

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Isak M. Danon
February 26, 1999
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Isak M. Danon, conducted by Katie Davis on February 26, 1999 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Springfield, Virginia and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

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Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection.

This is an interview with Isak Mike Danon, conducted by Katie Davis, on February 26th, 1999, in Springfield, Virginia. This is a follow up interview to a USHMM videotaped interview conducted with Isak Mike Danon on November six, 1989. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr, for making this interview possible. This is tape number one, side A. Can you please state your -- your full name and the full name of your parents?

Answer: My name is Isak Danon, I'm called Mike. And my parents names are -- or were, Joseph Danon and Hannah Danon. My mother's maiden name was Kabiljo.

Q: Can you spell that please?

A: Yeah. K-a-b-i-l-j-o.

Q: Can you please tell us when and where you were born?

A: I was born June 24th, 1929, in Split, which is currently Croatia, used to be Yugoslavia.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about your parents? Were they -- Where were they born?

A: My parents were born in a suburb of Sarajevo, a little town called Reeserko. Sarajevo is in bo -- in Bosni -- Bosnia, as we pronounce it, and they came to Split separately and they met there.

Q: Do you know -- Tell us what you know about your grandparents on both sides, and their names.

A: My grandfather, on my mother's side, his name was Haim Kabiljo. He came to Split from Sarajevo, a little bit before World War One. He didn't do too well wherever they lived, so somebody suggested to him that he could come and work with them in Split. He put him in a business doing -- making mattresses by hand. This was what he would do; when people would order, he would custom make a mattress. My grandmother didn't work. That was not customary for women to work out of the house. My grandfather was also a shamus, which is a sexton in the -- in the synagogue in Split, and he lived right next door, which was provided by the synagogue for him. My grandparents on my father's side lived in Vizoco, which is the same -- a suburb of Sarajevo now. My gran -- grandfather, his name was Isak, I was named for him and so were four of my cousins. He -- He didn't do anything, really. He used to have a grocery store and then he co-signed for somebody on their loan and the other person defaulted, so they took my grandfather's store in payment. My grandmother's name was Blanca, which was -- my older sister was named for her. And again, she didn't work out of the house, but she would take in sewing, so they survived. There was a wh-whole bunch of brothers that were growing up, and she, with her sewing, supported the househo -- the household, excuse me.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about -- I want to go back to -- to Split, the town of Split, an-and the set of grandparents that were there. What -- How was your family,

grandparents and parents, a part of that town, particularly, of course, of -- of the Jewish community?

A: My grandfather, Haim Kabiljo, he, as I mentioned earlier, was a sexton, and his main function was, as a sexton, to keep the synagogue in an order, make sure that it's clean, that it was -- all the things that are needed. And also, one of the big problem was that we had a very small Jewish community and one of the big problems was trying to get a minyan, or a quorum, for the services every day. So he would go searching for people, men. In those days, only men counted for the quorum. He would go around searching and asking them to come to the services. I failed to mention, when he got a little older, and his children were grown up, he s-started sort of s -- a little store, what they sold was yard goods, mostly. It was a very small store, and one of my aunts, I think she was next to the youngest of his children, she worked in that store. My grandfather was well known in the Jewish community, as one can imagine, and my mother had just terrific memories and she always talked about him after he passed away. But I was about nine years old when he died, so I remember him. When we would go visit our parents in our store, we would take a walk and go say hello to him, or we would meet him sometimes on the street and I remember every time we met him, he would reach in his little pocket, which is -- he had a watch in the pocket, watch with a chain, and he would pull out a coin. A Yugoslav coin was called a dinar. He always had a dinar for me. That was good for an ice cream or a couple of candies. So ah -- we had tremendous memories of him. Our grandmother, she was a little bit rougher. She didn't have the finesse to deal with the little children. So our

memories are not as good as -- about her. Now, my other grandmother, I remember her. She was a very hard working woman. She was a good cook and a good baker and she made lots of sweets, which we always enjoyed. She would ship them to us. Once a year we would get a package of all kinds of goods, jellies, marmalades, cookies. Even a homemade salami, occasionally, which I didn't care too much for, because it had an onion-y smell to it. But these are memories of a childhood. Since then, I learned to love onions.

Q: Can you talk some about the role that your faith played in your family when you were growing up? What was -- What were the habits of how your family observed their faith?

A: Yeah. Well, our faith was a central thing in our lives. Both my mother and father had grown up in the religious homes. We are what is known na -- here, as Sephardic, which, for those who don't know, means that we are descendant of the Jews who lived in Spain, and after the expulsion, they went to either Turkey, or they went to Genoa and crossed over to Italy, or they went to Turkey and moved with the Turkish occupation. They moved further up and of course Sarajevo was Turkish outpost and that's where they -- they must have come that route, I think. Although Split was settled by Jews of Italian descent, which means that the most people who live i -- most Jews who lived in Split, came from Spain, through Genoa, through Italy, and crossed over the Adriatic, into Split. As I said, our -- our religion played a central role in our lives. We observed all of the holidays, quite religiously. We never went to school on any of the Jewish holidays. We maintained a kosher home, and we -- the education was such in Yugoslavia, that the

primary subject in the public school was religion. So, because we were a very small minority, when the priest would come to teach religion, we would be excused, we would have a free period. And there is a payback, later we would have to go twice a week to the -- some facility, usually was one central school, well all -- where all the Jewish kids would come and we would have Jewish education, which consisted of course, of religious observances, Hebrew, history and well, songs and such. That's about what I remember, as a young child.

Q: Can you remember anything -- and perhaps share it with us, that your parents taught you, not just about religion, but the -- the place of Jews in your town? Where did they fit into town? Do you remember them talking about that, or what was your perception of where they fit?

A: Well, I think the Jews were in -- in the town of Split, they were pretty well integrated with the general community. Most of the Jews in Split were either small merchant -- and I'm emphasizing small, or they were professional people, doctors, lawyers, accountants, and such. So, I don't think that there was too much distinction, as I was growing up. The -- We had, in the neighborhood, we were totally integrated and in the business community, you sa -- s -- have, let's say, shoe stores, there would be several of them, one might be owned by a Jewish family. The rest would be owned by the local, whatever religion. Prevailing religion in Split, was of course, Roman Catholicism, and -- but they also had a few, I guess you might call them Serbian Orthodox, or Eastern Orthodox, but prevailing Serbs. So, we were -- as kids we were lumped with s-some of the Eastern

Orthodox in school, because we were the ones -- we and them, were the ones who were told we can be excused during the religious instructions in the class. But the classes were conducted still -- there was a big crucifix on the wall and everybody had to say the Catholic prayers, which we would just stand up and not say them. But this was true for -- both of us, and the Serbian Orthodox kids. And some -- some classes, there were a few of those and few Jews. Sometimes I would be the only one of my faith or only one who was not a Roman Catholic. So I -- I didn't feel too much of a -- a burden, and especially when it was time to be excused. I accepted that gladly. Yeah?

Q: What was the reaction when you stood and you did not say the Catholic prayers?

A: Well, I think that -- I had a teacher who liked me. I was the best student in class. That was my -- I don't know whether that was a burden I carried, but I enjoyed studies. So -- And I was a very, very small kid for my age. Everybody towered over me. So everybody considered me like a -- I don't know, like a little puppy and the teacher did, too. I remember now, that I'm being asked to recall some of these things, I remember I would be cuddled by every teacher over there. We didn't have any male teachers, just female teachers, and they were all single, not -- none of them usually were married. Anyway, so, nobody ever said anything. I -- I know, in fact, later on, at one point, I learned from somebody that there was a possibility of having an interfaith prayer. So I suggested that, and she accepted it for awhile. I guess she was reprimanded later on. But this came -- There was at -- somebody who had left Romania and moved to Yugoslavia and this one young girl said that they had that ecumenical prayers. So she gave me the translation of

the Romanian ecumenical prayer, which I -- which is the one that I brought to my teacher, and that's the one that was tried, for awhile, anyway.

Q: So a-at this point, you're quite comfortable and assertive about who you are?

A: Today, you mean?

Q: No, at this point, i-in your life.

A: Oh, you -- you mean like [indecipherable]

Q: You're -- You're a young boy, but you're very clear about saying that you were quite comfortable with the mix of people and also saying that I am Jewish and I would like my faith included here, if possible.

A: Yeah, well, that was true for a long while. However, the situation started changing with the political situation. And I would say the first changes were when Hitler took over Austria and there was pressure on every country nearby, to sign up with the axis powers. So, there was again, like I mentioned to you earlier, I was told once not to talk about politics, but this is not politics, this is -- this relates to the Holocaust. There was a party in the -- in that area, the Croatian area, called Ustashi and they were beginning to rise up, with assistance from the Austrian government and later from the Germans. And they were agitating, and of course, they took the same -- Hitler's, you know, values, and preachings and that's -- at that point, started getting somewhat -- more and more uncomfortable for us. In fact, occasionally, we w -- we would be attacked by the local kids and I'm not talking about stealing our lunch, or anything like that, although that took

place on occasions, but just for the sake of playing the role that they heard from their parents, who were sympathizers of the Fascist governments.

Q: C-Can you do -- remember one of those incidents, just so we could get a clearer picture of it?

A: Oh yeah, very much so. The -- Split was located on the sea and there were areas, the beach, and Saturday morning I was always at the synagogue and we didn't have school Saturday and others -- friends of mine my age, and I, we -- we were pretty close, so Saturday after the services, we would go for a walk, and there was areas in the city that were well known for people walking. But we would go further, we would go to the areas that are beach fronts and in the winter months this was sort of nice, because it wasn't crowded -- it wasn't too crowded. There were people there, because Split was in a -- I won't call it temperate zone, but it was very comfortable, especially if you could be shielded from the wind, and our beaches were shielded. So, we would go walk, maybe even take our shoes off and walk in the -- on the surf. And sometimes, or one time, wasn't just one time, but often, some of these other kids from the neighborhood would start throwing the rocks at us, and stones. And, you know, I learned to fling rock pretty well, also, but they were usually in the majority, so we always ended up at the short end of the stick.

Q: H-How did you know that -- How did you interpret this, or how did you know or feel that it was because you were a -- a Jewish boy?

A: Well, there was no doubt, because they accompanied their attacks with vocal attacks, too. So there was no doubt why they were doing it. They -- They made it quite clear, so --

Q: Can you talk a little bit more about how things started to shift? I guess when you were fairly young, things were pretty good and calm and -- and you felt comfortable. But then, as you said, Hitler came on the scene and things started to shift. If you could just tell us a little bit more how that started to alter life in your town? Things that your parents said to you perhaps, or you overheard?

A: Okay, well, first of all, when Hitler started coming on the scene, maybe 1935 or '36, I was only six or seven years old. But in those areas, we -- the kids, six, seven, we were pretty aware of what was going on, because we had to be and we heard our parents listen to the radi -- I mean, we heard them talk, listen to the radio intensively. You know, everybody had to keep quiet while they were listening to the news and what was going on. And so we were quite aware. And at first -- well, the first signs, we knew that there was an effort being made to teach the Jewish community, the grown ups, the adults, teach them some form of a trade, because they were saying, in case you have to leave in a hurry, how are you going to support yourself unless you have a trade, something that you can do with your hands. So there was -- a few courses were set up in a club that we had, like photography, like working with the leather, tailoring. I know my sister took up sewing and she learned pretty well how to sew.

Q: Which sister?

A: My older sister. Her name was Blanca, named after my paternal grandmother.

