit. About a half a foot. Not enough for you to get out but enough to keep you in. And I went back into the cell. I had to do two things. I had to count how many minutes it takes for the guard to make his round. And how long it would take me to break the wire on the outside by pushing it back and forth, it would crack.

I knew that. So I had to do two things. I had to wait for that guard to come around and after he left, I had to work on the wire. I never forget this. I worked on the wire, it cracked, I could open it. I now could open the door, that trap door. I opened it, crawled out, I was in the court yard. Surrounded by that little piece of wire which was covered with pieces of glass, sharp glass. So you cannot get over the wire. Again, I knew two things. Get my fellow comrades out of the prison, open the, they had no locks on the outside, they had bolts. You open the bolt, you could open the door. I opened all the bolts and let them all know that they are now free if they want to take advantage of it. I will never forget the look on their faces. Where will we go?

I said, you want to stay and die that's your business. At least I give you a chance to get the hell out. I was a young kid, what was I? 21-years-old. Skinny, young kid, I jumped over that wall, 1-2-3, and I went in between the pieces of glass and I looked down. I had to jump onto this lamp post here, it was only a few feet away from the wall. And I saw the guard down there, going back and forth, and when he turned his back I went the other way. I jumped on that, I was bleeding, my feet, and my hands

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were bleeding. I was going on all fours, I cut myself on the glass. I jumped on the lamp post, went down, and walked right away so he would not see anybody standing there, that stood there, that didn't stand there before. These are the things that you learn. And not run. Walk. Although you may be scared to death and frightened and any moment he will call your name and, hey, where you going? Where you coming from? No body said anything but you expect them to say that. Now you're a hunted animal. You're a hunted human being. And I walked away from it. I still had no place to go. Now I was in the city, in the town of Nice. Couldn't speak French. I had no money, no passport, no papers and no place to go. You couldn't walk the streets, they catch you. You couldn't go into a house, the concierge is going to report you. You couldn't sit on a park bench too long because you would be suspected of something. The police would ask you, who are you waiting for? Where are you going? Where are you coming from? Where are you going to hide? Where are you going to get a piece of bread to eat? Where are you going to stay at night? They would round up a couple of blocks of the city, put police all around it, and they would go inside and everybody has to show their identity cards. I had none. What was I going to do? It was a pity now that I was free, I was out of prison, they couldn't hand me over to the Gestapo, where was I going to go? What was I going to do? Where was I going to hide? I now knew that I was a fugitive. I was a hunted man, I was a wanted man now. They had a price

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on my head. I escaped from prison. I'm an escapee from jail and I opened up all the cell doors. They didn't take kindly to this. I don't know why I knew it, I was caught in a trap and that is how I got into Africa. They put us into Con-de-aud-ja-lis (ph) and . . .

Q: How were you caught?

A: This was, rounded people up. I was in the round up. He came to me, I had nothing to show them, I had nothing. I couldn't speak a word of French yet and I had nothing. They caught a lot of people and they send us to Ard-ju-los-so-mia (ph), a camp. That's where I saw almost 30,000 men, women and children, in that camp. And in that camp they had another camp and one tent where they put all of us. All the guys under 21 years of age. There were 10-year-olds, 12-year-old, 14-year-olds, 8-year-olds crying for their Mama's. They gave us one candle that flickered in the dark there and we weren't allowed to go out. They were going to shoot us the next day, they said. And they got us outside a few times. We had to line up and they had people with rifles and we heard the order, shoot. And they shot over our heads. They had no intention of shooting us. We didn't know that. Finally they called us together, they put us on that boat. We didn't know where the boat was going to go. I had no idea. They chained us all together and they put us on the boat, into a hole, the belly of the boat. They had the heavy machine gun mounted on top, that pointed at us in case we tried anything, they would shoot us

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down. We looked through the openings of the belly of the boat, there was some openings there. And some guy said we are passing the coast of Spain, we are going to Africa. We thought they were going to use us as target practice with their planes. We didn't know. Again, we were scared, we were frightened. We are about panicked. We were shaking. We didn't know, we were drowning like rats. Well, what do they intend doing with us? So we finally got to Algiers. We were happy we landed. They put us in the prisons there. And the attack of famine, the \_\_\_\_\_ don't know nothing. They had rats in there the size of cats. Vultures, the rats, you name it, they had it. It must have been, maybe, six weeks, seven weeks. We lost track of time. We didn't know what day or night, the day of the week, the month. We lost everything but our senses, and we were close to that. We kept our senses by knocking on the cell. The other guy, he answered back and we knew we weren't alone. They finally took us out and put us in the cattle cars and took us into that hell hole. Four days in 100 to 110 degree heat. We were crowded in the cattle cars. They put maybe four cows or two camels, we were probably 40, 50 people. People died standing up. The ones who were dead \_\_\_\_\_, they threw the water in, opened the door, threw water and some bread. Few made it. By the time we got there many had died standing up. And this heat. Unbearable heat. We already felt but when we got out of the cattle cars, now we had to walk maybe 10, 15 miles because that was the last stop of the railroad. We had to walk

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to the camp. And the \_\_\_\_\_ on horseback would beat us as we, because we were all chained together. There the French were, chaining you're legs and you're arms to one another. And the one's that fell we had to drag them along. And even the ones that were dead, we still had to drag them along. There was no reason. We felt already better when we saw the camp from afar. What was the camp? Barb wire in a circle and a couple of tents. I'm now going back a bit. Because they were really bad times. And when we got in the camp we stood there for hours. The camp commander came to us and he says, now listen up. I have never forgotten what he said. His name is Kabosh. He said, you all came here to die. It's just a matter of time. Some will live a little longer and some won't. But you all came here to die. That is my job and I'm good at my job. Oh, people cried and people sat there in desperation. People wanted to die, wanted to kill themselves. It wasn't a pretty sight. They told us the next day we start work. Because the guards saw this, yeah, he's here for the duration . . . of life. No body gets out of here. They had about four concentration camps and four or five, I figure, in Algiers. None were very good. Ours was considered the worst of them all. And it was. I don't know how good the others were, but if ours was the worst, they were very bad. I tell you, how I survived the two years. You know, two years, that's a long time. How I survived that for two years, that hell hole, I will never know. To this day, I think about all these things, all these experiences, how I survived weeks and weeks in solitary

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confinement in Algiers, in that dirty prison where we had to lick the walls for a little moisture. I can't even go into details because it's too cruel. How I survived the \_\_\_\_\_ and the hunger and the being so scared and the hiding and the smuggling borders. And the nights we cried because my mother isn't there. Nobody was there. And the desperation, the hopelessness. How we had the strength to deal with this is beyond my understanding. And to this day I can't understand this. It's been fifty years and I'm still living it. It's like it happened yesterday. I see in front of me like it happened, I, if there's a way to get it out of my head I will find it. You can't live with it and you don't live without it. Can you understand that? It's there always, all the time. It's with you. All that life. They robbed me of my life. They robbed me of ten years of the best years of my life. And then they robbed me for the rest of my life because I'm living with it.

Q: After you got out of the camp, how did you remember those experiences? Did you try to forget about it a little bit for a while, when you came to America? Did you seek out other people who had had similar experiences?

A: No. It was many years that I couldn't even talk about it. I couldn't even talk about it. My wife knows very little to this day. Because she cannot bear to hear it. The brutality and the cruelty from this so-called civilized, world community has done to the Jewish people is unbelievable. She cannot even understand that, she does not want to talk about it. And I have never really tried to force it on her because it is not

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fair.

Q: When did you first talk about it after the war? Who did you first talk about it with?

A: It took many years. Maybe thirty-five, thirty-three years before I even mentioned it to anybody. My children to this day don't know anything about me. I have a daughter that is educated, a school teacher, very intelligent. Has a beautiful home, husband, two children. She knows nothing about me. My son, 3 years of college, an educated boy, smart. Very intelligent boy. He has a picture of the fellow agents, fellow, what you call it? He's a fellow agent, he's a smart boy. He doesn't want to talk about it. He knows nothing about me. And I say to him, Paul, I have a need to talk. You want to hear? He says, oh, that's great, but I really don't want to hear. When we went to Israel, I'm in the upper sham, my children wouldn't go in. It shows you, you have to be a special type of a person to understand, to endure this, to be able to talk about it, to be able to discuss it. That the average person cannot even comprehend. How do you understand, don't even want to talk about it, don't even want to know about it. Because it's too cruel, it's too brutal, it's too terrible. And why should they? Why should they feel sad, why should they feel pain, why should they feel hurt, like I did. It was put on me. I didn't chose this. I endured it because I wanted to live. One reason, I wanted to live. That was the only reason. Not that I liked it or wanted to do it or wanted to be a hero. I just wanted to live, I wanted to stay alive. If I would never have experienced this I wouldn't want to know about this



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either. People have told me, go write a book. A book on what? On cruelty and brutality? What the world did to us? I ask myself, there was so much room in this world to put a few Jews. Why didn't they? Look how big countries are, Canada is so big. Australia. Whatever you call it, everybody could have taken a few. Hitler said in a speech in 1937, he said, take the Jews or we'll kill them. As simple as that. Take them, we don't want them, you take them or we'll kill. To the world, he said that. There was no response. There was no response, nobody, in fact, not only didn't they respond to it, but they all closed their borders. They left us . . .

**End of tape 1.**

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## **Tape 2**

Q: Let's talk again, let's go back. Life in the United States, after the war?

A: Life in the United States, after, when I got here was very difficult. There were no such things as help or organizations to help you, do anything for you. Again, I was alone. All by myself and I had to make decisions all by myself. These were different kinds of decisions. It wasn't decisions of how to fight a war or how to capture the Nazi's or whatever. This was just, again, how to fight for my daily bread.

I had to fight for something to eat, a place to live and I may not have been chased by anybody but, nevertheless, I had to find a place to sleep.

Q: We left off before where you had started to do well in the watchmaking business.

I'm wondering, did you also start to seek out how you felt about religion and Jewish organizations and did you start to search out social groups?