Anyway, she -- she was very young in those days, too, but she learned how to sew and later on she really made -- made her living sewing and even during the war, when we would get some pictures from her, she would show us the same dress that she had changed and every year it's look different. That was the only dress she owned. Anyway, so we -- we sort of saw that things were not going too well in the rest of the world, for the Jews. And we were conscious, so this learning a trade was one thing --

Q: J-Just to clarify, this is the people in the Jewish community saying to each other, we must learn a trade and we will therefore provide these courses?

A: Well --

Q: It wasn't anybody else?

A: No, more than the people in the com -- Jewish community. The Jewish community, the organized Jewish community would engage some tradesmen to teach the trades. Like maybe on Tuesdays and Thursdays, there would be electrical trade and the carpentry and leather --

Q: Preparation?

A: Yeah.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And maybe on Wednesday would be sewing and cooking and stuff like that, for women. So this was an organized effort. But then came a few other signs. For instance, some of the instructors -- my sister, her first year in the gymnasium -- first year

gymnasium is equivalent to fifth grade. She was two years ahead, she was two years older than I was, so she was telling us how her instructor was making anti-Semitic remarks to the class. And of course, kids caught on and they emulated their professors. And also, there were a few of my, quote, friends, that they would sort of jokingly make an-anti-Semitic remarks, and -- while they're hugging me and all that, or trying to copy from my homework, they would still make those remarks. So there was no question this was happening as gradually as one can perceive it. And in the meantime, the war started in -- well, there was the Czechoslovakian take over, what we call peace in our times, and then the war started in Poland, that's 1939. By that time I was 10 years old and I saw what was going on in the world and so did everybody around us. And we saw the signs, we would see the -- these Ustashi, they would have their meetings. I don't know how to equate this to the current situation. Would be almost like Blacks living integrated with the White community, but every Tuesday night, the White community would don the white sheets and hoods, you know. And so, is that a sign of something? I guess that would indicate, you know, that if -- in case of some trouble, you could not rely on your neighbors too well. So, that was another sign.

Q: D-Do you remember your father or mother talking to you about this, or you assing -- asking them about it, or perhaps your grandfather?

A: No, my grandfather, by that time, the one in Split, Haim Kabiljo, my maternal grandfather, he had passed away and my grandmother passed away a few months later, well, 10 months later. And the ones in as -- near Sarajevo, I wasn't in contact with them,

except, well, once or twice we visited. But it wasn't so simple to go there. So, anyway, my parents, they had friends in the community, Jewish friends, and they would come visit us, and in our house and in the our si -- our area of the Jewish community, language that was spoken among my parents and their friends was what we call Ladino. This is, for those who are not aware, it's a Spanish origin, which is laced with words from every country where they travel. As -- I could give you examples how, maybe Italians take a word, English word, put a vowel ending to it and give it a il or a la article and --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Isak Mike Danon. This is tape number one, side B.

A: Anyway, I -- I have some Italian friends and I know they take an English word and give it an ending, a vowel ending, put an article, like you know, whatever kind of article, I mean masculine or feminine and it becomes an Italian word, and into the next generation it may still remain. Well, Ladino is created that way and I can equate it like Yiddish is a German laced with Polish, Russian, whate -- other language, wherever the Jews lived in those days. So, Ladino was the prevalent language among my parent's friends and we learned the language very early, so our parents couldn't talk secrets in our presence, we knew what was going on. Anyway, so they -- they talked very somberly about the world's situation in those days and, you know, it's contagious. Whatever your parents fears and th-thoughts are, you -- you catch on to it and you emulate.

Q: We haven't introduced your -- your two sisters, so I'd just -- get you to say their names and the order of their births.

A: Okay. I -- I had three sisters. One was older than I was. She was born in May fif -- May 15, 1927, two years older than me. And then I have a sister Sarah. She was born in January fifth, 1931 and I have a sister Esther and she was born September -- correct, October 30th, 1935. And my older sister, Blanca, she passed away in 1993, she had breast cancer. And my two other sisters, Sarah lives in Philadelphia, and Esther lives in Baltimore. And well, s -- Sarah, right now is what they call a snowbird. She's currently in Florida, to avoid the winter.

Q: Can you just think back about your house when you were growing up and what kind of values your parents were teaching you, and how.

A: Oh, okay, well, the values that my parents taught us, are the values that I like to teach my children and I hope that I have been able to instill in them, some of the values. One, that I keep telling my children, my father always had something for the poor people. They never were turned away and they used to come quite often to the house and to our store. He taught us never to let -- let them leave without giving them something, at least - - no matter how small it was. I know we would walk down the street and somebody would -- some of the what yo -- we call today, street people or homeless people, they would be sitting on the sidewalk, they would stick their hand out and my father, like we would pass there, my father would stop, take out the coin, give it to us and tell us to hand it to the beggar. But there was even more to that. He would -- Well, this one thing I

remember. There was a guy that was really down and out in his luck and h-- he would beg. He was an immigrant to our community, he was a Jewish young man and he didn't care for begging, so my father one time suggested to him, why doesn't he buy some nuts and salt them and toast them and make little bags and sell them? And he did that and I remember our father would always buy two or three bags. He didn't like the nuts, but he bought them, because this was a way of supporting somebody. And only recently, I was reading about the life of Maimonides, the philosopher and the Jewish theologian, of the what, tw -- 12th century? He -- 12th, yeah. Anyway, and he had -- he wrote on every subject conceivable and one of them was charity. And he had -- he sort of set up eight levels of charity. And I know the highest level is helping somebody become independent and this is what my father believed in. We also believed that the children should get better education than their parents had and we -- we were sent to school, we -- wh-when the war started, Jews were not allowed to go to school, and I think I mentioned that the professors, of course, couldn't teach, so what we did, we created a Jewish school. The professors that were fired from their jobs, they were employed to teach the Jewish kids who were not allowed to go to school. Well, my father, he had a little misunderstanding with somebody, so he didn't send us to school, but he engaged tutors to come to our house and teach us things. So, oh -- also, he was teaching us the religious subjects and we learned a lot in the house. When we would go to religious school, we were always top students and like, let's say if I was in third grade, I would usually be placed with kids of the fifth grade or sixth grade, because of the -- my level of knowledge of the particular

subject. My mother was a very, very hard working person, I guess by necessity, because my father didn't work. We had the store, but he would just go there in the evening. My mother would go early in the morning, open up the place and she would be there all day. And in those days, you opened the store about eight o'clock in the morning, you closed it at 12, you went home for lunch. You went at four, you re-opened and it was opened til eight o'clock. This is, I think throughout Europe, they had this. Some people call it siesta. In summer, I guess, people would go home, eat, and go to sleep for a couple hours. What else did we learn? We learned -- One time I found a wallet that belonged to a construction supervisor and he was ready to fire half of his staff and -- and my -- I ran home with it and my father told me to go back and find who it belongs to. "Don't give it to anybody until you're very sure that you find the rightful owner." And I remember, I had looked inside, there was a lot of money in it, but the guy only gave me one dinar as a reward and I was pretty unhappy about it. But my father told me that the return of the wallet was a reward in itself. I'm a little choked up now, talking about these things because it brings memories. So, maybe if you give me five minutes to get back to my own self, yeah?

Q: I want to shift now, to what you remember about your parents actually making plans so that you and your father could leave at a moment's notice. You mentioned in your first interview, that you actually had little rucksacks, little backpacks packed. Can you remember how that came about and the actual packing of them?

A: Well yeah, that's really what everybody in the Jewish community had done. Well, let me mention something like, when the war came, the food became pretty scarce. So, we were lucky that we were occupied by the Italian forces. Now, what I need to mention is maybe we skipped quite a bit here, because the war came to Yugoslavia in April, '41 and this -- your question pertains to our leaving Split, which took place after the -- Mussolini fell, after the government of Italy and what they call capitulation, yeah, yeah.

Q: Well, one reason I think it's -- it's probably okay to skip some, is because of your prior interview. I think that you covered that very carefully.

A: Okay.

Q: And in some detail. So, un-unless there's something specific -- I remember you speaking about the Italian occupation and how lucky you were and then how it changed.

A: Okay.

Q: So, if there's something you would like to say, that would be fine, but I -- I think that probably it would be okay to -- to skip and try to fill in just some of that detail.

A: Oh, okay. No, there's n-nothing special that I needed to or wanted to add, but I was just trying to give it perspective, and -- well, and our departure was preceded by when the Italian government fell. Of course, the -- the Italian army was let go, you know. This mis -- the general population just rushed the -- the what do you call it, we call them kasir -- kasirna, which is the military complex that was right in our neighborhood where the m -- the s-soldiers lived. Anyway, and it wa -- they had the storage of food there and ammunition, so everybody rushed there. I was watching people carrying bags of flour

and wheat and you know, all kinds of canned stuff. An-Anyway, so then the partisans came to the surface and it was -- before that, it was underground. Now, there was enough partisans, they came from the mountain, they organized the local population and there was partisan units marching through the street. If I can mention, Split was a city -- I call it a town, but it was a city of 50,000 people. It was the biggest city in Dalmatia, the coastal -- coastal area and much of the interior. It was the, I guess the capital of the -- like we have states, they had these -- well, there was -- Yugoslavia was subdivided into -- it's not kingdo -- the kingdom was the whole count -- I will have to remember this word, the translation of the word later. And -- But Split was the capital of one of these, call them states, if -- until I get a better term for it. And so it was a pretty large city. I mean, I remember with pride, looking at the big, tall building, eight floors, nine floors, another one, you know. So, i-it was wide avenues, tree line avenues, you know, all that. So, the city was sizable and now we saw all these -- the partisans and their insignia was a red star and -- on the cap it was a -- like a military cap, you know, with a red star in front of it. And the population started participating, and they would have these meetings, town meetings and you would get maybe 5,000 people show up for the meeting and there was somebody speaking about, you know, we have to arm ourselves and we have to chase the occupation and we're -- have to do this and that, you know. So there was a lot of enthusiasm.

Q: Just a clarification.

A: Sure.

Q: This is after the Italian soldiers left, but before any Germans came in?

A: That is -- That is correct. This was like a -- maybe what, 20 day, about three weeks in there, where the partisans were able to hold on to this quote, major city for the area. So, that was -- was like pretty wild and also like the partisans would conduct trials of the people who had collaborated and in -- there would be signs and you know, posters saying how many were convicted and shot and all that. It was -- maybe it was kangaroo court type, it was very swift and pretty -- I won't say brutal, but it was swift and final for many people who had collaborated. It was a very sharp division. You're either with us or you're with them kind of thing. So the population had committed themselves. And then there was -- the German troops were trying to come into the city, but they were held -- they were held in check at a place where the Turks were held in check several hundred years earlier, the Ottoman empire was held, because it's such a terrain, the rough terrain, mountains and cliffs, that you can position yourself and you know, it was that kind of warfare that people could establish -- establish themselves and prevent even motorized units and tanks from advancing. So, partisans were able to hold off the German troops for a very long time. And in those days, we were wondering what will happen if the partisans don't hold the line and the Germans do come. And we didn't know -- We didn't think of an if, we were thinking of when, yeah. And that's -- in those days, we just did what everybody was aware that had to be done, namely prepare, so you can make a quick getaway by whatever means. Some people were thinking of getting a little boat and going to the islands that were near Split. But that wasn't so safe, because Germany and

Croatians that were armed by the Germans, the puppet government, they had better means than the partisans. Partisans were living off the support that they could get from general population. But Germans were pretty rough if they caught somebody helping the partisans, they burned the entire town. And later on, I remember seeing towns, just everything -- no house had a roof on it, because the roof was burned, you know. The rest was made out of stone, or bricks, so it couldn't burn, but i-it was -- or, if maybe partisans would kill a German person, the German would just take hundred at random and shoot them. That -- They -- They wouldn't have to be guilty or they wouldn't have to be partisans or anything, just hundred citizens, or hundred men, ju -- o-out of the town, they would take them at random, put them against the wall and shoot them. So -- Okay, so we are in this situation where everybody's wondering -- you know, the partisans said you have to be either with us or with them, and during those 20 days, lots of people said, "We're with the partisans." So when the Germans were coming, then all of these people who had declared themselves to be with the partisans, had to find a way to leave. And the Jewish population, of course, would be the first victims of the German onslaught. And Germans were bad enough, but Croatians were worse. So -- Anyway, so we were just cognizant of these [indecipherable] and we were ready -- what did it take? Not much. I mean, it's just, like my father had a bigger backpack, I remember and he put a, you know, a sweater, a pair of shoes, some underwear and there was some, I remember, I don't know if you know what zwieback is? It's a hard, hard -- it's not bread, it's like a, yeah, crust of some sort. Anyway, so I know he had brought that. He was in the military, the

Yugoslav military two years earlier, when it was general mobilization, so he brought a couple of those zwiebacks and I remember, we tried to bite into it, impossible. So he put those in his, you know, backpack and of course we put -- we all, each kid had something that they made ready and after we left, my other sisters, my younger sisters, they remained. Oh, my older sister, she joined the partisans immediately. She was 16 at the time. Yeah, here.

Q: Was this in the 20 day period?

A: In the 20 day period, yeah, but we had learned -- my parents had learned that she was in the underground before that. I remember when they found out about that. That was very traumatic, you know, she -- well, this was like she begged them to understand what's going on. Of course they were, you know, petrified from fear. But anyway, so she left in the first day or two of the partisan liberation, but the other two sisters, I remember -- not I remember, they keep telling us the story, how they practiced jumping from the second story window, you know, on the -- on the back of the house, to get away. But we didn't do that, we -- we had these knaps -- knapsacks or backpack or whatever. We used to call them rucksacks, that's, I guess, the German term. Anyway, w-we left in the middle of the night, but we were walking out of the house, through the front door, we don't have to jump out of the window. And as we were leaving, so were many other -- others from the city. You know, the ones who had committed themselves to the partisan cause, to the anti-Fascist, anti-Ustashi cause. They were all leaving the city. There was almost a major evacuation at the time.

Q: Can you talk a little bit more about that discussion your sister had with your parents, that you apparently heard. What was she trying to communicate, or what was she saying about why she was doing what she was doing?

A: Well, she explained to them that, you know, there was in-injustice in the world and that she wants to do her part. And they were saying, you know, "Well, you're young and you're so little and frail and what can you do wi -- to help with," and she was saying, "It's a mor -- everyone needs to do it. If we let them do these things to us and nobody resists, how can we ex-- expect to survive? The-They'll have always an upper hand." But anyway, my parents were -- were terrified, because they didn't know what the future would bring to her, and to us, if it's discovered. There was -- There were a few things going on, you know, like occasionally leaflets would be distributed by people like her and they -- also there was armed -- armed attacks on the occupation troops and I know -- I could tell what -- something happened because next day or immediately, there would be curfew imposed and even if it happened during a curfew, they just lowered the time. Like, in the middle of the summer, I remember curfew was nine o'clock throughout the summer, and then, after an event like that, was reduced to six o'clock and then five and four o'clock in the afternoon, everybody had to be in their homes. So -- And the people, you know, kids, 14 -15, were active participants in these things. I'm not saying in the armed attack against the occupation, but leaflets distribution and I don't know the -- well, they had books that they were reading that were, what's the word, you know, they were against the current regime and it -- people would be caught sometimes, doing these things

and Italians -- I mean, they may have been less brutal than the Germans, but if they would catch somebody, they were not very gentle with them. We knew of many people who had gone -- who had been taken and they would send them to some prisons in southern Italy, on the island of Lipari. And they would come back with all kinds of wild stories, you know. And I know some people who used to tell us -- well, the mother of some young men who were taken by the Italian troops or Fascists, anyway, they said that they w -- they ironed their backs, you know, with the hot iron. But the -- One of the prevalent punishment was castor oil. Th-Th-They would force the people to drink a very large container of castor oil. I guess like maybe, if we use a measuring cup, like two cups, you know, at a time. And I don't know if you can imagine the effect of castor oil, but you forget all your trouble -- all your other troubles when you have that. So anyway, my parents tried to dissuade my sister from participating and maybe she said that she wouldn't do it any more, but no, I know she continued in the activities, because at that point, I was reaching the age where I was useful to the cause.

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Isak Mike Danon. This is tape number two, side A. Can you think back to the night that you and your father left, and -- and just tell us a little bit about that, about how you said goodbye and then actually -- where you actually went.

A: Well, okay. When -- On this crucial night, I guess, we were awakened by the neighbors. These were the good neighbors. They came knocking at the door, banging, and I remember, "Mr. Danon, Mr. Danon," and, "the Germans are coming." So we got up, took me three seconds to get dressed, my father got dressed and we grabbed our backpacks, which as I mentioned earlier, were packed with whatever we thought was important and that we could carry. Excuse me. And also, my father and my mother had subdivided whatever valuables they had. In those days, one didn't carry too much cash, because was losing value, so people would buy -- they called them Napoleons. It's like a 20 dollar gold piece, it's about this size. And you -- They would sew them in the coats and clothes, so they thought that nobody was going to find them, you know, but everybody knew the -- where to find, in case they were caught by the Germans or the Ustashis. So -- But anyway, they subdivided what they had and I said goodbye to my mother. I don't believe my two younger sister were up at the time. We got out of the house, it was, of course, dark. They didn't have street lights. They had them on the main highway -- on the main thoroughfares, but not in our street. And we started walking toward the mountains, which were not too far from Split, because we lived in the

suburbs. I don't know for -- if you lived in Denver, you could see how Denver is flat and then the mountains rise up and that's how Split was. It was near the water, you know, flat land and then the mountains, just all at once, straight up. So we started walking in that direction and little by little we heard voices and others joined us. It was a mass exodus, because others had heard the same rumor or word that the Germans were coming. So we kept going. In the daylight hours, we were in the mountains. There were highways, but the idea was that the Germans were going to come on the highways, with their motorized units, so we walked along the road -- to the side of the road, and I remember, that was rough. I had a good pair of shoes, because my father had just bought himself, me and my sis -- older sister, a pair of shoes -- didn't buy them, but he engaged a shoemaker to make them for us, yeah. And they were like the ski type, you know, the mountain, the snow. Shoes that were very well made, the best shoes I ever had. Anyway, so --

Q: Do you think he did that in preparation, in retrospect?

A: Could be, could be. Could also be that he wanted to give a job to this one guy, who had come from someplace else. See, Split was full of immigrants. The ti -- during the Italian occupation, Jewish immigrants. We had the community of maybe 200 people, all at once swell to four or 5,000. So it was the -- one of my father's characteristics of engaging people to -- like to coach us in -- well, we didn't -- we didn't attend the public schools, but Italian was a required language, so we had an Italian coach. And we also had music coach coming to the house, teaching me and my sister, my older sister. And this guy that did our shoes, he was also an immigrant, and all these people were immigrants.

Anyway, so we met a lot of people along the way and then finally we got into a village and sat down and ate what we had. And [indecipherable] kept walking some more, until night time and we and many others -- there were other men, mostly men and they were walking to join the partisans. And we all did that. And finally we came to a town that was held by the partisans, it was a -- like a command type of town. And we made ourselves known that we want to join them, you know? And they --

Q: How did you do that?

A: Well, because th-they saw us coming, you know. Of course, th-they were hiding. So, some of them approached us and we put little signs, like a little red star, to indicate what we -- what our intentions are. And they interviewed us and they said, well yeah, sure, but, you know, you just go with the group. And little by little, they found odd jobs for us. And la -- this was the system. They never -- You never came and signed up, you just eventually came to be accepted. So --

Q: Did you have to prove yourself at some level?

A: Well, it wasn't so formal, allri -- you know, step by step. Eventually, like I know at one point, I was separated from my father. It was very common, separated and then we meet again and separate. And I know I was in a place where -- well, near the coastline, where there was a couple of boats, wooden boats, you know. This is a coastal area, fishing towns and there was a lot of these boats. Most of them were sailboats, but small sails, you know, you stick the sail. You leave the boat in the water, but you take the sail home and then you bring it and you sail. Some also had motors, but not many. Some

were rowboats, almost like the Phoenician galleys, you know. But, I remember being in that town and it was night time and there was a bunch of guys. Later I learned they were partisans, but they sort of pretended they were fishermen. And they invited me if I wanted some food, they were cooking something. Wasn't beans, was -- they call it Ourzo, but it's -- that's a f -- it's not a wheat, it's a form of a -- what do you call it --

Q: Pasta?

A: Yeah, it's -- I think it's grain, but it's oats, yeah. I think it's oats and the -- peeled, so. But it's still taste like -- like the horses might like it, but not human beings. Anyway, so I remember that's what they served and that's what they ate and that's what they gave me some of. And they were talking about what are they going to do next day and what -- what unit of the Ustashis they were going to attack, you know. And I remember, as I traveled through the mountains, like in different places that were held by the partisans, big point of conversation, you know, would be -- somebody would read the accomplishment of some other units, someplace. This wasn't organized military, this was just somebody in another town had attacked Ustashi unit, or Ustashi sympathizers town and had burned so many houses and taken so many sheep. These were pastoral areas, mountains, but still, sheeps were the primary source of income. So they would say, "Okay comrades, now what are we going to do?" You know, "Are we going to sit back and relax while our fellow comrades of other towns are doing all these big things?" So they would say, "Let's go and attack them." Well, "How many rifles do we have? There is 12 of us, we have three rifles, well," you know, "how much ammunition? Maybe we

can get some more guns," you know. So that's where they would go. Sometimes they were successful, sometimes not. But anyway, so, this how we traveled for -- I don't visualize right now, how many days or weeks, but we ended up -- I mean, through the mountains, but we ended up again, near the coastline. I was with my father. And there was one of these wooden junks, was going -- everybody was getting on it, so we got on it. And went to one of the islands and I will give you the spelling of the name. H-v-a-r, Hvar. That's -- That's where I spent a very major part of my time with the partisans. So anyway, we went there in the morning -- I mean, this was all -- everything -- movements are made during the night. Day is for hiding. This was the way of life. You hide during the day, you move during the night. Tr-Travel, whether it's on foot or on a donkey, or a mule, or by one of these boats, was always by night and very quietly.

Q: When you and your father left to go join the partisans, how -- what kind of decision was that? Was that a political decision, to go fight the good fight, or was it more a decision to -- to s -- to make sure that you and your father would not have to come face to face with the Nazis, to be safe, or how would you characterize the decision?