A: Yes, yes, yes. I had no time for social groups. And I had lost my belief in God. I do not believe in God. I am what they call a traditional Jew. I'm a Jew, I fight for being a Jew and I die for being a Jew, but I'm not religious. Religion was taken away from me. You know, when I left home I went to Italy. My mother gave me a set-o-thrown (ph), do you know what that is? A talus, you know what that is? And she says, this will bring you luck, take it with you. I got as far as Italy, Milan, and I would talk to it. I was homeless there, I slept on a park bench and I still have a buddy over there. I wasn't the only one, there were thousands of us. And I said,

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why isn't God helping me? Really. I believed in Him. I went to the Synagogue every Friday and Saturday. I went to \_\_\_\_\_, I went to, I did everything I was suppose to do. We were religious, we had a religious home. The kosher, religious home. We celebrated every holiday. I spoke by the Hebrew and Jewish \_\_\_\_\_. Why isn't He helping me? And after I had a few days of hunger, I said, He's not going to help me. No way. I better, I went ahead and I got very angry and I buried it. I went into a park and buried it. I want no part, I said, I want no part of you anymore. If you're not there when I needed you, I don't need to, I don't want you, and I don't need you. You're not going to help me, not now, not ever. I can see that. Whether you don't see, whether you don't hear, whether you are there, whether you're not there. There is no God. I did it in anger. I was, what, 17-years-old. And that was the last I ever was religious. I haven't set foot in the Synagogue, oh yes, last, the first time in 50 years. Last Yom Kipper. When I went with my grandson. My grandson says, Grandpa, come with me to the Synagogue. And I couldn't deny him this. I have rather mixed emotions about that. When I went into the Synagogue with my grandson and I had to cantor and I knew all this by heart still, because I was brought up that way, I said, who are you praying to? To a God that took away my family? My home? My country? To a God that didn't help me when I needed Him? To a God that never saw me suffer? That didn't bring me a drink of water or a piece of bread when I needed it? What am I doing here? And,

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on the other hand, went through my mind, my mother would have wanted me to go.

If my mother was here before me, she would say, son, go. Go to the Synagogue, it is good for you. It wasn't good for me, I went, but it wasn't good to me. Because there is too much pain and too much hurt and too much disappointment in me. This sense of loss. There was so much. Like my three brothers, my three sisters, my mother and my father, I sense of that loss. And a sense, my whole life, the best years of my life. I can never get that back. That I went through what I did and the rest of my life, the memories that I have to live with. What is that? What is there for me? What joy? What happiness? In between, I had to work. I worked fifteen hours a day, not just for the money. I didn't want to think about it. Because my mind thinks. Because if I let my mind go on, I'll go crazy. I would go out of my mind. I no longer know what's right, what's wrong, what's good, what's bad. I no longer know why I feel the way I do. Many times I don't even understand myself. Why do I say, the hell with it all. Start a new life? How can you do that? How can you say that? How can you forget many years of your life? How can you forget a family? A home? I was torn out of a home and put into a world of brutality and cruelty. A world I did not understand. Or how to deal with. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_?

How I did it, I can't go on and on, I don't know where to stop and I don't know where to start. It took me some forty years before I was even able to talk about it. Sure, I

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mellowed with time. I don't have that much hate in me anymore. Oh, I didn't get merely depressed. Disappointed. The anger. I don't feel that anymore. I'm numb.

I don't care anymore about my \_\_\_\_\_. I have a few more years to go, so what difference does it make, that's what they say. What difference does it make? They really don't know, nobody cares. Write a book about this? Who would read it? Who wants to know?

Q: You're first years in the U.S., you said you didn't want to talk about this with anyone. Were there not times when you wanted to seek out people who had similar experiences?

A: No.

Q: Never?

A: I didn't want to know, no. To be honest with you. I didn't want to, I just wanted to keep busy. There were people there that I could have talked to, that had similar experiences.

Q: Did you search out for information on other hands? What had happened to other people's families, anything like that?

A: Yeah. I heard about it. There's one boy that I know and he's in San Francisco. He is writing a book on it. He came to see me. And he gave me a list of people that I knew that he found out about. So, what good is it? I knew these people, so what good is it? So, they died in the meantime, and, whatever, I couldn't come over with

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him, talk about the misery. Talk about the cruelty. Oh yes, we had a meeting in my house. There must have been maybe a dozen of us. We were in the same camp at the same time. Sure, we started to have a talk about it, we remembered. Then we talked some more. Then we said good-bye to each other. So what? Is that going to bring anybody back that we lost? Is it going to bring back the, it can't make us feel good. Feel better. Not good, better. So what? Does it change you're feelings? You're bitterness? Against this society that allowed such a thing to happen. Against the world community that didn't care. No, I don't see the point. And I don't see the point in talking to anyone. I have been talking about this all these years, knowingly or not knowingly, to myself. I'm tired of talking about it. Talking to myself. Not to anybody else. But I'm tired of talking about it. I don't want to talk about it to myself anymore. Once in a while, I say to my grandchildren, I say, when they \_\_\_\_\_ around, and I know that we died for a \_\_\_\_\_ . I say, why? You mustn't do that. Do they understand? Our Jessie, 6-years-old, you don't waste. Do they know from waste? They have everything. What they don't have, I give them. It's still things, that's with me. Even with my son. I say, don't sin for. He don't want this and he don't want that. I said, Paulie, don't sin. Paulie, my little Paulie. He's 30-years-old, but he's still my little boy. When he went away, I cried. When my daughter got married, I hated my son-in-law. He took away all I had. He took away my family. All the family I have is my

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son and my daughter. He took away my daughter from me. I hated him. I didn't say anything, but he saw it. And to this day he can't forgive me. I know I'm going to end up the way I started, with no one. You see, my wife goes out at nine in the morning, he comes over in the afternoon. She goes to Brooklyn college, she goes, yes, you have \_\_\_\_\_. My daughter lives in Jersey. I talk to her a couple of times a week. My son in Long Island, I talk to him once in a while. I'm still alone. And my son left to go to college in Canada. Carlton University. I cried. Is this normal? He said to my wife, he has to get use to it. We are not going to stay with him forever. He has to get use to it, I go to college. He has to get use to, I'm moving out. But I never got use to it. He didn't understand why. And neither do I. I don't understand why I do what I do, I act the way I do. I can't let go. That's all I've got. And yet, I have to. So it's, you learn things in the past, you gain, you lose, you have to let go. But it's not easy. It's very difficult to be alone. Here, I am alone, look at this big house. And I know the inevitable is going to come. But all the experiences of the past hasn't taught me enough to accept the inevitable. You understand that? Nothing. I have to accept what comes. Just like in the camps. I had to accept and adjust. Whatever came my way. No food, no food. No water, no water. No this, no this. No liberty, no freedom, no freedom. I accept. I can no longer accept anything anymore. You know the old battle cry? Issay. That's French. Enough. Enough is enough. You can accept so much, so many times, so

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often, that it's enough. You can't paddle anymore, you're tired. Tired of fighting, tired of battling, tired of, that is why they call me wishy-washy in my family. Wishy-washy. Grandpa's wishy-washy. Why am I wishy-washy? No fight. You want it, go take it. You want a doll, I buy it for you. She has fifteen, I'll buy it for you. No, my son wants another car, another car. No, that's okay. My daughter wants something, fine. My wife wants to go here, go here. She wants to go there, go there. There is no resistance anymore left in me. No resistance. I'm aware of it, they are not. I'm aware of it. And I ask myself what has happened to me? Is this what this did to me? All these years, these bad years? I don't know. Things are hard to understand, even for me. I've been living with it all these years. My experiences, I wouldn't even talk about the little details. Talking about jumping a lot of, over jumping a lot of details. I'm living with it. It's like it happened yesterday. When I broke out of jail, it's like it happened yesterday. Let me go back a ways, to Germany. I smuggled myself from Italy into France. Before I did this, we got a train and went to Marie-a-sal-amour (ph), I know they're familiar with this area, but it's the border between Italy and France. We laid there for four or five days. There must have been hundreds of us. We couldn't get back into Italy. We couldn't get into France, across the borders. They called that 'The St. Mora Incident' (ph), nobody knows about it. Or very few people know about it. I can't forget it. Finally, the fishermen, there was a fishing village, a small fishing village, they said, we'll take



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you around the bend. This was where the mountains meet the ocean, we will take you around the bend into the beaches of France. If you give us everything you've got. Every man, woman and children. People did. How long can they lay there and starve to death? Nobody wanted, nobody helped. There were two gun boats, an Italian gun boat on one side and a French gun boat on the other. This was just before the war broke out, a few days before the war broke out. So people gave them everything they had, errings, their rings, gold, everything. It was the fishermen had a chance to make some easy money. They were poverty stricken. They never saw any money there. They put them on the boats, the boats were old. They went out on the ocean, the ocean breakers were high. You know, breakers are always high, when they hit the mountains, the rocks. They cracked in two. They overloaded the boat, they got greedy. The boats cracked in two. People fell into the water. I saw that so I'm sure. And you could hear the cries. Help us. Save us. Somebody help, most of them said, God, help us. Save us. There was the father, the wife and two kids. Who do you save? The wife can't swim. The kids can't swim. And the kids are, save me Daddy. The other one says, save me Daddy., and the wife was going down. And you can't swim. The screams and the yells. And the people on the boat, we are laughing when that happened. They were laughing. They didn't put down the boat to save them. They could have. They were laughing. I saw that. And the cries of pain and the cries of desperation.