A: Well, the decision to fight never entered my mind nor my father's mind. Yeah, that was my older sister. We were trying to save our skins, frankly. My father, let's see, how old was he at the time? I would say he was 40, and he had fought in the -- this war that was brought to Yugoslavia, in 1941. They had general mobilization and he -- he didn't have very pleasant memories from that. I mean, he was in there long enough, but I know he didn't care for the experience. And I was much too young. I was 13 years old, you

know. I wasn't going to fight anywhere. So we just left the town when we heard the Germans are coming, and there was no other place to go but the mountains. And if you joined the partisans, you're -- hopefully, you're with some -- some organize group. Otherwise, you're on your own, and how do you survive on your own in a strange town, you know? And again, the general population of that area was peasant. You know, they live off the land, either as shepherds or as farmers. Once you got into the mountain, there was not much farming, except maybe around your house, you know. No extensive farming of any kind, anywhere. In the lowlands, where I lived, they had like -- grapes was the big thing. And fruit, fruit, different kind. Figs, peaches, cherries. But figs was a big fruit and grapes -- many, many of the people, they live off the grapes. They -- you know, there's a lot of work that goes in to this and th -- once they collect the grapes and squish them for a wine. You know, st -- stomp it and whatever they do. We all have seen movies how that's done. I used to see that done personally, all our neighbors were that, yeah. Anyway, so after that, it's nothing else to do the rest of the year. Well, anyway, so my father was a city dweller, if you will, and he couldn't survive in the mountains, among the -- the suther way of life, you know. So, he was out of place, and I guess the entire Jewish community would be out of place in the rural -- well, more than rural, it's in the peasant type environment, you know. Farming or sheep-herding or animal, you know, life, because they were not accustomed to it. There is -- Just to dissuade anybody that -- that's in the Jewish genes, they proved in Israel that they can be good farmers and everything else. But in this type of situation, we didn't have that background. So,

anyway, we came to the partisans to be a part of a organized society, where we could survive and of course, make our contribution, whatever is needed. And we were accepted, I guess. There was a place for everybody and once we got into this place on Hvar, they found a place for me, too, and I was still 13 years old. I was placed in a machine shop, I guess. That's -- That's the best -- the best description of it. But machine shop was making -- well, we were repairing ammunition, we were even making some of the things for the mi -- for the partisans, for the military or partisans. I remember, oh there were two kids younger than me in this unit. We were three kids assigned to this unit. One was 11 year old, and one was 12. All f -- All came from Split, similar route that we came. What we were doing, actually, is generating power. It's a -- like a bicycle, you would just go, you know, drive this bike, stationary bike, but would generate power for the units that they had. We would fill the batteries, you know, we would do -- and we would also stoke the ovens, you know, for the -- the guy -- blacksmiths, you know. They weren't shoeing horses, they were making things out of -- well, let's say the guns -- I mean the weapons needed certain parts, steel part, they -- they wouldn't have it. They take a piece of steel and -- and by hand and hammer, you know. Get it into the [indecipherable] and just beat it and grind it and make the part, whatever it takes, whatever time it takes, you know. And they would fix rifles, they would fix machine guns, occasionally, you know. And I remember they even had a big searchlight that came to be fixed. And we, the kids were doing -- even our job was making -- what the -- would you call it, it was for disinfecting clothes or whatever for the hospital. You take -- We would take a barrel of the -- for oil

barrel, split it in half -- and this was pretty heavy steel, split it in half, and finish up th -- with the -- I don't know -- I didn't -- don't know in English how you call these things to - - like a file. Yeah, file it down, fix it so it doesn't scratch. Then we would take a metal sheet, roll it and we would make grooves on both ends, so y-you have like roll. And beat the ends together, then we cut a piece for the bottom, make holes in it. So this was a barrel inside the barrel and on one you would put water and the other one would hold it closed, because steam gives you more heat to kill the germs. You couldn't just boil it because you only get 212 in boiling water, 212 degrees, but steam, you can really make it, I don't know what, 400 - 500, whatever. So this was one of the jobs that we, the kids, did. But these other kids used to tell stories about how they would, before they came to Hvar, they were engaged in real battles, Germans and the Ustashi were -- had these bunkers and the kids job was to sneak, crawl on the ground to the bunker and then just lob hand grenade into the small holes in the bunker. And they could do it very silently, so they would not be detected. So the kids were useful for that, wher -- whereas grownup per -- person would be detected much easier, the kid knew how to wiggle his way to the bunker and do this kind of job.

Q: Now, in -- in this time that you're with the partisans, do you have any contact with your sister, who -- who is part of them?

A: No, no. My sister -- First of all, partisans had to fight and run and move and all that. When we did -- We didn't know who was alive and who was not. We didn't know -- we left my mother and two sisters in Split. We had no idea whether they were still alive. My

father, one time, was th -- I don't know whether he was trying to comfort himself, or -- not comfort, but whether he was just trying to be able to talk about it to somebody. He was telling me how, in one of the announcements of the partisans, said how Germans had caught a unit of the partisans from Split and how they -- there was some females, and how they were tortured and all that stuff. And he says, "You think that your sister was one of those girls that they're talking about?" And I said I didn't know. I mean, we -- we didn't -- there was no contact. Partisans -- Yugoslav partisans were all over the country, it's like one would not say, let's say, if somebody wa -- is in the Ame-American army, even today is -- maybe somebody is down Georgia and the other is in Massachusetts. You know, it's same army, but no contact. You don't know who is who, this is war, and it -- they didn't have, you know, well organized, it was just scattered people and units and no, there was no way one could tell who was where and what and how.

Q: I want to ask you to sort of think -- I want to ask you to think and reflect on your whole family, with this question, which is that, how do you make sense of the fact, that when the war came, everyone in your family was a very tenacious person and survivor. They met it with tenacity. Your sister Blanca went off to fight with the partisans. You and your father went off to join the social organization. And then, as you said in your first interview, your mother and your sisters -- and your little nine year old sister led your -- your mother into hiding. Where do you think that quality came from in your family, of meeting this horrible situation with such determination?

A: Well, I think circumstances mostly to be given credit for. I -- I take no credit for me, as being tenacious or organized or courageous, none of those characteristics would fit my -- my psyche, I guess. No, what -- what happened, we were just being swept by events and locations and developments as they were taking place. I mean, you make do, wherever you are, you do what one needs to do to survive. And I really don't feel that I had any of these characteristics that you're attributing. But, my sister -- my sister Sarah, who led my mother when she was nine years old, she -- she had this characteristic, leadership, strength of her conviction and all that. Even today, she is very forceful person and she can -- she can get people to tell her anything that she wants to -- out of them, you know, I mean, from a strictly social or friendly perspective. No, she -- she had that characteristic, which I did not, and I still don't. No, I'm, in every respect, all my life, I been low profile person. This happened to be a period of let's see, the courage was needed to survive, but I can tell you some stories, within a year from this period that will prove to you that I was a -- what shall I say, a Milquetoast, a weenie, a weakling.

Q: Tell me one of those stories.

A: Okay. One story. After we left Yugoslavia, we ended up in Italy and one day, I was with a bunch of kids in the neighborhood. We were playing around and there was an open well. So one of the kids had dropped a stick in the well, and I saw it floating. The well didn't look too deep, the water level was way up, so -- and it was floating. So I decided that I could recover the stick for this young man -- young man, kid, maybe 10 - 11 years old. So, the well had a little retaining wall around the hole and there was a little

hole at the bottom of the retaining wall, I think it was intended as a drainage. After the rain, the water would go into the well. I didn't know the principles of how the water gets into the well, but I'm now debating it. Anyway, so from -- I put one of my legs in this retaining wall and the other I straddle the retaining wall, and I put another leg -- another foot into the hole and I held myself with one hand on the retaining wall, while with the other one I tried to reach. Well, this hole in the retaining wall got slippery. There was moss or s-something, some green growth -- growth on it. Anyway, my foot slipped and I ended up hanging by one hand, with my body inside the well, hanging. And I held, first I held for the dear life, with my fingers, and there was -- I couldn't hold with the whole hand, I just was hanging on by the four fingers and it got very painful and in my mind, very quickly, I decided this was too painful. If I let go, I might drown, but what the heck, it's less painful than holding on, and -- because my fingers were breaking and the pain was excruciating. So I let go. Luckily, the well wasn't too deep. It was a wide well, wasn't -- wasn't a real type of well, was just a water collection point --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Isak Mike Danon. This is tape number two, side B.

A: Anyway, the story, it's a little bit long story. The kids went yelling, "Mike fell in the wa -- in the well," and then my father came running much later. By that time, I was already pulled out by somebody else, and he was -- he thought that I had drowned. But,

aside from that, it proves that I cannot tolerate pain, and I rather just find the easy way out of any situation. But, so tha -- there goes my [indecipherable] was shattered.

Q: Two more questions about this -- this period.

A: Sure.

Q: One, did you ever hear anything about what happened to Jews who stayed in Split when the Germans came, wh-who didn't go with the partisans, who didn't go into hiding?

A: Yeah. Their end was pretty swift. They were taken and they were sent to a extermination camp in Croatia called Yasinovats. Yasinovats was a killing field, like Auschwitz and Dachau and all that. And, as we speak, there is a guy that was in charge of that camp. He had a happy life in Argentina, I believe -- is it Argentina? Anyway, he was just recently sent to Croatia for trial, but who is going to try him but the same kind of people that were in charge then, his buddies? So I'm sure he will come out smelling like a rose, because they already named streets for him as a hero, and all that. So, y-you know --

Q: What's his name?

A: I'm not sure of his name, something like Savage or Sabage, I'm not sure right now, but this is very recent. In fact, I'm sure that the Holocaust Memorial Museum, or whatever unit, would have that information, yeah.

Q: Can you tell me any more that you heard about, what actually happened in your village, or for instance, to your house?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Not in your village, in your city.

A: [indecipherable] city. Yeah, I can tell you, sure, what happened. We didn't own the house, we rented. The house was owned -- we -- the house where we lived, was owned by a guy who had immigrated to United States, worked here in the steel mills and send money to, quote, the old country. And of course, the money had higher value here. I'm sure everybody knows the story. People would come from Europe, live, 15 - 20 of them in the same -- not room, but in the same apartment, work all kinds of hours, not spend any money on food. Everything they could save was going back to where they came from. And when they would go back there, they were rich people, or at least their families were pretty rich. They would buy real estate. This guy bought couple of vineyards and he had two houses, which he was renting. Anyway, we had second floor, in the -- like ground floor. They call -- We called it basement and ours was called mezzanine, but it's first and second floor, and then there was a third. In the ground floor lived an old man. His wife had died while I was young. He had seven sons and three daughters and he came with us to the partisans. He was a very old guy, but he was a wiry man, yelling at everybody, "I have seven sons and two grandchildren in the partisans." And so, he -- th-th -- a -- the daughter was date -- one of the daughters was dating a Italian lieutenant, so I don't know what happened to them, but I -- people living above us, they were Ustashis, so when we left, I'm sure they had a picnic in our place. We had a lot of food that we -- my father was able to buy because, in our store -- since money was

losing value, lots of things were bought and sold on basis of barter -- barter. You know, so people would barter things, like farmers would bring some of their foodstuffs to trade for the -- what they used to call -- before the war, clothes that we -- some of the stuff that we couldn't sell before the war, was now in demand. It was a reject before, it wasn't modern, wasn't anything, was leftovers. They would say, you know, "I want some of that stuff." So we had, I guess a lot of stuff that wasn't selling before, so this became in demand, because it was still the good kind of material, not the war goods, which was made -- they used to say that it was made from wood. You know, it -- you soak it and would fall apart. Anyway, so we had a lot of food in the house and I'm sure the people from upstairs, they took it all. And the street there, that was across th -- from us, were the people who came and told us that the Germans are coming. And then there was a few others that -- my middle sister, Sarah, she was friendly with a girl there, and she went to visit her, recently. The place was still there, the same, everything -- nothing has changed, you know. Th-This was in the suburbs. The houses were built of stone and cement and concrete, so this was expected to, you know, stay up like that for hundreds of years, unless the sa -- somebody bombs it, you know, and that wasn't the case. So the -- the area is still the same, she told me -- my sister told me she recognized rosemarie that it was growing along the edges there and she went -- you know, knocked on the -- the house, and she introduced herself and, "Oh, come on in, yeah, you remember so and so," and oh, lots of reminiscing and she stayed for a meal with them. So, you know, the area is still the

same and everybody just got married, had kids and their kids had kids. And the life goes on, in this area and I guess every other area in Split, and the suburbs.

Q: Now, what happened to your paternal grandparents?

A: My paternal grandparents, they were taken by the Germans. Actually wasn't -- may not have been Germans, but it was the Croats took over in that area, the Ustashi, and the Moslems. And I have no special likes for Moslems, because they all, en masse, joined the Ustashi in Bosnia. And you know, now that there was war in Bosnia and I was very unhappy with the United States support of those people who were the killers during World War Two. And the same people are still -- they are a little bit older, but they are still there in charge and their philosophy of life is still the same one, so --

Q: I want to talk more about that one later --

A: Okay.

Q: -- really go in -- in depth on that.

A: My father figured out how many of his relatives in -- how many in his immediate family perished when the Germans came into Yugoslavia and this happened in 1941, early April in 1941. His parents were taken. He had, let's see, I think he had six brothers. So there were seven men, yeah. I know -- I didn't know too many, because we didn't live there and I only visited once and some of his brothers never came to visit us, so I -- I met some. Some were in Sarajevo itself and some were in the suburbs in the little town where he was born. They remained there. But most of them had moved to Sarajevo. And they and -- they were all married, their families, their sons and daughters, they were all taken,

with Germans. My father counted 28 total that had been taken, including his parents, and --

Q: Ta-Taken where?

A: They were taken away and one doesn't know where. But that was the end. You know, the story, if you watch "Schindler's List," or if you -- there was a movie I just saw a couple of weeks ago, the "Life is Beautiful," and it's playing in the local theaters. It's an Italian movie, with English subtitles. It shows how they're taken and put in these boxcars. At the museum, you have some of these boxcars. They put them, you know, how many people they can squeeze in, and they close and it goes and the -- there's no record. But most of the Yugoslav Jews were taken -- most of the ones in Sarajevo and our area, in Bosnia and Croatia, those areas, were sent to Yasinovats. That's this camp that I mentioned earlier, and never heard from them aft -- after that.

Q: Okay. I'm going to jump a little bit to when you and your father have gotten to Italy, and then I want a -- you to remember -- you've -- you've told much of this story in your first interview, which you did in 1989, but I want you to remember and tell us some of the details of how you were reunited with your mother and sisters. And -- And a little bit about what that was like.

A: Well, i -- I told the story how my father and I, although we went to Italy separately, but we met there. And we were placed by the British, in a town in Italy called Santa Maria. This was the beaches with the villas, which were owned by, I guess northern Italian, or people from all over the world, maybe, but were occupied only in the season.

So this happened to be winter and happened to be war and the occupying powers needed the facilities so they took all these villas and they put us in there. What we had was -- I don't know if I mentioned that the partisans were sort of -- let me -- let me take a step back.

Q: Sure.

A: The allies were trying to mislead the Germans into thinking that the second front would be fought on that area, the Dalmatian coast, that that's where they were going to make the invasion. In other words, they had -- allies had occupied Sicily and they landed on the boot of Italy and they had gone up a little bit, but they couldn't go too far up, so there was a lot of talk about second front. And the Russians, of course, they had a big front, what 3,000 miles of front line and they were demanding that the a-allies, meaning British and Americans open the -- a new front, to take some of the load from the Russian front. And the allies were doing this propaganda kind of thing, saying that they are planning a landing on the Dalmatian coast. Split was the capital of Dalmatia. And they would drop leaflets sometimes, telling the people to leave. So lots of civilians were leaving those areas and they were finding their way to the islands, where they were picked up by the allies, by British, actually, and taken to Italy. And Italy was temporary location, then they would take them to Egypt, where they would stay in the -- under the tents -- yeah, that was tent city. I remember the name was El Shot. Anyway, and when our turn came to go to this place in Egypt, my father panicked, he says, "I'm not going to the Sahara," you know, or whatever. So we were told, "Get ready, everybody." It was --

There's a Yugoslav word for totality of escapees, like evacuation number one, evacuation number two. We were in one of these evacuation units, strictly civilian. So, when it came time for our evacuation unit to go to El Shot in Egypt, my father woke me up one morning, he says, "We're getting out of here." So we engaged somebody to take us to the train station, not in this town, the nearest town with a train. And we got on the train. I said we engaged somebody, somebody who had horse and wagon. He agreed to take us. And we went to this town -- Italian city, called Lecce, L-e-c-c-e-r -- L-e-c-c-e. Anyway, so we were -- we were going to go to Barre, because Barre was the center of all these Yugoslav escapees. But, the wa -- the train that we took to Lecce, we had to transfer there to another train going to Barre, but the Barre train had already left, so we had to find a way to spend the night there, spend the day and the night. And early in the morning, the following day, to get up and go to the train station and board the train to Barre. Well, my father could never get up early enough so we stayed that day and okay, well we'll go next day, we didn't wake up in time. Well, the next day we didn't wake up, and anyway, so we ended up staying in Lecce. We rented a room in a house, first with somebody who was renting beds for American GI's who would party too much and couldn't make it to a hotel or to their own rooms, so they would sleep there. Anyway, I remember, was a dollar a night. No, not dollar, I'm sorry, hundred lire, which was equivalent to a dollar. But anyway, so we stayed there for maybe a month, and then we found them -- place by the month, and we lived in Lecce. But my two aunts were still in the other area, where the Yugoslav immigr -- immigrants were put by the British. And they were in the -- they

were placed in one of these villas, but because the British were trying to accommodate people, if you had friends and you wanted all to be in the same villa, they let you do it. If you didn't have enough friends to fill the villa, then they would fill the rest of it for you. Well here, there was 40 people who found each other. They were all Sephardic Jews from Bosnia and they -- some knew each other from before, some became good friends in the -- all this, you know, living in the tran -- in transit, moving around and all that. They became good friends. So they we -- were put in this one villa together and life was good for them, that place. My two aunts were among them. Two aunts and an uncle, one husband of one of the aunts. Anyway -- I'm sorry, and their daughter. They had three daughters. Two were in the partisans and one was with them. So, they were there in -- in this -- Santa Maria was where we were, but next door to it was another village -- a bunch of villas put together, called Santa Croce, which is where they were. And they enjoyed life there, I know, because my aunts were all good cooks -- down, down, down -- my aunts were all good cooks and they volunteered to be cooks over there and like they would get -- down -- they would get food from the military, you know, they would get flour, and dried potatoes -- diced potatoes in cans. This was how the military would give to it's kitchens. And when we were living in -- with the peasants -- with the local -- I mean, local, from Dalmatian, you know, from the -- when I say peasant, this is not a derogatory term, it's a people who live off the land, who tilled the land or are shepherds, or are involved in agriculture. So, they -- when we were with them, they would cook the meals, three meals a day, where the flour would be made into paste, and then they would

put bacon, which they got from the military and some of these dried potatoes and this was all made into a mush, and there would be -- there would be our morning meal, our noon and our evening meal. Well, this Jewish house, they -- from the flour, they would make pasta, different kind of pasta and I learned how to make pasta myself. You know, it's really, as a kid, it was fun. And the bacon, because none of us ate it, was swapped with Italians to -- agricultural areas there, Italian, they loved the stuff, so they would give them oil. There was a lot of olives there and oil was a product of the local area. They would give them oil, they would give them green vegetables, onions, and you know, stuff like that. So I remember when we would come and visit my aunt, like you would get -- I mean you eat pasta, you eat fresh vegetables. And they made friends with some American flyers, you know, Air Force officers who were also -- many were from Yugoslavia, because some of the -- from the Yugoslav Royal Air Force, had escaped to London and they were trained to fly US planes, you know. And there was a lot of them nearby, so that they had an opportunity to come and visit civilians and talk in their language, yeah. And they would sometimes bring their buddies from the American flyers, you know, who were not of Yugoslav extraction. And it was fun. And they would bring corned beef cans, you know. And sometimes, like when I would go visit, I mean, you have hamburgers, th-they would make, from the corned beef, they would make hamburgers and you have pasta and you have cauliflower or spinach. I said, "Hey, this is like pre-war food." And they would -- Instead of this mush, you know? So you --

Anyway, that's where my aunts lived and my uncle lived in Barre. There was a camp there, I think I mentioned a lot about.

Q: Oh yeah, you just [indecipherable] that.

A: Yeah, okay, and that was the first stop where the Yugoslavs would be going, usually. The ships would go to Barre, the British ships. So one time, my aunt and my cousin from this Santa Croce -- oh, they would come visit us often, and we would go visit them, just you know, maintaining family contact. But one time they came and they said, "Well, we want a tip." That's a tip, they use a Turkish word, means, when you have -- when you're bearer of good news, you're supposed to give something like a prize or a tip. "What is it?" They're saying, your mother -- my mother, my father's wife, they came to Barre with the two girls. And that's how we found out. So my uncle, he told my wa -- my mother and my sisters that we were in Lecce, and he -- they went to -- to the authority, the British and told them about it, you know. And they contacted us, they put them on the train, to the other place, where my aunts were, and they all came one day. I mean, within -- within a week, but by that time, we had already signed up to come to the United -- into United States. Stop it for a minute. Anyway, so my mother and my two sisters came and life continued with them. Yeah?

Q: Describe that moment. What did your mother say about you? You must of -- had grown.

A: You know, that's the problem, that -- I like to describe it, but I just don't have it in my memory unit. It's not there. I'm trying to retrieve it, it's not. All I remember is the second

day, I took my sisters on the town. And I remember -- well, I had some money and I took them to an ice cream place. In Italy, like in Yugoslavia and throughout Europe, outdoor cafes were very popular. So there was this one outdoor cafe where we used to go hang out, and my father and me and all our friends would meet there. It was called Chinchin, I remember that, na -- yeah, anyway, I took them there and I ordered special ice cream. It's called, in Italian, it's called cassati. It's a frozen round thing and you cut pieces and then you put whipped cream on top. Anyway, during the war, this was a big thing. And I remember, I ordered for them and me and I guess their stomach was not used to it, so both of the gi -- my sisters got sick from that.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Isak Mike Danon. This is tape number three, side A.

A: They both got sick, I remember that part. And then the next big thing was getting on the -- the manifest to go to United States with us. They came -- This was in June, near the end of June. Dates escape me right now, but I know we were preparing to go to United States in July and I remember about sixth of July is when we left. So they didn't have too much time, they were with us in Lecce for about six, seven, eight days, no longer than that. And again, this was war conditions and we all heard about bureaucracy, how it moves very slowly. This is one time where bureaucracy moved fast and we were able to put them on the manifest to come over to United States with us. Of course, if they couldn't, we would have just pulled out, but there was the law that was passed, was authorizing 1,000 refugees. And I know must have been tens of thousands, maybe even larger numbers that applied, so this was something special if you were approved. So, the fact that they recognized the family, this was to their credit. And I remember on July 10th, we left -- we boarded military trucks and we left and -- toward Naples, where the ship was going to take us to United States. And so, I didn't have too much time with my sisters, you know, being by ourselves, but once we got on that transport, we went to a -- oh, i-it was an abandoned, what do you call it, insane asylum, where they put us -- this was our not only delousing station, but we received all kinds of shots and you know, tests, medical exams and all that, to see whether we are fit to go to United States. We

spent three days, and I know I spend it with new friends that I had met. I was like -- I -- I still was not 14 at the time. I mean, let's see, this was -- oh, I guess I was 14 already, then. Yeah, and anyway, I spend it with other boys my age and I saw my sister, she made a lot of friends -- my older sister. I don't remember my younger sister, because she was with the children. But we were pretty extroverted at the time, and we made lots of friends among our own age group, so I know we didn't spend it as a family unit.