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I hear it to this day. To this day, the screams. Help me. Help us, somebody please help me. And nobody helped. Nobody saved. And the next day the bodies, they are washed ashore. In with the tide, hundreds of them, they took on the boats. They call that "The St. Mora Incident". I was there. I saw it. You ask me if I believe in God? That is when I decided to smuggle into France. I couldn't go over the mountain. I never climbed a mountain in my life. I never saw a mountain in my life. The highest mountain I ever saw was the garbage dump in my town. I couldn't swim, the breakers, I would drown. I couldn't go on the other side, I couldn't go back to Italy. There the guards were standing with the rifles. I couldn't get into France, they were standing by the borders the other way. Where do you go? What do you do? And there was all of them, not even 18-years-old. Never made a decision in my life. The first time away from home. Where do you go? What do you do? I had a little kid that turned out to be, he was 12, 13-years-old, he lost his family, running, suddenly he lost his family, he was alone. I said to him, you know, if we don't make a move, we are going to die here. Nobody came to help us. There was a whole wide world out there. Nobody cared, nobody gave a damn. So we went to the barb wire. I said to him, I got smart very quickly, I said, the only way we're going to get out of here are by doing the things that nobody expects us to do. By going into France, I tore the barb wire. Nobody expects to be that bold. And that's what he did. He went right through. Sure, we got bloody, we got dirty, we

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were \_\_\_\_\_ anyway. Nobody's going to help us. I realized right then and there, I am on my own. There is nobody out there in this whole world that's going to give me a hand out to help me. If I don't help myself nobody is. That's how we got into France. And that's how it started. The French are a very kind people, you know. They were just as cruel and nasty and brutal as the Germans. If they could, first of all, you go to jail for a month, four weeks in jail. Before they even talk to you. That's for causing the politically. That's the first thing they do, they throw you in a cell and that's it, you stay there for a month. That's just for causing the \_\_\_\_\_. And then they ask you your name. They don't care who you are. And these jails in France are not hotels. You can take my word for it. And then they call you a spy. They called me a German spy. Seventeen and a half years old, hungry, dirty, with torn clothes, bloody. I'm a spy. That is the intelligencia of the French police. The level of intelligence. If I was a German spy I wouldn't look like that, I wouldn't be like that, I wouldn't come in like that. There was too much for the intelligence to deal with. And then you had endure. There was so much you had to endure. The whole life was enduring, accepting, dealing with it. And you never had a chance. You were always the underling, you were always the one that had to deal with it. That had to put up with it, that had to accept things. You were never on top, you were always on the bottom. And today, I have a home and everything I want, everything I need. I say to myself, what was this all about? How did I do it? How did I came out

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on top? You figure that one out. That's one for the books, how did I come out on top after all that? After being on the bottom all that time. I struggled, that's how I came out on top. I struggled. I did without. I didn't ask for anybody's help, I did it myself. Even America, it was a struggle for me. It took me a good five years until I got out from under. It wasn't easy. But I've learned enough in my past to deal with my present and there is my future. I learned to make decisions, and mostly the right ones. I learned to deal with it, without any kind of hesitation, I came my way. Mostly I came out on top. And that was, not because I'm smart, or super smart. It's because my experiences have taught me a lesson, it taught me things. You see, when I go out in my car and I go into a strange area or neighborhood, I know my way out because I'm \_\_\_\_\_. And I know we're building there, and a church there, and a place there, there's a restaurant there, oh, I came in the other way. Observing. Learning. You always learn. You keep an open mind. You always seem to be doing the right thing now. And I say to myself, how come I did all the wrong things in my life before? How come? I had to learn. We all go through school, only the school I went to wasn't the school that you went to. And I fought in the underground, in the French underground. Let me go buy the \_\_\_\_\_. We run through, we lived in the woods. We would strike here, strike there. What did we have to work with? What did we have to fight with? We had nothing. But somehow we managed, with little, with nothing, we managed. And how did we

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manage? By using ingenuity, natural ingenuity. Not learn from books.

Q: You said there were certain things that you always come back and remember?

A: Yes.

Q: Any particular details on them? Are there a couple of specific details that you always sort of come back to?

A: I come back to the detail area, when we didn't behave they would put us 14 days in four-caf-a-rally (ph), four-caf-a-rally (ph) was with the French Foreign Legion, the last outpost. What they did to us, it was, night's were so bitter cold and we were at the foot of the As-fas (ph) mountains and the cold would come down from the mountains. And they would hang us on our arms and hose us down with ice cold water and beat us with the back of their rifles every night, and they use to come in drunk, or they use to be doped up, and that was fun for them. Fun, they called that.

Let's have some fun. Things like this for the smallest infraction of the rules. The camp commander came in, you saluted him. And you, one way he walked by you away, but the other way he wanted, this way. If you looked at him crooked, or you had good hair, or something like that. Fourteen days, [speaking in French]. These are the things, we were not allowed to make a fire. We were hungry. So, we had a big pot. So, the Red Cross would share they're packages sometimes. What did they send us? Nothing we could eat. Things we had to cook. Like peas, things like, hard things. So we put our water together and we cooked. Cooking wasn't

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allowed. You get fourteen days at four-caf-a-rally (ph). We had look outs, if anybody sees the \_\_\_\_\_ coming, whistle. A guy, he was asleep, and he didn't see. I was busy mixing this stuff. Cooking. So this guy stands in front of me, with his \_\_\_\_\_. What are you doing there? Nothing. You're cooking. I'm not cooking. He says, what are you doing, aren't you cooking it? No, I'm just standing here, I'm not cooking. He kicked it into the sand, food that we were looking forward, to have a little bit to eat for everyone. Can jour four-caf-a-rally (ph). I knew I was going to go to four-caf-a-rally (ph). I was certain . . .

**End of Side 1 of Tape 2.**

Q: We have just taken a break and now we're upstairs in Mr. Alexander's study looking at photographs. What's this one?

A: 1941, 1943. This is the camp. Here is the photos of the Andes Mountains, and all the \_\_\_\_\_ I came from. And here is four-caf-a-rally (ph). I am the only man alive who has these photos. This is the camp. This is how we lived. Jaffra, Algeria, North Africa concentration camp, 1941 to 1943. Here's the camp, these are the tents that we lived in. That's how we slept, on these stones and grounds. See?

Q: Who are these people here?

A: These are friends of mine that I was with. They were Russian officers that were in the Spanish Civil War. And that I will find that they kept me alive. Here, here is that, Jaffra, December 24, 1942. "Make your life so that you later don't have to be

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ashamed of your past." He wrote that to me. "In friendship, Boris." I've had this picture all these years. See? This is a picture of my mother. "Sunday, 5/8/39: To memory on your mother who wishes you the best. I wish you much luck in your future. Don't forget your mother." See? "My dear son". I wrote, "in June, 1943, Va-look (ph), who didn't seem to like me very much." I wrote that on it. And here, "in April 13th, when I was liberated, I escaped death. We will meet again." We never did. This spot you see, I carried this picture on me all these years, for see his blood, don't you see, on here, spots of blood, from the beatings that I took because it was always on me, that picture. Always kept it all these years. He wished me good luck, best of luck. Here's what I accomplished, you see that? Those are my accomplishments.

Q: Could you just read a couple of them?

A: American Watchmakers Institute, Certificate of Master Watchmaker. Logical Institute of America, Certified Watchmaker. \_\_\_\_\_ School of Watchmaking, Completion. Master Watchmaker. Chronicle Watch Technician, Pittsburgh, PA. Master Chronocraft Technician.

Q: And this is a poem that you wrote?

A: Yeah, that I wrote. Reading: "My young years shelled by German Nazi murderers, torn away from my family and tossed into a world of despair and brutality, a world I did not understand. How does one forget the years of

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degradation, the humiliation, the hunger and sickness. Corpses of young and old staring at you then and now, forgotten by a world that didn't care. I am a graduate. I survived the pits of Hell." Here, I wrote that. "We have followed the bright beam of freedom's light, ours was a journey out of the night, with empty hands we will rest on this shore. Our loves, our hopes, our bodies too sore. We will never forget the pain and sorrow. We live for today, there is no tomorrow. We will learn to \_\_\_\_\_ until it was too late, we lived in a world so full of hate. We remember our tragic past, we escaped the flames and are free at last. Let us have hope and we will survive. Yes, we are here, we are strong and alive." This is my world, here. And everyday I lived it. We never survived the Holocaust and we are living with it. This is the world of a Holocaust survivor. How do you forget this? How do you forget this? Here, all this. Holocaust. All these books. When I'm alone, I read these books over and over. And I remember the people that died so others could live. Every one of them. These were my people. These were my people that gave their lives and this was written in my concentration camp, this book. All I say is in this book, in detail. You remember and it hurts. That's my mother and my three sisters. My brother and his wife. Sure, they killed them all. He was in Belgium at the time and she was in Germany. She tried to get to him, crossing the border they caught her, they hanged her next to her baby, from a tree. You see, here. My three sisters and my mother. You see the way that they are dressed. We were people of means. See the way



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she's dressed.

Q: And do you know what happened to them?

A: Pardon me?

Q: Do you know what happened to them?

A: Who?

Q: You're sisters and you're brothers?

A: I don't know. The last I heard was they were cast in Auschwitz. I wished I knew.  
I wished I knew.

Q: Start that again, we're back downstairs now.

A: You know, when you suppress these feelings and these memories and these experiences and this hurt and this pain for so long, for so many years. Once in a while, you think your past is going to come out and you don't let it out because you know that nobody understands it. And nobody wants to know.

Q: Let me ask you about that because upstairs, in your office and in your living room, there are photographs, there are books about the Holocaust and, obviously, it's present in your life, but you say that your kids and your wife don't like to hear about it too much. They don't know that much about your experiences, is that the reason?

A: Very little. They know very little, and I don't push. Why should they know. Can they change anything? Can anybody make up for what they did? I think the world

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is just as guilty as Germany. Can anybody make up for this? For these losses? The hurt and the pain and the cruelty and the barbaric ways? Who can make good? Is it enough to say you're sorry?

Q: Do you're kids ever ask? I mean, do you ever, how have you talked about it in the past?

A: No.

Q: How has it been brought up?

A: They may know my past but they wouldn't talk about it. They may know where I came from, but they don't want to talk about it. And I don't push it. Why should I? What good will it do? Will anything make up for what the world has done? What Hitler did? And the Germans? And what the world had allowed to do it? It's been fifty years. People say, enough of the Holocaust. To them, it's enough. How can it be enough for the survivors? It can never be enough, you can never forget. Can you forgive, can you forget? Should you forgive, should you forget? Who knows. Who has the answers? They say you only hurt yourself by keeping it alive. Would you rather have died? You don't know the answer. I don't know the answer.

Q: Over the last thirty years, have you found it important to talk about it or not talk about it at different times?