Q: Can you pinpoint at a time when you -- you saw in your mother and your father, or even felt it yourself, where -- where you began to feel like, okay, I think we are safe, we're back together, it looks like we're going someplace safe. Was there a point when you started to relax, or perhaps it was watching your mother and father?

A: No. At my age, I don't think I spent too much time dwelling on safety or anything else, I just lived my life from day to day, having fun in wherever I could find it. When I lived in Lecce, I befriended, or I was befriended by a very large number of boys my age, and I met their families and we used to roam the streets and I even took up smoking. I was able to get cigarettes when nobody else was, so that wa -- I was the big man on the campus in that time. I quit smoking when my father caught me -- caught smoking. He didn't do anything, he says, "Oh, you're smoking now, congratulations." That was it, yeah, that ended my smoking career. But anyway, no, I -- I don't think that I could tell you when I started thinking of safety or security, you know. Because even under the worst conditions in the partisans, we were just doing what came naturally under the circumstances without too much thinking.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about any memories you might have had of -- of how your mother and father kind of readjusted to each other, or were able to share their experiences with each other?

A: I couldn't. I'll tell you why. My mother was non-communicative a -- when it comes to personal stuff and I spend time with my father. My father, I have to say something bad about him. He was the -- from the old school, where the father was the lord and master, the husband, you know. He was all powerful and we had no rights whatsoever, except whatever he, by his own grace, bestowed on us. Well, so we didn't have too many close relations with him, except that we didn't get allowance, so -- but we -- when we would go for a walk, he was the one who would say, "You guys want an ice cream?" If he was so moved, you know, or something like that. So we tended to hang with him, you know, hang by his -- on his arm, at the expense of our mother, who -- who was working all the time, and couldn't spend time with us. So, I don't know if their relationship between each other, you know, and there was not too much affection displayed, either between them, or between us, among us kids, cause we didn't know how to express it. We learned it later. I think I learned it from my younger sister, the affection, you know? But, no, I just cannot say anything about that, because that was not out in the open.

Q: If you could just talk a little bit about what the experience of spending all that extra time with your father? You were, essentially, sometimes you were separated, but you were really with him, day and day and day and day out. I'm just curious if --

A: Okay, well, let me tell you. When we were in the partisans, we -- if we marched, I was usually ahead in the marching line. He -- He had more problems, physical problems, than I did. Then, when we were assigned to different -- to the units, he was in charge of the supplies. He was like a supply sergeant and I was in the machine shop. We spend an awful lot of time in the machine shop, from morning til night. We'd come to meals, sometimes I would see my father then, sometimes I wouldn't. I would see him at night. Since there was no lights, we burned the kerosene. Home made lamp, that was the way of light, because during the war, it was the situation where you didn't have -- even if there was electricity, it was either bombed out, or they didn't have the oil to burn it so they can generate electricity or whatever. Coal, whatever was used. And it was small place, so everybody had these kerosene lamps and they were put out very early in the night. You only burned them when you had to. So, it was sleeping time and get up early in the morning and go to work. And we had our own individual functions. In Italy, after we came to Lecce, my father -- this a funny -- not a funny s -- well, it's a funny story, but as a result of this funny story, and I'll tell you about it if you care to hear it, my father got a job as a censor. This is the military censorship. They would, the Post Office -- every letter was opened, read, regardless of what the language was written in, and they either cut it out or blackened the parts that they didn't want to remain there. So my father had the job and I was roaming the street with my new f -- new found friends and life was beautiful and it did not center around my father. We -- I mean, we didn't have especially close relations, we didn't have antagonistic relations, just how was your day, okay, I

would -- I even would sometimes attempt cooking, you know, so when he would come home, we would have a meal. We lived with a family, an older lady and her adopted daughter and I would help them -- help the older lady in the kitchen sometimes, because we would sometimes provide the food for them. So, I guess they would let me make the hamburgers, because the meat would come out of cans -- corned beef cans that I had bought or traded or something. So, like I said, I wasn't too close th -- in contact with my father. But how my father got this job, was one time we were on the street walking and there was a guy whispering behind us, and -- whispering with somebody and they were following a couple of American officers and they were -- one was listening to what they're saying and he would interpret it to the other guy, and I nudged my father, and I said, "Look, I think their spies. They're trying to hear whatever the American fly boys -- American Air Force officers tell them about where they are going to bomb, or what they destroyed, or whatever, and then he tells the other guy." So, I -- I told my father. So we -- my father and I decided to follow this one guy. So anyway, we followed them -- these two guys, we followed them and then one guy went in a -- what do you call those? It's like a coach, horse and buggy thing, but it's like the kind that they have in New York, around Columbus area.

Q: Horse and carriage.

A: A carriage type, real fancy ones. That was the means of transportation. So he went in one end, we say -- we went to another one, "Follow that carriage," you know. Like in the

--

Q: The movies.

A: -- the movies, yeah, gangster movies. And we did that and then when he came out, we stopped and he saw that we were following us, so he came over and he wanted to know what's going on, and we tried to deny it, and anyway, we saw where he went in, what house. So we -- I knew who the British officers were, I knew one of them from this Chinchin restaurant. And I had seen them -- seen him in an office someplace, through the window I saw the guy. So I said, "I bet you , if we go to them and tell them about it." So we went and told them, and they said, "Uh-huh, uh-huh." They -- I thought they were like Intelligence Service, you know. Anyway, so, about six days later, they came to us and they said, "Okay, would you like to work for us?" To my father. So --

Q: You've proved that you're industrious --

A: -- that we're --

Q: -- enterprising.

A: -- enterprising yes, but we also proved that we are on the side of the allies, yeah. We are, yeah, creditable, you know, citizens, or whatever. Anyway, so that's how come my father was working at this censorship office. Yeah?

Q: Well, I think I -- I -- I'm going to jump now.

A: Yeah.

Q: It's going to seem like a really big jump, but --

A: Quantum jump, yeah.

Q: Because you've told the story of being on the ship --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- and getting to the United States, I want to jump all the way to actually living at Fort Ontario, if that's okay with you.

A: Sure.

Q: Can you describe a typical day there?

A: A typical day, after the first two months that we were there, a typical day, yes. For one thing, we came to Oswego, Fort Ontario, August fourth, 1944. This was summertime, so summer is a fun time, but in -- come September and kids have to go to school. So we were signed up in the local school. We were interviewed and assigned to a grade. And frankly, I think unfairly in some cases, because the selection was made on basis of our knowledge of English language, I didn't know any English, so I was put in seventh grade, even though I was 14 years old. But, you know, people who spoke English, some of my friends, too, were sent to local high school. So I felt a little bit of a -- not resentment, but that I was set back unfairly. But, thinking back, all I had from the Yugoslavia, was -- like I had completed four years of schooling, and a portion of the fifth year, which in our case was gymnasium. So they put me in seventh grade, lower seventh, th -- you start with seven A, then you go to seven B, eight A to eight B, so -- so they put me in seventh grade. Anyway, a typical day would be, you get up, you eat breakfast in the communal kitchens. We had -- thousand people were assigned to three kitchens, three community kitchens. You eat breakfast, after breakfast, you start walking toward the main gate. You usually -- during breakfast time, you meet some of your fellow walkers to

the school that we went to, was couple miles, I would say maybe three, four miles from the camp. You go out the camp, you sign out. There's a guard -- we used to call them policemen, because they had a police uniform. There's a guard, he watches you sign in and me and my friends would go to school. The school would start, I believe about eight 15 or so, would be over by 11:30. We would go back to camp for lunch, back to the community kitchens, have lunch, back to school for the afternoon session. Yeah, it was, I guess, like here, except here schools, you have lunch period and you have lunch rooms. We didn't have lunch rooms, this was -- this was called junior high school, I guess, and even if we did, we just didn't carry lunches. We -- I don't think they would let us carry it, because that was reserved for those who traveled long distances, and we had, within couple of miles, our own facilities. And there was an hour and a half or so for lunch, maybe even longer. So, you know, it -- we were pressed for time. Anyway, we would come home and we were in the military -- formerly military camp, which had all kinds of sports facilities. I mean, you know, running track, field, and we had organized our own clubs. We had taken old supply rooms and converted them to clubs, you know. Our -- And we had Ping Pong, that was a biggy for us, playing Ping Pong the whole afternoon. The schools didn't give us homework, which was unusual for us, we were used to European style, where you get a lot of homework. Anyway, so, play Ping Pong, then go to supper. Usually, during the lunch hour and supper, there would be somebody announcing what's taking place, in the evening, there's usually a movie. We would get some real nice movies. I don't know whether the camp administration would buy them,

or this was donated or whatever. We'd get movies. They had people, the camp organized theatrical groups. There was always something going on. If it's not movie, it's a play, if it's not a play, it's some kind of discussion, debates, our club, we had youth clubs, we had our own personal clubs, that -- Yugoslav youth. There was newspaper, magazines. But just hanging out, going to the canteen, which is -- there were -- the-they sold ice cream and stuff like that. You know, the kids like that. And, when came winter month, well -- I forgot something. They had a unit of Quakers that came -- well, Quakers, Friend's service, whatever. It's a religious group.

Q: Quakers.

A: Yeah, but it's -- was sponsored by qu -- Quakers, but they were like social -- social service and they would help us organize games and do things. Like one of them was in charge of Girl Scouts. My sisters keeps talking about how -- all the activities they did as Girl Scouts. Another one would get the grown-ups to -- for sing-a-long and play games and you know, different things. And this one was sort of helping us -- I guess teenagers, younger teenagers and she one time helped us build a skating rink. We did it -- We got a shuf -- shovels from the department of sanitation, I want to say, but you know, garbage collectors. We got shovels, we got wood from the carpentry office so-someplace in the ca -- within the camp. And we just dug wherever we could, you know, made it flat and put the boards along and we flooded it, and sure enough, it froze. Not very evenly, but it was a skating rink, and you know, anybody who could get skates and a bunch of brooms to guide yourself so you won't fall.

Q: Brooms?

A: Brooms, it's like skis, you know, handles, you know? That's what I was doing. Some people knew how to skate well, but I had to use two brooms, yeah. Anyway, so activities were just plentiful. Food was absolutely fantastic. Good, plenty. That was one of the things that the grown-ups that were there, you know, many of them, especially my parents, they thought that life had settled for them. This is manna from the sky, we're going to live like this forever. No worries, everything is going to be provided. And when we left camp, they had a, you know, a rude awakening, but during the life in camp, was good for them. And I know my mother kept remembering how life was terrific and just a big change from whatever they did, whatever was taking place before, when we came to camp. Yeah?

Q: What was the feeling among your parents, did -- at this point -- let me ask it like this, when you got to Fort Ontario, there was an agreement that this was temporary, that you would go back to Europe. What did people say to each other? Were they beginning to say they might like to stay, or di -- you know, especially as they saw what was playing out with the war, what were people saying?

A: Well, there was a lot of different opinions. A lot of people had relatives here in United States, especially, many of them, in New York, and they wanted to rejoin their relatives. Some people had relatives left in other parts of the coun -- of Europe, and they didn't know what was going on, so they wanted to go back. But needless to say, that when the gates sort of opened, and we had to leave camp -- well, the camp, Fort Ontario, not too

many wanted to go back. There was a first -- first time when they said, "Who wants to go back? Now is the time to do it." Only 13 people went back. Second time was a few more. My aunt -- One of my aunts and her husband and the daughter, they went back, because they had two other children that -- they learned about their survival and just so happened that both of their daughters were -- they had distinguished themselves, you know, in the war, both with the partisans and later, the civil administration. So -- And this aunt and uncle of mine, their family, they were so close, you ask me about my parents, how close they were and I couldn't tell you, but I can tell you about this aunt and uncle. They were always -- I mean, they displayed their affections to each other and both the parents and the children. They were really close, the family. So --

Q: Tell us their names.

A: Their name -- It was my mother's oldest sister. Her name was Bukeetsa, which means first born. And she married this man, his name was Joseph and their last name was Monteelio. You might -- You might be surprised, all these names, they sound Italian, my mother's name, Kabiljo, Monteelio. They did have Italian names. They came, evidently, through some of the Italian areas, but what I was going to say, there's a lot of Sephardic names that sound Italian, that the Jews in these areas were -- Sephards are very few and far between. They wonder, what was it -- What was your name before you changed it? Well, it was the same, you know, it just -- different names. Anyway, so there was, if you read this book, "The Haven," this lady, Ruth Gruber.

Q: This is the book by Ruth Gruber, right, excuse me.

A: Ruth Gruber, she describes about all the political gyrations that took place during the time, which were not within my knowledge, because I didn't dwell on them.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Isak Mike Danon. This is tape number three, side B.

A: Well, we had my older sister, we found out where she was and all that. And we -- we were thinking of bringing her over here instead of us going there. So we didn't even entertain a thought of going back, if we could remain here.

Q: Can you -- At this point, does -- what does your father know of his parents?

A: My father didn't know anything about his parents. He assumed that they were dead immediately after they were taken and he was saying the memorial prayers for them, right away, I mean.

Q: Who told him that they saw them taken?

A: Well, i-immigrants were coming o -- you know, s -- some who were able to escape and they'd come -- everybody was coming to Split, if they could, from other parts. If you envision Yugoslavia the way it was and here is one little, coastal sliver, that swa -- occupied by Italians, and the word gets around that you can survive there, everybody tries to go there, no matter what -- what -- no matter what the cost. So, lots of people came to Italian held areas and they talk about "Yeah, I saw your parents being taken," you know,

and all that. And -- Or people say, "Anybody left?" "No, nobody left," of the Jewish communities, here, there, you know, so that was pretty well known.

Q: Y-You say your father was saying the memorial prayer, did -- did he ever make it a formality and ask you to join him and say this as a kind of a service for his parents?

A: No, no, he -- he thought -- I guess this is what he had, a premonition that they died, certain day and that's how he a-assumed and he -- th-that day, he decided they died, yeah. This was, I guess he needed it, you know, to what we -- what do we call here, closure, or something, yeah, in today-speak, you know.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about, you mentioned in your first interview, the feeling of the camp, of that it was enclosed. I don't know if there was a fence or barbed wire, and just some of the feelings that that sparked among people, par-par-particularly you?

A: Well, you know, this was the big thing, when newspeople came to interview us, all over -- I mean, New York Times said there was a lady a-and she asked, "What do you like about the camp? And is there anything ya -- what did -- don't you like?" And then she quoted us yelling the word for barbed wire, is zhitsa, and says -- she quotes, "Zhitsa, they all yelled in unison," you know. No, this is a rebellious spirit in a teenager. You know, somebody's trying to chain me, and that was it, but aside from not being able to go into town, except later, they allowed us so many visits or -- within such a radius of 20 miles and special dispensation to go to Syracuse, which was maybe 30 miles, you know. No, there was nothing. Even the quote zhitsa, didn't bother us that much. Life was pretty smooth. No matter -- If I think, in retrospect, wherever I was, wh-wherever I might have

been, I watch today's youth, you know, I had everything there, we all did. No, absolutely, there was no complaints, except the psychological first impression to a rebellious teenager, you know, that when you see a fence around you. So that was not a problem.

Q: You mentioned again -- In your first interview, you mentioned the Japanese internment and I ha -- a -- maybe suggested a parallel there. I-I-Is that something you have any thoughts on, or did back then, I don't know if you were sa -- aware, you know, aware of the fact that the same administrators that administered the Japanese internment camps, were administering your camps. I -- I don't know if --

A: No, we were not aware of the internment of the Japanese Americans until much later, yeah, when we learned, you know, in our history, after we were released from the camp. But the only reason I mention it, is because I wanted to convey to whoever I was talking to, that this was the administration that was in charge of us, the very same one that was in charge of the Japanese, and I -- my guess was going to be that they -- the Japanese were - - Japanese Americans were treated just as well as we were. I couldn't see any reason why they wouldn't ha-have been. But, basically, it was the same administration, was called War Relocation Authority. And then for us, they had a separate segment, it was called emergency refugee center, Oswego, New York. But it was the same administration. You know, they had the same machinery in motion. So, that's the only reason I mentioned it, yeah.

Q: Can you talk -- You alluded to it a little bit ago, can you talk about the transition from leaving Fort Ontario, to having to really strike out and set up life in the United States, and

-- and tell us some of the things that happened right before you left, and -- and sort of take us through that.

A: Well, what happened to us was, I mean, we had to leave and we all left. We were sent to New York. But before that, there was a group that had sponsored us. The United States government was not allowing, in those days, of free entry to the people who sought immigration to the United States. They wanted somebody to put a bond, monitor a bond, to guarantee that we would not become a public charge. So this organization, the Jewish organization called Jewish American Joint Distribution Committee, put the funding -- in other words, they guarantee that -- they guarantee that we would not become a public charge. So, what they were trying to do is, people who are leaving the camp, they were trying to disperse them, so they wouldn't all go to New York, because they had the mechanism to take care of people, but not if they all go to the same place, because that's a big burden on one location. So, they interviewed everybody and they convinced my parents to go to Philadelphia. They told them what a great place it is, and in Philadelphia, there is a Sephardic synagogue, which is on the historic sites today, but it was the second synagogue in the United States. Now, the first one was on the Cape -- I'm sorry, first one was in Newport, Connecticut -- Newport, Rhode Island, yeah. It's called su -- Truro synagogue, same as a town on the Cape, so strike that out, yeah. But anyway, in -- in Philadelphia, there is a synagogue where George Washington had visited there, yeah, so they talked to us about history, you know, and that, "You will be welcome there," and all that. Okay, so my father wen -- okay. Some of our friends went to Baltimore, be -- this

one guy told us later, he agreed to go to Baltimore, because Baltimore, that part, more, m-o-r-e, means sea in Serbo-Croatian, so he thought he would going to be near the sea.

Well, close enough, but not exactly. Anyway, so different people went to different places, but I would say not too many went to Omaha, Nebraska, or you know, Caspar, Wyoming or something. Still, it was either LA, Chicago or New York, Philadelphia area. So, when we left the camp, we had to go someplace, because we were under the quota and Yugoslav quota was not very large, like maybe six a year or something. But, I think my parents, because they were born in Sarajevo, Bosnia, which at the time they were born, was under the Austro-Hungary empire, I think they put them under Austrian quota, which was much larger. So -- Still, they decided to close the camp in January and everybody had to be out. Well --

Q: January of what year?

A: January 1945. I'm sorry, '46. Oh, how time flies. 1946. We came in '44, and we were there a year and a half. August '44, to -- okay. So, in January, they were closing the camp and everybody had to leave, so we were taken or shipped to New York, and we stayed at the place which was run by an organization called HIAS. It's an acronym for Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. Anyway, so we stayed there for three, four days in January, we were on the February quota. February, we had to leave the country, and we went to Canada. We went to Niagra, Niagra Falls, Canada, and then we crossed the bridge to United States. But it was all pre-arranged with the immigration officials. They had all our papers squared away. They let us leave the country and then as we came, yeah, yeah --

and from there we boarded the trains and came to Philadelphia, where we were met by a representative from a Jewish social agency. And they took us to a country club, which was, because it was winter, wasn't too well frequented. Anyway, so we spend there, about five, six weeks, until this one guy, he was our quote, caseworker. He would take us from the country club, to -- he stayed with us in the country club. He would take us to the city and try to find us an apartment and jobs, and all that. Well, eventually, he found us jobs -- I mean, he found us an apartment and we moved to Philadelphia, from this country club, was called Filmount Country Club. I di -- I remember the country club, it was very luxurious. I don't know if you know about Gimbel's, used to be a department store, the owner had organized this club, and it was -- they used to try to impress us, what it takes to be a member of that club, you know. Anyway, but we enjoyed the facilities and then we moved to Philadelphia, in a very slummy apartment, because that's all that was figured out we could afford. And it was in the area what is today known as Society Hill, but in those days wasn't Society Hill. It's within a block or two from Independence Hall, and all these historic sites. Anyway, life in Philadelphia for me, was very difficult. I mean, I didn't -- again, I didn't dwell on it, but I found a job, within maybe 10 days, I found a job in the factory -- hat factory. It was very hard work. The pay was minimal wage, which it --

Q: Do you -- Do you remember what it was?

A: Yeah, 50 cents an hour. And I remember, after the first month, I had to go -- no, I didn't have to, but I went, asked for a raise, and it was a nickel, so I was making 55. And

then they passed a law that made it, the minimal 55 and I felt cheated. So next month I got another nickel raise and so forth. But that was some really hard work. I worked there harder than I ever did anywhere. If you can imagine, hats are made from felt, heavy felt and steam. So you shape it with steam and in the summer, lots of steam is just not conducive to a well-being of a person, like myself, anyway. Anyway, so I worked there, and --

Q: B-Before you go on, why -- why didn't you go to school?

A: Well, was --

Q: Wha -- Who made that decision.

A: The de-decision was made by my father. We didn't have any money, that was the decision. He didn't want to work, so I was the only one over 16, so the idea was that I was going to earn something, whatever it was. And, as the customs of the times were, all children turned over their paycheck -- that's mailman -- turned over their paycheck to their father, and I was doing that. And if I could work extra, or overtime, and all that, that was -- I was proud to bring a bigger check. Little by little my checks became, like 18 dollars clear. Fi-First it was like 14 something and with the taxes deducted, you know. Then it got to be 16 - 18 and then finally I started making like a dollar an hour, God, I thought I was really the highest paying employee anywhere, and with overtime, I was happy. And --

Q: Why didn't your father want to work? At this point, he must have been about 45 or 50.

A: Yeah. He didn't want to work. He was never much for working, even when we were kids, when we had the store. He said it was his store and my -- he would say my mother was like an employee. But he never went to work there, very rarely would he go. And if he would go, he would like, make it by 11 o'clock. And people would wait for him. You know, customers would line up, sometimes wait for him. People from the villages, who sold their foods and wares and like the milk lady, she would come early, deliver milk, and then with the money that she would collect, she has to buy a -- supplies or whatever, including material for clothes. So they would wait for him, they never knew when he was going to show up, 10:30 - 11. But anyway, he was not a working person. So, eventually, I got my employer to offer him a job, and he did try, for awhile, but it was too hard for him, you know. So he didn't -- he just never worked. Yeah, he would -- My two sisters were young, you know, they were under 16, so they went to school. And then my mother found a job with some local family that was making aprons, yeah. And she was just folding them and packaging them. Not much of a job, but that helped. But they didn't need her, they didn't need a full time employee. So, eventually, my mother found a place in a -- a factory -- clothing, men's clothing factory in Philadelphia. That was big industry there. But I was the one that provided the main sustenance, you know, for the family. And, after the first, maybe four months -- like we came in February, in Philadelphia, I got this job after we left this country club, in April and next September, I signed up for evening school, yeah. And from then on, I went to evening school. First high school,

then, you know, college. Seems like 15 years of evening -- evening school. But anyway -
- yeah?