A: I don't need to talk about it. Because I doubt if most will listen. And if they listened, what good would it do? I look at the things, I look at the photographs, I

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look at the, between my memories and between the photographs and between the things I write. I write poems. I wrote more poems than this. I have no desire to keep it alive, you have to need to keep it alive. That's why you give up talking about it to anyone because nobody wants to know. Everyone has their own problems. And what could anyone say to make you feel better, tell me that? How could anyone make me feel better? What could they possibly do or say to say enough is enough? What is enough? How do you define the word, enough? There can never be enough. We lost 6 million people, 200,000 children burned alive. How is enough, enough? I've spent ten, twelve years of my life in misery and suffering. How is that enough? And the rest of my life having nightmares about it. How is enough, enough? When my wife gets up in the morning, sometimes she says, she worries about this and worries about that, she doesn't feel good. I says, you know, what would you have said in a concentration camp? Or we go out to eat and she's eating them like this, and she doesn't see anything she likes and I said, what would you have said in a concentration camp? They gave us no menu. In fact, they gave us no food. What would you have said then? Everything I, I connect everything with the camps. \_\_\_\_\_, what would you have said? You have a pain, at least you have a doctor to go to. What would you have said in a camp, there was no doctor to go to. You laid down and died. What would you have said then? I always seem to be going back to the experiences, for some reason or another. So

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what good is it, where does it get me? Instead of me saying, well, we'll go and see a doctor. I say to her, what would you have said in the camp? It's tough. You seem to think that we are tough people. We are, age maybe made us a little tough and we are hard people. We can absorb and we are able to take hardship and disappointments. You're wrong. We are just as you and everybody else. We laugh, we cry and we remember. And we deal with anything that comes our way. We have emotions. We have feelings, just like anybody else. That's just the way it is. We have no, there is no way to deal with this. This was a bad time. There's no way to deal, there are no answers. God is not the answer. Man is not the answer. Revenge is not the answer. Make time go back. Give me back what was mine. Make it happen. How else could I be happy? People say I never laugh. What have I got to laugh about? Oh, I have a sense of humor anyway, but what have I really got to laugh about? Like they said to me, we want you to live with it. I am living with it. And I can't get out of it. You see, you can't live with it and you can't live without it. What's the answer? Nothing is going to happen. It's never going to get any better. Many times, I sit down here, \_\_\_\_\_, I'm sitting down here. Like this. And he says, now, at last God, I didn't believe in you anymore, give me the answers. Give me a little happiness. Take this sadness away from me, give me a little, let my mind feel a little better, don't give me so much trouble. Nothing is happening. I can sit here for an hour, two hours, down here. And nothing. My wife

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comes up, what are you sitting in a dark room for? I say, it's something you don't understand. How do you give up on things? It's hard. It's difficult. It's there. When you can't find it with all that you had. It's been fifty years, maybe more. And it's still like it was yesterday. But my mother said to me, when I get out of prison. I was in prison, in my home town, two or three months, they scooped me up from the side of the street. My mother said, \_\_\_\_\_, they will come right back. Don't stay outside. Why we lived in fear? I went out to get a loaf of bread, I came back. On the way back, a car on the side, they arrested me. You're a Jew boy? Yes. He arrested me. I was, what, 16, 17-years old. And they threw me in jail. I remember. Cell Number 10. Never forgot it. When I got out, my mother got me out. I don't know how she did it, she must have paid somebody off. We had a great deal of money. I remember coming home from prison, the jail. My mother is sitting by the door with my little sister in her arms. And she said to me, son, here is 10 marks. I didn't even get into the house. Here is 10 marks, that's all you're allowed to take with you. Go to Milan, Italy. Why Milan, Italy? You didn't need a passport, they were friends. Mussolini and Hitler were friends, that was the only border I could go through. Go to Milan, Italy. Son, run, son, run, and don't ever look back. Those were her last words. So I said to her, we will see you again? I be back soon. I didn't know what is happening to me. She says, I doubt it. Go, boy. Go, son, go. Go to the railroad station, here's you're ticket for the train. Take the train and go.

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She gave me a little bundle to take \_\_\_\_\_. And that's what I did. And to this day I feel guilty for having left her. I should have said to her, Mama, we all go. You go, I go, the kids go, we all go, or I don't go. I was not even 17, I didn't know. Perhaps some kids you could have hidden in the Italian mountains. I have all kinds of excuses now, in my mind. What you could have, what you could have done, or should have done, or would have done. I know somebody would give us a piece of bread. If we would have gone into Italy, gone into the Italian mountains where nobody would know, very deep in the mountains. Perhaps we would have survived. Perhaps. Perhaps some mountain people would have given us something to eat, would have hidden us. That's fifty years later, when you say to yourself, why didn't I do this or why didn't I do that? They sacrificed their lives for me. And I give them nothing back. How do you live with this? How do you live with guilt? Oh, perhaps some people can. I know I can't. I've been living with this for fifty years. The only way that's going to die is to die with me. I've got to tell you. It is not easy. It is not easy to live with it. And now I write poems.

Q: Have you, since you came to the U.S., have you gone back to Germany, to you're home town? To see the house where you grew up?

A: Yes, I went back twice.

Q: And what was that like?

A: It was not good. I went back twice. I saw our house, we had a big house.

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Standing, not touched by any bombs or anything. People live in it, pay rent to the state, the city or whatever. They own it, they say. I saw the house. I went into the house and it broke my heart. The people that answered the door asked me what I wanted. I said, if you would allow me I would like to come in and look at the house. But the house is not for sale. I can tell you that the house is not for sale. So, I must have looked strange to them. They said, come in. I looked, I looked at my bedroom, all the others. It broke my heart. I walked out. I went into the Temple \_\_\_\_\_ . The Temple is abandoned, it never burned out. Because it was in a building where people lived so they are afraid to burn down the building, so they never touched it with any fire. The woman opened the door, the caretaker. The door squeaked. I walked in and there was just like I left it. The \_\_\_\_\_ were still in there, hanging there. We had the name plates on every seat. I was choir boy. My name plate was on the choir seat, where the kids would sing with the cantor. I stood there, looked. My mother's name, my father's name, all there. And suddenly the Temple filled with the same people, they are full of people, the same people that I knew. All the people. And they were praying and I saw them all there. I was in the middle of, I was in another world. I saw the Temple full of people, until I finally heard the voice from the caretaker, you've been here an hour. I have to lock up. I went out, I went to the office, where they call the yidda-jig-a-minda (ph), you know what that means? The Jewish office, Jewish relation, something like that. I

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said, do you have the file of all the Jews that use to live here? Yes, we have most of the files. You German's are good at keeping files. I looked through the files. Where my brother's were shot, left Germany, place unknown. Harry Alexander, that's me. Left Germany in 1939. Place of, where he lives, unknown. Never returned. Possibly dead. That was my file. I saw my own file. I looked, I said any other Alexander's alive on here? He said, no, he doesn't know anyone. They either left the country or died. I spent about three hours looking through the files, until I found my file. So I left, I had nothing more to stay for. I looked around the city, all the familiar places I use to grew up. And I met a few people. They were children then, now they are older people. I remember them. But that was about all. I had a friend here that died. I use to be in a concentration camp with him, I met his family. And they said, here, they had pictures of me. They said, he talked a lot about you. The only thing, he was so sorry, always sorry, that he was, you were so young at the camps, that he felt so sorry for you. That's what the wife told me. \_\_\_\_\_ . I visited his grave, I put flowers on it. And then I left.

Q: What's been the best information you've been able to figure out about your own family? What happened to them?

A: Nothing.

Q: You say you think you're sisters might have been at Auschwitz?

A: Yeah, they were deported to Auschwitz. Some survived, some didn't. I have no,



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I have inquired about all kind of organizations. Ah yes, I have crossed you're name with, I have a stack of papers up there even to the ceiling. And I haven't stopped. I'm still looking. Until the day I die I will be looking. And I've prayed, just if I find one of my sister's for one day. That would make my life.

Q: What do you think happened to them? Do you image? Do you think about it?

A: No. I imagine many things. I hate to think about it. My little sisters. Maybe they were used in medical, you know, the research by the \_\_\_\_\_, could they have been gassed in the gas chambers, could they have been hanged, could they have been buried alive, could they? Just the thought, what could have happened that makes me chill, makes me cry. Just with what could have happened to them. You know, people killed their own children in the camps. To keep them from suffering, did you know that? What did my mother do, I don't know, maybe \_\_\_\_\_ her kids already. You feel sad, a lot of sadness, a lot of unhappiness. And this is the one thing you don't know really how to deal with. You just feel that depression, that heavy load on you and you can't get rid of it.

Q: How do you think it's effected your own views about your own family and having a family? Did you know that you wanted to have a family?

A: Yeah, I wanted a family. I only had two children. Makes me very possessive. I can't let go of them. I love them too much. I have a lot of love to give. I love them too much. I see, when I'm in my daughter's house and she yells at the kids, I say,

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don't yell at them . . .

**End of tape 2.**

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### **Tape 3**

Q: And we are talking about your own family.

A: Yeah, I am very possessive of them. I perhaps am easy-going. I love them a great deal. And nothing seems to be important, but there were the kids too. Don't be so critical. In other words, it could always be worse. Be happy you have them, be happy they are healthy. Be happy they are normal. Kids act like kids, that's normal. They will spill things, that's normal. They will break things, that's normal. And always there, I wish I had my sisters. They could break everything they want. They could do anything they want, I would be happy just to have them. And all that you appreciate these things. Do you know you have to have a history. One day my son came home, now he's with law enforcement, you know? But he comes home and he says, guess what happened today? I said, what happened? Somebody smashed the whole side of my car, brand new car. So I said, Paul, what did you do? Well, we took his name and in a few minutes the police were there in time with law enforcement, he says, everything was taken care of right away. So, come down and look at it. I came down and look at this car, the whole side was smashed in. So I said, Paul, is that all? Are you all right? He says, fine. I said, is that all? No problem. We get it fixed. You take my car and do you're business and I'll have the car fixed for you. We have conditions. I take care of it for you. He has no time, he works nights, days. He said, how can you stand there and tell me that it's all going

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to be a brand, new car? I says, Paul, it's only a car. It's not a life. He says, doesn't that bother you? I said, no. Why should it bother me? God, it's only if something had happened to you that it would have bothered me. This doesn't bother me at all. Nothing. No problem. I went to a guy, no, he'll fix it in three days, I had the adjuster there, car got fixed, looked like new, I picked up the car. I says, here Paul. He says, it looks like new. Wouldn't know anything happened. I said, see Paul. No big deal. So he said to me, is anything a big deal to you? I said, Paul, I had a lot of big deals in my life. This doesn't compare to my big deals. And I survived through big deals. He walked away, he said, you are hard to understand. I said, maybe so, but if you would give it a little effort, a little try, you'll understand what I mean. If you'd had the experiences I had in life, this is not a big deal.

Q: So with you're family, you refer to you're experiences a lot? But you don't apparently talk about it?

A: Yeah, right. I refer to them all the time. All the time. My granddaughter is coming tomorrow, she spills a glass of milk, no problem, don't worry about it. I wished I had a glass of milk to spill when I was in the camp. I would have licked it off the floor. No problem.

Q: Do you not think it's important to talk to your family about you're experiences? You're kids, you're grandkids?

A: No. No. They get it in the Jewish schools, the Sunday School, they always talk

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about it, yeah. It's not, I don't know, I have mixed feelings about that. Why should I, my little grandson is 9-years-old. Why should he hear about these things? One day I will leave him all my books on the Holocaust, I leave it to my grandson. And then it's going to be his decision, to read it or not to read it. I want it to be his decision. I want him, I want my son to come to me and sit down and say, now, I have time. Tell me about you're life. I want him to say it, I want it to be his decision, not mine. With my daughter, the same. I want it to be her decision, not mine. If my daughter would come to me and say to me, no telephone, no interruptions, talk to me. Daddy, talk to me about you're life. Perhaps then, but it has to be her decision, not mine. My wife knows very little. It was her decision to talk about it, not mine. I won't push it on her. I have no right to do that. I have to live with my life and they have to live with theirs. Everybody takes out of life what's important. And everybody has to absorb what's not important, or what they think is important. It's as simple as that. I've lived with my life, it's got to be, that's the way, whether I want it this way or whether it's, I cannot help it or whether I cannot get rid of it. It's my life and it's my head, it's my memories, my brain. I have to put up with it. I have to, I absorbed it, I lived it. I did it. Why should I forget about it? For my own sake? I can't. How do you forget these things? No, it's a very difficult thing. I guess we have, we survivors, we all live with guilt, every one of us. Why are we living and they are dead? You know, the old guilt, the Jewish guilt. Why didn't we just die,

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why didn't we do the other? Maybe it would have worked out this way or worked out the other way. But that is the way it worked out and that's the way we have to live with. Those are our feelings, those are our emotions, those are our lives. We are not happy people. He didn't kill just 6 million, he killed a hell of a lot more. I'm one of the victims. Do you think this is a life that I'm living? Sure, we eat, we drink, we talk, sometimes. We go out, we go take a walk. This is life? But our minds are still there. We still think about it, we still live it. We not only think about it, we re-live it. Every time. Let's go back for a moment, how we went, we were in Dunkirk. You've heard of Dunkirk? The North of France, on the beach where they shot the \_\_\_\_\_ into the ocean? The last two hours before the German tanks came, the British took their people over, back to England. Where was the fairness, they left us alone, they wouldn't take us. We ended up on Dunkirk. Do yourself a favor. Two hours before the German tanks came, you know what they said to us? We can't help you anymore. Dee-boy-ee-mou (ph). You know what that means? Help yourself. You're free to go. You are not under any command anymore. We had no guns, old guns that didn't work. We had the wrong ammunition with the wrong guns. The French. Dee-boy-ee-mou (ph). Go help yourself. Save yourself. And we had to run from Dunkirk all the way from the North of France to the South of France. On the way we talked German. The farmers were going to attack us with their pitch forks because they thought we were the Fifth Column. You've heard of

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the Fifth Column? They hated us. The Frenchmen attacked us with the pitch forks, the Germans tried to shoot us. And the hunger overcame us and we were exhausted from running - a thousand miles. I want to tell you, we were so hungry we broke into a chicken house. What do we know about chickens? We are not farmers. And the chickens started to go crazy and we tried to steal a few eggs and the farmer woke up, he came after us with pitch forks. We run for our lives. This is crazy. We can't even steal an egg. We run for our lives. They would have pitch forked us. So we went into the fields and stole grapes, where they were planting grapes. We ate the grapes. Only one problem, the grapes are covered with insecticide. We all were very sick from it. These are little incidences that you remember, little things, like yesterday, it's in you're head like yesterday. Sometimes you laugh, but it's a bitter laugh. Why? Why all that? Has humanity sunk that low? You find a reason why it happened, you find an excuse, you find why the world acted the way it acted. Why nobody came to help us. Why the Germans did what they did. No answers. We found the questions, we didn't find the answers. So there are many incidences like that. We went into Neim (ph), near Nice, about forty miles from Nice. There was the headquarters of the underground. Somebody gave us away, the guards surrounded us and says, come out with you're hands up. We knew they were going to shoot us. We were saboteurs, we were underground fighters, we were FFI. So the older guy says, you young guys, we were about 18 or

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20-year-olds, make it over the fields and we keep them busy. Make your way into Nice. We'll keep them busy here while you get out. There were guys 14-years-old with a pack they could hardly carry. Throw me your guns and run for your lives. We did. They were shooting at us, but they were mostly shooting at the other guys. They keep them busy so we could get away. I never know what happened to these guys. If they got away, if they shoot it out with them. So what's there in Nice for me? I got caught there. There was no way you could save yourself unless you had a friend there or somebody to hide you. You just couldn't get away from it. No matter where you turn, no matter what you did, or what action you took. You lost. You were a loser. You were condemned to be a loser from the day you left home because nobody wanted you and nobody helped you. And you had to fight so many odds. Just to stay alive. I don't know how to explain these things, there are just too many things that go through my head. And the miracle, I am alive today. A miracle. You see how I live. I live in the past, I don't live in the present or the future and I can't be rid of it. I cannot shake it. And somehow I feel good. You see, I feel at home in the past. Because that's what I know. Today I could fight them all because I know how. I could outsmart every one of them. I could out do or out run or out smart or out play anyone, because I have the experience. But it took me a lot of life, a lot of living to get that experience. A lot of suffering that I get that experience. I laugh out loud sometimes, when my wife asks me, why are you



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laughing? I said, I remember. In Nice I use to steal a bread and I wouldn't \_\_\_\_\_, and the baker could never catch me. That was funny for me. I look at it now and it's funny. I stole a bread. And I went to the hide-out and I shared it with another three or four guys. We each got a piece of bread. That was glory to us. We won the war. We got a piece of bread. We beat them all. We didn't die over self starvation. It's funny. Hey, guys, come, a piece of bread, we beat them this time. And they said, nobody is going to beat them. But this time we beat them. Next time we worry about it, there will come \_\_\_\_\_ we worry about it. You see, in France, they use to take the big baskets outside the bakery. They had the breads in there, long breads outside the store. We were hungry. We went into the small towns, villages, we saw the bread basket out there, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ walk on, grab two breads, and run like hell. Of course, that was a victory. There are so many incidents. I would walk right up to trees and people scoffed, but I stealed the figs from the trees. And then run like hell and they wouldn't catch us. We were always scared, always afraid. The guards will be able to beat the hell out of you if they catch you. But how could we live? How could we stay alive? How else? We didn't worry too much about it in those days, we were young. We could run, we were skinny, we could run, we could climb. And we had no nerve, brains, we didn't worry about the consequences. We knew they couldn't catch us, we were too fast for them. We were use to running. But that was all we

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did, running, that was the whole life, then running, grab and run, grab and run. Grab something and run. That was a life? Sleeping under a bride. Sleep on a park bench and always one eye open. See the cops, make his rounds, he will catch you. Sleep in bushes where they couldn't see you. That was our existence. We never knew what tomorrow's going to be. Yesterday is past, today we are still making it, tomorrow we don't know. That's how we lived, from day to day. Like I said to my Paul, we lived for today, there was no tomorrow. That is how we lived. And I think about this today and you say, I don't know how I made it. And when I look at my son, I say, I think to myself, may you never have to go through, my son, what I have. May it never happen to you. And I look at my grandchildren, so innocent, so beautiful, so little. And I cry. My heart gets heavy. I look at them, little faces. And my little grandson says, Grandpa, you always kiss me. Do they understand why? My grandson says, let me go, Grandpa. I hold him around, no, Grandpa, you've had me 10 minutes already, let me go. Does he understand why I can't let him go? I'm not just hugging him. I hug my sisters. I hug my mother. I hug my father. I hug my life, that I have lost. Do they understand, does anybody understand that? I can hold my grandchildren and tears come to my eyes. Does anybody understand that? How do you, \_\_\_\_\_ things like this. It's difficult. It's very hard.

Q: Do you think that there are things that are important to you, and what sort of things were important to you, that may not be important to people who haven't been

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through what you've been through? You said that God isn't important to you, that for a long time friends and socializing wasn't important to you. I'm wondering, over the last thirty, however many years, what has been important?

A: My children, my wife. After having my children, my family. That's all. I work, my family, my work made me forget my wife. I would keep myself busy from 8 in the morning until 1 or 2 o'clock the next morning. And when, then I was so tired I would fall into bed and go to sleep. I had to be active like that, it was important. Before I had children and I was married, it was important to make money, to make a living, to get myself out of the rut. To get myself on my feet. Once I got married and had the children, my family was important. Not even my wife so much, as my children. Because they needed me most. They are very important to me. And that was my whole life, my children. I was always the one that was over-protective. I was always the one that was always there when they needed me. I always was, whether they had the runny nose or whether they had a fever, ache, or whatever it was, I was always there. This was my whole life.

Q: Has politics been important? Has being Jewish been important?

A: No, no. I don't care. I don't care. I know that this world will take care of itself, with or without my help. I don't have to help them, carry a gun there. They manage very well. And about the world? I couldn't care less. I don't give a damn. I care about them that cared about me. I am totally indifferent. I hardly read the paper. I

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page through it, one-two-three, that's the end of it. I couldn't care less. They couldn't care when I needed them and I needed them for 10 years, in hell holes. They didn't come to my aid. There was no country that came to my aid. No country sent me a piece of bread. You know, I wrote a poem. May they rot in Hell, all the Kings, all the lands, that would not let us in. All the Gods, all the Priests, may the blood never wash off their skin. There was no priest, there was no Pope, there was no King, there was no land that opened their border and said, come in, Jews, come in here. You'll be safe here. Oh, there was room. Do you mean to tell me there was no room for 3 million people, all over the world? There were 800 people on the St. Louis, that boat that came over here, they wouldn't let them land, they were about to die. In America. Do you know that? Have you read the book on that? 800 people and they wouldn't let them land in America, 800 people. They could have gotten lost in one city block. And they went back and they got killed, they died. You tell me that's justice? You tell me that's humanity? You tell me that's compassion, that's pity? Oh, I know none of these things. No compassion, no pity. Yet, I will not pass by a beggar and not give him a dollar. I go to 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue, I will not pass by a little old lady that I think could be my mother and give her \$2 or \$3 dollars for the \_\_\_\_\_, poor woman. And my wife tells me, you say you have no compassion? No, I have no compassion. I feel sorry for her, but I have no compassion. There's a big difference.

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Q: What's the difference?

A: You don't have to have compassion to be sorry for somebody. To give them a couple of dollars if he's hungry, you give a couple, you don't have to care for that person. You don't have to care for anything. Just to give a couple of dollars, it doesn't mean anything. I have it. I wouldn't give her one of lungs or one of my kidneys, but I'll give her a couple of dollars.

Q: What about being Jewish?

A: Doesn't mean anything to me. I don't care. Don't you understand? I have lost everything that would be in high esteem for anybody else. I have lost all that. What good is it being Jewish? What does that get me? Yet, I'll die for it. If anybody called me a dirty Jew, I smack him. But I don't care about that anymore. Jewishness has never done anything for me. My mother was Jewish, kosher house, villages, my father, what did it get them? What did it get them? They have nothing. I use to go to the \_\_\_\_\_ every Friday night, every Saturday morning. The whole family went. We got dressed up. The boys in blue pants and white shirts and the girls in blue skirts and white blouses, that's the Jewish flag, the Jewish colors. And we had to, we celebrated every holiday. What did it get us? What did it get them? God saved, God saved the children? God protected them? What God? We are God. What God? Where was He? Oh, I heard people scream, [foreign words], but they would die while they were being killed. [Foreign words repeated].

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Where was he? Did he hid them? In the prison, when I lost my senses, \_\_\_\_\_, I pray, I said, God help me. Send me into the water. A piece of bread, anything. Take away the loneliness. Take it away, never mind food, never mind water, take away the loneliness. Lighten my heart, I'm crying. Do you think we didn't cry in the prisons? We didn't despair? We didn't lose hope? We didn't want to die? How often did I say, God, help me, please. Take away the loneliness. A piece of bread, a drink of water. God, please help me. Take me out of here. Where was the answer? We didn't get any bread. He didn't send an angel with a little water. He didn't send, he didn't take away the hopelessness. He didn't give us courage. I said to the Rabbi, he came to my house, he said, come to Shul-high (ph), and I said when you give me the answer to my question, to my satisfaction. Give me one good reason why I should go to Shul-high (ph). To empty my consciousness of guilt? I have done nothing wrong in my life that I have to ask forgiveness. God has nothing to forgive me for, but I have plenty to forgive Him for. Straighten that out and I'll come to Shul-high (ph). Convince me that there is a God and I'll come to Shul-high (ph). He said he hasn't got the answers. I said, then I don't go to Shul-high (ph). Go home and when you come back you give me the answers. We are like two adult people, we are intelligent, reasonably intelligent, grown up people. There are questions. I have gone through a great part of my life and nobody has the answers to why. I haven't got the answer and you haven't got the answer, so

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let's leave it at that. I have to live with my life the best I can, and you believe whatever you believe in. The only thing I believe in is me. That's the only thing. If I don't keep myself alive, nobody will. If I don't work and make a living, nobody will pay my bills. I'll be in the street. That's all I know. Let's be realistic. We say it like it is. I don't know what to say . . .

**End of side 1 of tape 3.**

Q: Continuing with the interview of Harry Alexander.

A: What do you want to know, tell me.

Q: Well, we were just talking about, we just finished talking about answers and questions. I wonder if you have had answers to some of you're question? If there's some lessons that you have learned?

A: The only lesson I have learned, my friends, is to listen. It is the realization that there are no answers. There are simply no answers to my questions. There is nothing I can change and nobody else is going to change it. There's nothing I can do to make my life any easier or to understand, to just understand my life. Why and how. I realized there are no answers that can change my life. After fifty years, I sit down and write poems about the Holocaust, what does that tell you? My mind is on it and I can't get rid of it.

Q: Is you're mind on it more now than it was, say, twenty years ago?

A: Yes, yes.

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Q: Why is that?

A: I was busier twenty years ago. I was in the work field. I was in the field out working and I was raising my kids. The kids were little then, they needed me, and I just was too busy. And since I retired, it hit me like a ton of bricks. My kids are out.

You see how quiet it is in the house? The whole house, just the two of us. And I can't give the house up. It's so big, look what we have, we've got here, upstairs. I can't give it up, this is where I raised my children. This is where I spent a good part of my life, in my memories, and I can't give the house up, I can't move. Since I retired, I have no time. Some say it's the golden years of you're life, it isn't the golden years. Don't you believe it. Because that's when everything really comes out. Because now you have the time. Everything comes out. It's not the golden years. People say, you make your own golden years. That's not true. The golden years make you, you don't make the golden years. Maybe you don't have, you don't think as much, the years gone by, like I do now. But it's with you. It was with you all the time. It never left you, you know that. It never really left you. It stayed with you.

Only you put it in the background. You shoved it back. I'm busy with the boy now, I'm busy with the girl now, you shove it back. I have to take her to school, I have to take him to school, I have to do homework with them and yet, you keep shoving it back until you get so tired, you went to sleep. Now you're not tired anymore. You don't shove it back anymore. It's taken over. Now it's all coming out, that you're



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being punished. That you put all this in the back of you're head, all these years, now it's coming out with all the brute force. What do you see upstairs? My sisters, my mother, the pictures. My wife says, why do you have it out? Put it away. How can you do that? They were once part of my life. They are still a part of my life. They maybe somewhere, wound up surviving, two or three of them, I don't know. I just don't know where, I just don't know where to look anymore. But why should I put it away? It's hard to understand, you can't philosophize. You know, all these things, you're whole life, all these years. It's with you. There is no way you can get out of it. It gets a hold of you. I don't let go. There are sometimes you shake it off and it does not go. No matter how hard you shake. What else would you like to know?

Q: I do wonder, we've talked some about you're life and becoming a watchmaker and life in the United States. We didn't talk much about getting married and raising a family and all that, but I'm wondering just in general, if you could quickly talk about if there is anything over the last twenty, thirty years that you think, were decision you made, were things that were directly related or effected by you're experiences during the war?

A: No, I always took things lightly. Because no matter what happens, whether to me, whether to the children, or my wife, no matter what happened, it couldn't have ever been as bad as I had it. I could never sink that low anymore, like I did. I sank

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rock bottom. This could never happen again. As long as there is a piece of bread to eat, a drink of water and a roof over my head. It would never be as bad as it was.

I can always build from there. There was nothing I couldn't build. I remember stupid things like, in Jaffra and Africa, the logga (ph), I speak German already, the camp. We had to go to the bathroom. Now, you would think, you go to the bathroom. In the tent, you have to call, Guard? Guard would come. I have to go to the bathroom. He always says, put you're hands up and come out. And then we had to dig a hole in the ground and you had to kneel down and do it. And he stood behind you with a loaded gun. He had his finger on the trigger, he could blow you're backside off. You went to the bathroom out of being scared. If he had a twitch, I've had it, I fall right into the garbage. Now, things like this. Then, when we got out, once in a while, in the courthouse, I would say, Guard? I'm free? You always felt that they are walking behind you with a loaded gun. It took us a while to get rid of it.

That is how it takes us so long to get rid of these nightmares. You're so use to them, having them, so you say, how did it effect me? Nothing effected me. If my wife got sick, and the doctor gave bad news, I would say, it isn't as bad as they make it out to be. Come, I'll find you someone. I will help you. I made a few calls, I found someone to help her. I went to them, they helped her. That was ten years ago, she's fine, for the last ten years. Nothing can be as bad. I have learned not to take things on a scale, like don't make a big deal out of anything. Because nothing

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could ever happen to me again, what happened to me there. Nothing. Because I've had the experience to deal with it. I've had the experience of fighting it, I had the strength to fight it, and I would never allow this to happen again. Now they would have to kill me to get me back into that kind of a situation. I would never allow this, from anybody. I could save myself now, I could have escaped from Jaffra. Sure, I had to go through the desert for two hundred miles. One man did it, and he made it. Perhaps I would have died in the desert, who the hell knows, maybe a house would have taken me in. I don't know. That man was Be-gar-bick (ph), so he must have had connections with the outside.

Q: So you replay it back in you're mind? Thinking about other ways that you might have survived?

A: Yeah. The wrong ones, the right ones. Where I could have done something, where I couldn't do something. Why didn't I do it? Why did I do this, why didn't I do that? Oh, yeah.

Q: Are there other examples of things that, specific instances, details, specific moments or decisions that you regret or wish you had done differently?

A: Yeah, decisions. I walked over, with the under conductor, the \_\_\_\_\_, yeah, just the \_\_\_\_\_ Rhine. I was up there. We went up there with donkeys. I saw it, nothing but mountains, mountains, mountains, where ever you go there was mountains. And we went all the way up there because it took us all day to

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\_\_\_\_\_. And then, we had food. I said to myself, what the hell. There was nobody up there. I could have spent the last time there, they wouldn't have caught me. There were people, little mountain people, that would live up there. They had a cow or two cows, they had the milk, and they had the cheese, they had \_\_\_\_\_. I could have spent the last days there, nobody would have caught me. I looked down. I said, why in hell didn't I take my sisters up here, we could have spent a lifetime up here. When the war would be over, we could have gone down to the end of the mountain again. There are many years that my sisters could have lived. Once I did it, maybe they were transferred from one camp to another and I was in the back of a truck and I went from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, and it happened. We prayed, and they made the turn, and I jumped out of the truck. I jumped out, went down the embankments, and joined the underground. I did it. Isn't it shocking? And I sort of disappeared in the \_\_\_\_\_. I got away. But for how long? What were my chances? I had no chance. I believe if you have a 20/80 chance, a 90/10 chance. I had not 1% chance to get away. So, what have I gained? I was in the woods, in the middle of France with no food and no nothing. No clothes, no nothing, freezing. What have I accomplished? To be free? For how long? Being frightened and scared every time the wind rushes into the leaves. Being scared. Huddling in the dirt, in the garbage and the leaves and the bushes. What have I accomplished? Free? For how long? Freedom won, at what cost?

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There was no freedom. Do you think France is a big country, where you can hide? You can't hide. There is no place to hide. Sooner or later, especially when they're looking for you. Once they got to the other camp, they knew they are one man short. So the hunt was on. So? What choice, what chance? What could I do? Where could I hide? And no food. And there was no food in sight anywhere. You think I was a hunter? You think I could kill a fox or a rabbit? I wouldn't know how. I would know how to eat it. No, like you say, I had a difficult time. Now, I would know what to do. Now, I don't need to do it. I could fight now. I'm observing, I see things more than others. I know things more than others. I have intuition now. I have feelings, intuitions. I can, I feel things. I, somehow I know, get out of the way, a truck is going to come through. You know, one of these stupid things? I have these feelings. And I say to my daughter, how can you let Brian go down to the corner, wait for the school bus by himself? These things go through my mind. Some nut could come and get him. Although she sends the dog with him. A Rotweiler, a 110 lbs. Rotweiler. He goes down with him. He goes on the bus, the Rotweiler comes back. Ha. Big. So? That's what she does now.

Q: Are there, we just talked about things you might have done differently. Experiences in the war, I'm wondering after the war? Is there anything in your life over the last twenty years?

A: Yes, I should have gone to college. Big mistake. I had the smarts, I had the

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head, I had a good head. I should have gone to college. Mistake. I reached the heights in my profession. I have every, that's as high as I could go, could go no higher. But I should have dropped, I should have gone to college. I should have taken up engineering. That's what I really like to do, mechanical engineering. Like I said, at that time I thought I couldn't do it because I didn't have the money, it would take too long and I had to eat. Where was I going to get food for me to eat, I had no money to eat. Even if it would be a free college, I still would have to eat, pay the rent and clothes, whatever, basic necessities. But if I would have had a chance, when I met my wife, I would have sent her out to work and I would have gone to college. That's a mistake I made. That was the last of the big mistakes. It was. I mean it. I should have gone to college. I had the ambition, I had the strength, I had the perserverience, I had the intelligence. It may surprise you to know what you, to understand what you have to know being a good watchmaker. It may surprise you to know. You have to know algebra, mathematics, \_\_\_\_\_. It may surprise you what you have to know as a watchmaker, a good watchmaker. I'm not talking about the \_\_\_\_\_, I'm talking about the watchmaker's watchmaker. When you work on a \$10,000 or \$15,000 watch, you can't make any mistakes. And when you are working on a timepiece that has 400 or 500 pieces in it. You can't make a mistake. You can't put one upside down because he has to take apart 380 pieces to get back to the bad piece. You don't get paid for that. Extra work. So you have

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to have a photogenic mind, you have to know exactly where everything goes. Take it apart, you have to know every piece, you have 300 or 400 pieces, you have to know it. You can't fool around, play no games. There are many nights I sat until 3 o'clock in the morning, but I did it. Although it wasn't easy. If I had put the effort into a college that I put into this trade, I would have made flying colors. But I am not sorry. You know, I have learned that you cannot be sorry about everything you did wrong in life. It happened. You can't go back, so what good does it, feeling sorry? You just take it the way it is, make the best of what you have. If you don't get what you like, you better like what you get. It's the old story. I made good in my trade. I had my own business for 25 years. I did well. I can't complain. I worked hard but I did well. I have a nice house, I have a nice, my kids all went to college. They all made something out of themselves, whatever they wanted. I say to them, you can do whatever you want, but go to college. Bring me that piece of paper on the wall. You got that piece of paper, you're free. I don't care if you're a garbage man, I don't care if you sweep the streets, but bring me that piece of paper on the wall. And somehow, there was no argument, they understood. What my children understood is that they have to have a Masters. That is what I demanded of them. No more. I said, I'll pay all you're bills, I pay all the college, no problem. But bring me that piece of paper. Perhaps I'm not educated to this day. You understand, I speak and write three, I speak and write three languages, four languages maybe, and I speak and

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write none. You understand that? Four and none. None good, none right. I'm not educated. I missed out on that. I'm very, I feel very bad about this. And I always suspect someone that speaks well educated, that has a nice way about them. Sure, my son comes, I don't understand what he's talking about, but I'm happy he's educated. He's a college boy. My heart is warm, because I may not understand what he's saying, but he's a college boy. I said, Paul, what did you just say? Write it down. I can't say it twice. He wouldn't say it twice. I don't care if I understand it. I have to go to my daughter, say, how do you write 'two'? To write out the check. '20' or '200' or '2000', how do you write 'two'? Two hundred? I did that to my daughter. She's a school teacher. She said, Da, you writing me out a check for 200? Well, if that's what you want, I give it to you. But she has to tell me how to write 'two' to this day. I still don't know. I make mistakes. I still speak multi languages, some I picked up. You see, that's the whole difference. I speak them, I go to France, I can speak French. But I don't speak French. I can write French, but I don't know how to read a French newspaper. But I skip words. I believe that if I lived there for three months, I would pick it up again. I've been out of there for fifty years. I \_\_\_\_\_ German. That's high class German, I can understand it. And I went to a German school, I just grew up. After a few years I was finished. I forgot. It's fifty years. I forgot. I don't remember anymore. But I'm sorry that I didn't further my education, book-wise. And I feel sorry for everyone that doesn't. It's a big loss. If you can



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possibly understand how important education is. I know. I never had it. I have to ask my wife sometimes, how do you write this, how do you write that? She tells me. She spoils me, she tells me. I'm not ashamed to ask. I have asked my son, you know what he says to me? Look it up in the dictionary. I say, Paul. He says, look it up in the dictionary. He won't tell me. He wants to make people use the dictionary. And I do.

Q: You said that since you've retired, you've been looking back a lot more than you use to?

A: Yeah, a great deal.

Q: And I wonder, if it's possible, you have a good family, a good home. I wonder if it's possible, even with you're experiences during the war, to look back and say, well, all in all, maybe I've had a good life?

A: No, I didn't have a good life. I'm happy to be alive, there's a big difference. I didn't have a good life. How could I have had a good life? I struggled the moment I left home. Let me tell you something. The home I come from, we had three factories and nine stores. Big ones. We had a factory in South America, in Argentina. We had a big factory, we had a big factory in Milan, Italy and a big factory in Ver-bes-pul-rita (ph) in Germany. And nine Lodz outlet stores. We sold fur coats. Would you say we were well-to-do? Would you say we had a good deal of money? Since I left home, that was it. I had, no longer had a good home. I

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came from a well-to-do home, good upbringing. Happy surroundings. There were always fourteen, fifteen people in our house. We always had five, six, seven guests for dinner. We always had a big, open house. Suddenly that all stopped. No, I didn't have a good life. I can't look back and say I've had a good life. I struggled from the day I left home. Until the day I came to America, I was, the struggle never ended. I use to go to very good watchmakers, I use to ask them, how do you do this? And how many ways can I do that? They would do it for me, but they wouldn't tell me how. I had to figure it out by myself. They wouldn't give away the secret. They would do it for me but they wouldn't tell me how to do it. So I had to struggle, from the moment I left home, my struggle started and never ended. And it never ended, even in America, after I was married. Then are the kids in the struggle, how to divide my time between a great deal of work and the children. Then finally, finally I stopped, but I stopped making good money. I owned my own business 25 years old and the business clicked, took off. And when that took off, I say, hey, it's taking off before I knew it. I worked for twenty-five stores. I did the work for twenty-five stores. I had all of Manhattan and Bronx and Brooklyn and Staten Island and Jersey and, tied up and they thought, we'll work him all over the country. All over. I had so much work I couldn't deal with it. I couldn't handle it. Piled up, I was choking with work. People would have to wait six, seven weeks to get their work back, I had so much work. And I did whatever I said when, and it started taking off. And I did

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that for 25 years. I'm not complaining about that, but it was a struggle. Then I had so much work, I had to work day and night to get it out. That was struggle. I had no time off. I couldn't take off a day. I sent my wife to Mexico on a vacation with the two kids and I had to stay home and work. I just didn't have the time to go. So, it was a struggle. You know, there are different kinds of struggles. There are struggles for you're life, there are mental struggles, there are psychological struggles. There are all kinds of different struggles. I use to sit on the bench and work and my mind use to be, then it got to be so good, so fluent. I did it automatically. The hands just went. And then my mind started to wander back again. Well, I'm making money, what will we do with it? Is it going to help me? Is it going to ease my pain? Is it going to ease my memories? Is it going to take away the bad, the nightmares? It didn't. And since I retired, my wife doesn't know because I don't talk about it. I don't tell her. I'm bad off, what does she have to know? I do casual conversation, casual things. But . . .

Q: You don't tell her what?

A: Don't tell her anything. I don't tell her anything. Once in while I come out with it. I remember, oh, that's good, cold water. I remember I would have given ten years of my life for a glass of water like that. And she say, you're starting up again? You're back in the desert? Oh, you don't know, that's a good sandwich. Ah, you remember how you picked up the crumbs? I say, yeah. You know, pick up the

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crumbs, years ago, there was a bread, on a tent, one bread for a tent, twenty men, one bread, little bread. Twenty men. So, one was in charge of dividing it. One guy in a tent, every day a different guy, that was allowed to pick up the crumbs that came off the bread as you are cutting it. I remember this, I use to pick up a crumb at a time, a crumb at a time. So. My wife says to me, are you picking up the crumbs again? Once in a while I say, you know it slips out, you know, I say, this is a nice, delicious role here. Ah, you're thinking about the crumbs you picked up? Can you understand that? It's the little things that, you know, so many of these little stays in you're head and once in a while it comes out. You know, it's, I appreciate the whole roll, not the crumbs. Can you understand that? I don't know how to explain that, but nobody would understand that. No, people will make a joke or forget about it.

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#### **Tape 4**

Q: We're continuing.

A: Yes, I've been sort of curling into myself, you know? I become a recluse, or whatever you call it. I'm not a very social guy because there's nothing anybody can tell me that I don't already know. Or that I would care to listen to. So I like to be by myself. You see, my wife goes out at 9 o'clock in the morning, comes back at 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon. I'm very happy, I'm by myself. I go to my daughter's, out in Jersey, she has a big house, a big yard. Two acres. I take a chair, I go back in the corner under the tree and I sit all by myself. [Inaudible]. She comes to me, she says, what are you doing there by yourself? I tell her I'm happy this way. I'm very happy being by myself. I've reached a stage in my life where I want to be by myself. I don't care to be with anybody. I can't talk to anybody. I want to live in my own little world. I want nobody else in this world, my little world. I don't care about anybody else's. I don't care what's going on out there. In here, it's me and me alone. So if the world passes me by, that's fine with me. It passed me by anyway. I'm angry. It passed me by anyway. And not in a good sense of the word. In a bad way. My years passed me by, where? In the camps, in the prisons, being hunted. Eating garbage. It passed me by anyway. So I don't care. I come to a point in my life where I don't care. I don't give a damn about anything, anybody, anyway. Whatever goes on out there, what ever wars go on, I fought my war to last me a

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lifetime. I fight no more wars for anybody at any time, anywhere. I'm not interested.

You have to understand my feelings. I don't care about anybody out there. They don't bother me. I had my way at my time, that's enough for me. I have a hard time enough dealing with what happened to me. I don't want to have to deal with anything else that happens on the outside. I don't know if you understand what I'm trying to bring across to you. Nothing.

Q: Is there, I guess again, is there any lesson that you sort of look back and you think, well, this is something, this is what I've concluded about this? This is my answer to this. This is how I've realized . . .

A: Yes. My answer is minding my own business, living my own life. Be with my own little memories, with my good ones and bad ones. With my nightmares and my good dreams. And just trying to live my life out as best I can. I'm seventy-five years old, not much more. Allow me to live my life out my way. Don't tell me how to live my life, what to do, how to do it, when to do it, where to do it. Allow me to live my life out, my years out, my own way, the way I've tried to be happy in, or unhappy in. That's all I want.

Q: You had said that in the camp in Algeria, you had a friend who would keep you going every day, saying tomorrow we'll get out of here?

A: Yes, Max, yes.

Q: I just wondered, then, it was always looking for tomorrow.

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A: That's the only thing you had to look forward to, tomorrow. What else did you have? Max Stein was his name. I wonder what happened to him. He went back to Austria. He was an army officer in Austria, a professional soldier. And I use to say, Max, we use to look over the wall, right over the desert, and I would say, Max, you know it and I know it. I spoke German with him. You know we'll never get out, you know that. We're here almost 2 years. You know we'll never make it. Every day we buried people. And Max would look at me, he's say, boy, tomorrow is the day. You better pack you're things together because tomorrow we'll be liberated. The gates will open. The allied armies will storm in and free us. I would say, Max, you can't be, you're joshing me. Remember, I was 19-years-old, 20-years old. Max, he was quite a bit older than me, 35, 40. He says, tomorrow is going to be the day so get ready. Now, I really didn't believe him, but I was afraid not to believe him. He put doubt into my mind. You know? Maybe he's right. Maybe tomorrow I will get free. And then what will I do with my freedom? I said, Max, where will we go when we get out? He says, things will take care of themselves. You've had places to go. I said, Max, we can't go home, we have no home. We can't go to our families, we have no families. We have no money. We have no skills, no trade. What are we going to do when we get out? Another problem. He would say, let's tackle one problem at a time, Max would tell me. One at a time, he says, once we get out then we will attack the next one. And I said, you know, Max, you better stick with me

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because you know where you're going, I don't know where I'm going. I go where you go. And he says, well, you will find your own way. And this was it. And the day before we got free, a few days before we got free, Max said, you know you're going to get free now, but be yourself mentally. What are you going to do with freedom after two years in confinement? I said, Max, I think I know where I will go. He said, you see, I knew you would do it. I knew you would know what to do. So a few days later, we were free. The gates opened up, the guards were gone. And we were afraid to go out. We thought, it's a trap. We thought, they opened the gates, took away the guards, make us go out and shoot us trying to escape. We thought it was a trap they laid there for us. We were afraid to leave. So the older guys said, nobody leaves the camp. We want to know what's going on out there. And, sure enough, a few hours later, the troop carriers came, British, and they came to us around the camp and \_\_\_\_\_. Now you have to picture, from almost 4,000 men, 300 left, for two years. 330 something. And what we wore was a sack with three holes, one for the head, two for the arms. That's all we had left at that time to wear. Dates, from dates, sticky sacks from dates. Full of lice. This was sticky, the dates, it was sticky from the dates, you know? We hadn't washed them. We hadn't taken a bath in 2 years. A haircut, a shave, in 2 years. So you can picture what we were made of. Desperate, skinny. And when the Captain looked at us, he says, put down the guns, boys. We had Professor, Dr. Pick. I had a picture



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of him. He died later. He was a Professor, Doctor in the Vienna University. He spoke about, I don't know how many languages. He stepped forward, an old, tattered man, and he spoke to them in English, what we were. He said, I heard him say, boys, put down the guns, get these people out of here. And they took us to the hospital, in Ma-son-kava (ph), first came Algiers Hos-in-day (ph), Ma-son-kava (ph) and Fort N-low (ph) and Fort Blanche (ph). Fifty years and I haven't forgotten their names yet. And at \_\_\_\_\_ there was a big army hospital, all tents. With nurses and people. And they took us there. The nurses, they were all offices I remember. All these things on their shoulders. They came, they shook their heads. When they unloaded us from the trucks, this is what we looked like. We smelled, we stank. It was terrible, we were full of lice. Oh, they said, get these things off them and put them in the showers. We were so skinny, so sick. Some couldn't even stand up anymore. But they helped us. They gave us injections with needles, they took out blood from \_\_\_\_\_ in the rain, I don't know what they carried on with us. We weren't allowed to eat for fear that our stomachs would burst. Only the fluids. But then in a little, they gave us something to eat. It took me no more than three weeks, I was back on my feet. I was running around like crazy. I was young, I was 21-years-old, you know? But the others died, there were 30 or 40 died even after they got out of the camp. It came, then Max came to me. I was in uniform already. He says, Harry, didn't I tell you. The day will come. The day is here. We

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were ready for duty, he also joined the army, in a different outfit. But we met. I said, Max, you were right. It took 2 years. You told me that for a year. A little late, but you were right. We are free now. Now where are we going to go and what are we going to do? Fight the war. Didn't we already fight the wars? In a different way, but it was a war we fought. Yeah, he says, we use to sit many times. In the evening, after our duty. We use to sit and we use to talk. I would say, Max, what are you going to do after the war? What are we going to do with our lives? We have nothing, we have nobody, we have no place to go. What's going to happen to us after the war? Right now they are giving us three meals a day. What's going to be after the war, Max? He said, we'll tackle one thing at a time. After the war, when we get out of the army. Something will happen, you'll find something to do, you'll find someplace to go. And he was right. I wonder what happened to him. He is someplace in Austria. If you could get some of these guys together that we spent that time with, that would be nice. No? We only had it once, but they all went their separate ways. And it was always sad, too, because together we talked about all the little things and the big things. About the people that died and the little things, the little incidences, little tiny things. You know? Like eating the crumbs from the bread or you know, we were so many in the tent that we had to lay on our sides. We couldn't lay on the back. When a bug would bite you, you had scratch, you had to wait for you to scratch. The whole tent had to turn around on their other side to

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make you're scratch, so you could scratch you're side where the bug was. And now, it's so funny. One guy would yell, everybody turn around on the other side. Some guy has to scratch. So the whole tent has to turn around on their other side, while we are turning, we scratched. Little, stupid things. But there were bugs in the ground. We slept on the ground, you know? There were ants and things, you know, that would bite you. Little, stupid things that we use to, that we laugh at now. Now it's funny. It wasn't funny then. It was serious. You had to scratch, you can't scratch, it's terrible, you know? You get all bitten up. And how we walked around in the date sacks. They were sticky inside, they were full of ants or full of lice. And we had to walk around like this, it was torture. Especially the heat. When the sun went down on it, they were breeding inside you, that's all you had to wear. Now you laugh about it, but it wasn't funny then. It was serious. And then, the whole, we made jokes. We use to say to each other, you, you're never make it. And the guy would say back to you, I make it before you. And we use to kid around like this, although it was funny then, it was sad. It wasn't funny. Today, you say, ah, that was a funny thing he said. It wasn't really that funny. It was sad, it was hard. People don't understand these things. The little, minor little incidences there. We use to get the rotten onion or rotten potato in the soup, the soup, which was warm water. We had to scoop up the bugs from the top to get to the soup, we would get cold soup. We had to scoop up the, today you laugh, you know? We use to say,

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look at the age of the, you know we ate out of these cans that you buy, vegetables and these cans that you have to open up to get to the, that's what we ate out of. You would say, how many bugs you got in there? Eight. I got twelve. Use to make fun of it, who has the most bugs in the, the thing, some, this is disgusting to people, but that was our life. Our way of life. And we got use to it. We thought. We never really got use to it, but we said we had to put up with this. You had to stay alive. You're main objective is to stay alive, no matter what it took. Stay alive. Two things, stay alive and don't give up hope. It was very difficult, not to give up hope under those conditions. But staying alive was the important thing. You could not allow the luxury of giving up. So that's why today, who cares. Could it ever be as bad as then? Could it ever be as, could I ever sink as low as I did then? Ever? What could possibly happen in my life that would be as bad as I had it then? They say, you go down only one way here, you come up again. Nothing could ever happen in my life, nothing, that could ever be as bad as that.

Q: And again, maybe the last question, again about leaving your story for you're kids and for you're grandchildren and all that? I know you've said that you don't want to tell them unless they ask? But I wonder if you feel, like it is important for them to know about you're life?

A: Why is it important?

Q: I don't know, I wonder if it is important for you?

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A: No. Not important. Why should it be important? Why should my kids be sad? Why should my kids have bad feelings, what happened to their father? I don't see the purpose. That's something that will die with me. That was born with me, live with me and die with me. Why should they know? I feel badly when these books, all the Holocaust books, the whole library I have. Leaving that to Brian. Why should he go through this? I'd just as soon throw them out. Why? What's the purpose? To make them feel bad? To make them see what a rotten world it was? To make them see what a guilt-ridden, rotten world that allowed something like this to happen? To make them lose faith in their existence, in their world that they are living in? No, what's the point.

Q: And yet it is important for you to keep thinking about this and to keep remembering?

A: To me, not for them. Yeah, for me. Because I lived it. That was part of my life. It's not part of theirs. Yes. It's part of my life. My family was part of my life, it's not part of theirs. They'll never know, my family. They'll never know my brothers and sisters, my mother or father. They never knew them. So why should they mourn them? They are passed, God knows where they are, alive or dead. Where they are buried, I don't even know to put a flower on their grave. Why should they be effected by this? What's the purpose? Do you see a purpose in that? I don't. With me, it will die. Everything will die with me. My experiences, my life, my suffering,

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my memories, my nightmares. Everything will die with me. That's going to be, they will bury me and they will bury that with it. They will say, oh, he was really a nice guy. Poor guy. He suffered so much. They'll never know how much. He suffered so much. Maybe he's better off. Yes, my friends. That's what it is. That's what it's all about. It's sad. What is it they say, my friend? We all live with our problems, we all live with our nightmares, our past. Some more than others. I live with it every day and every night. Every free moment I have I sit down here. I have made it pretty cozy down here, haven't I? I sit down here and I don't put the lights on. I put my head back and I re-live my life every now and then. A bit at a time, a chapter at a time.

Q: Well, thank you very much for re-living part of it.

A: My pleasure, my friend. If somebody can learn from it, just a little bit, like never give up hope. Have faith and believe in yourself. You'd have it half won.

**Conclusion of interview.**