Q: Why did you do that?

A: Because, I had completed -- in Oswego, where we were signed up, I started seventh grade, and as soon as I learned the language, got on the dean's list, you know. Let's face it, I was 14, and the kids in that class were 12. Yeah, so it -- I don't want to attribute to myself any superior intelligence, but I was older, so my brain should function a little better than a younger kid. So, anyway, so I would be promoted every couple of months, to the next grade. So, in the -- what, in a year and a half, I had completed three years of junior high school, seventh, eighth and ninth grade. And, incidentally, all the kids in Fort Ontario were not only on dean's list, but they were like top honors, always. They used to call it high honors and we had to march to the stage, where the principal would shake our hand and hand us the report card, whereas others would get it in their classrooms, you know. Anyway, this was during the assembly. But, so I started going to school, and I would also take tests. What -- These were like Regency tests. It was uniform test, GD, I guess they call it, about each individual subject. What -- We had an advantage, I spoke many languages by that time, and other languages have much more complex grammars. And American kids have problems knowing when to say me, or I, or him, or he, or -- you know, things like that. And I would take these tests, English tests, and I mean, y-you just listen to your ear and think about another language, you know. So, you have maybe two cases or three cases nominative, or objective and maybe possessive, which is -- we had

seven of them, you know, and all of these different tenses in verbs and all that. So it was very easy, I mean, except for spelling and pronunciation, English came pretty easy to us. But anyway, the point is, I was able to take all these tests and move up my high school education. I graduated from high school, and then went to college.

Q: How old were you at that point, when you graduated from high school?

A: Well, I gr-graduated --

Q: Can you remember?

A: Yeah, I graduated in about a year and a half and so I was like 18 or so. 18 -- 18 and a half. I know, less than 19. And then I started college. But this was, in those days, they didn't have like all, every evening, for four hours in the afternoon. Don't forget, I was working full time, overtime occasionally. So, I would just go two hours at night, to school. And it took awhile, until, well, at one point, much -- not much later, but in 1950, there was a war in Korea and I was just the right age for that. So they tried to draft me, but I got a couple of deferments, because I was the sole support of the family. But that didn't last forever. So, eventually, I got drafted and well, I got drafted in the month that they declare end of the war, in January '55. So, after serving my [indecipherable]

Q: Okay.

A: I want to go back, yeah. Anyway, I was drafted in January, 1955, and after serving my basic training, I was sent to Europe, yeah, to Germany, yeah. Well, that didn't go over too well with me, because of my background. I didn't think it was too safe to keep me in Germany. Safe for maybe somebody else, because I might be armed and might decide

that the -- you know, to provide justice for myself or whatever. But anyway, the point was, I was, when I was inducted into the army, they give you a battery of tests. And one of the things that they decided that I would be pretty good for, filling an interpreters position. And interpreters are mostly needed in front lines. So they trained me to be an infantryman, and they send me to Germany. I spoke some German, but not enough to be an interpreter. Then I told them that I wasn't happy, so within eight days or so, they send me to France.

Q: Did you explain to them why? I mean this, your personal history in context?

A: Yeah, but I explained that to the chaplain, not to anybody in the chain of command, because I don't think the army would accommodate anything like that. So I guess he talked to whoever was in the personnel office, when they were filling quotas for France. In those days, we maintained what was known as communication zone in s -- in France, so I was sent to a place near Bordeaux, a camp which had a hospital. Well, it was like a regional hospital, regional POL. That stands for petroleum, oil and lubricants, and the other [indecipherable] area. They were all from Bordeaux, all the way to the German lines, where we maintained our native strength. So anyway, so I was sent there to interpret French, which I didn't know a single word of. And the commanding officer insisted that I was filling the slot, and he wanted me to interpret, so six weeks later, when he called me, I interpreted. Anyway, so that's -- I spend a year and a half in France.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Isak Mike Danon, conducted by Katie Davis, on February 26, 1999, in Springfield, Virginia. This is a follow up interview to a USHMM videotaped interview, conducted with isen -- Isak Mike Danon, November six, 1989. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr, for making this interview possible. This is tape number four, side A. A clarification, at this point, are -- are you a citizen of the United States?

A: I obtained my citizenship as soon as I was enti -- eligible for it, within five years of residence, which was something one strived for. I know I did. I know my parents did and everybody that I knew that was in similar situation like I was, strived for, with pride.

Q: Okay. Well, that was my other question. At that point, what were your feelings about this country?

A: I'm -- Well, how does one say I would be top patriot, you know. I would offer myself and whatever, you know, like they said in the signing the Declaration of Independence, our bodies and fortunes and whatever else. I mean, I had great feelings about this country, and I still do, of course. I may have political differences with some of the foreign policy, or maybe even internal policies, but you know, the country which provided a home for me is utmost in my esteem, for -- unquestionably.

Q: So when -- So when you were called to serve, and it was clear that -- that you needed to do so and that your family would be taken care of, I guess -- I guess what I want to ask

is, what was your attitude when you went to serve in the army, representing the United States?

A: Okay, well first, a slight correction would be that my family would not be cared for. They have, you know, allotment, but they're not sufficient to maintain oneself, especially this point. Well, my sisters were already getting older, you know. I mean, they -- they could go to work. I don't know if it's both sisters. Let's see, in 1950, no, my one sister would be -- '31, she was 19. No, 18, at that time, so she was working already, the -- the one next to me, but the youngest one was still in school. So, this is the sister that I mentioned to you that, pretty strong willed, and she, as soon as she started working, she says, "Well, my money, the one -- the money that I earn, is mine." And she had problems with my father. He insisted that it was his. So they came up to some compromise, but still, not enough to maintain the family. You know, she was making like 25 dollars or so a week and she settled for contributing 15 maybe, you know. It -- Not maybe, but that's the number that I remember.

Q: This is Esther?

A: No, this is Sarah.

Q: Sarah.

A: Yeah. The -- The one that when she was nine was guiding my mother, pulling her by the hand. Anyway, so that was the other source of income, and my mother, she would work, or wouldn't work, depending on the situation where she was working. They had layoffs, and she wasn't very quick. She couldn't -- She couldn't manage on the

piecework, so they had to pay her the minimum wage, and they were not happy to pay minimum wage to somebody who could not earn it under the piecework system. So my mother would be the first one to get laid off and the last to be re-hired. So, anyway, that's why I say my family would not be taken care of. But, when my younger sister started working and the allotment, you know, and all that, then I -- I di -- I agreed that, okay, my family could survive without my full support.

Q: The allotment was what?

A: The allotment in those days was based on my salary, which was 78 dollars, so from that, I needed to contribute something, and the government would contribute something also. And I remember later, when I got a promotion, and -- well, whatever it was, increase in pay, that the government's contribution would be 105 dollars a month. But we ended up, my father was afraid to sign anything, and so h-he never signed the application for allotment. He -- After we left camp, he was totally -- not devastated, but destroyed. I mean, his psyche was destroyed. He -- He thought that -- that people were looking at him, the secret police was watching him, you know, and all that. It was -- mentally, he had problems. And he wouldn't leave the house, he would stay in the house, all the time peek from the windows, you know. So he was not capable of doing anything. And he was afr - like I said, afraid to sign any documents, for fear that might -- it might be some form of a commitment or something, I don't know.

Q: So, in a sense, you really were in charge of the family, after this -- at this point your father became somewhat disabled by --

A: Yeah, but --

Q: -- it sounds like some sort of mental illness.

A: Yeah, but he still maintained the control. This was -- Yeah, you don't dethrone a king just because he is not functioning in the most efficient manner. So this was one of the friction points in our lives, and it took long time to resolve it. In fact, it wasn't -- it was never resolved, except when I came back from the military, it was a financial settlement kind of thing, that we decided how much we're going to provide for him and whatever he does with it, it's okay with us.

Q: Us being who?

A: Us being me and my two sisters. Actually, one sister was married. She got married in 1951, so -- yeah, '50 -- '51, June '51. So -- I mean July '51. So that eli-eliminated her, but it was my younger sister and me.

Q: Now that you mention getting married, at this point, you're working, you're going to school, then you have a stint in the military. Are you able to find time to date and court and you know, start thinking about a family yourself, or how does that come about?

A: Okay, first I -- My life was totally taken up by my work and my school. And my social life consisted of Sunday afternoon, I would go to -- in Philadelphia, to the Y, work out, swim, meet some people there and spend the afternoon or evening. I did not have enough money to go on dates or anything at that point, for a long while. Then I started dating. I guess I met this girl at school in the evening, at college. And we dated for awhile

and I was still mentally a child, while she was more mature and she wanted a future and I guess I wasn't ready for that. Then --

Q: Was she an -- an immigrant?

A: No, no. I didn't -- I maintained contact with one family, who were immigrants. In fact, there were three brothers in this family and they lived in Philadelphia, not too far from me. And the oldest boy was a year older than me and the second one in line was year younger. And they were part of my clique in Fort Ontario. When I say my clique, we were in the same clique and then when we moved here, we continued our friendship. I say here meaning Philadelphia. We maintained our friendship, then the second they -- one of the -- middle brother of the three, he was accepted -- he was a pretty good student, he was accepted in what they call Central High, which is academically advanced -- advanced school. In fact, you get a BA when you graduate from that high school.

Anyway, and that was his future, he found friends, he developed different friendship. But the older brother, this fellow by name of Raymond Barney, he was a friend of mine from then on, I mean, from the camp and in Philadelphia, for a very long time. In fact, when I was in the military service, I was stationed in France, and they're French, yeah, and he came to visit me and we sort of got our signals mixed up. We were supposed to meet in Nice and I went there for a week, and he wasn't there. And then I came back and he was waiting for me near Bordeaux, in my installation, but I had already shot my vacation.

And anyway, so we were good friends. And then, while I was in the service, he met a girl and he married her, and she was from New York, so he moved to New York. But, when I

came back from the service, I was -- I started dating some other girl, and I dated her for like three, four years, but it was just Saturday night kind of thing, you know. We had a standing Saturday night date. But then, let's see, what happened, we broke up, I know. She went to -- to one of these resorts in the Catskill, she met somebody that was more serious than me, so that ended that. And then, in one of my summer evening classes, there was a bunch of girls -- this was Spanish class. I was trying to get some college credits in a hurry, so I would attend -- let's say I would attend advance college course, but they wouldn't give me credit unless I had some of the other preliminaries. So I would take an exam in the preliminary, pass that and have the advance course, which I had to sit for. And this was advanced Spanish. So she saw I had a ring. It was a monogram ring that had turned itself around and she thought I was married, so she thought I was safe, nobody would say that, you know, that she was hitting on me, to use the current colloquial. And so she would come and sit like next to me and I won't say copy, but we would work the homework together. And it was a very happy group, like about eight girls and two guys and we would go after class, we go out, celebrate, or whatever. And that girl, when I decided to leave town, get a job someplace else, I left her, you know. And then one year I went to the mountains, the Catskills and lo and behold, we met again. And that was my wife for 30 years, and she passed away a year ago.

Q: And her name?

A: Sandra.

Q: Okay.

A: And --

Q: Where was Sandra from?

A: S-Sandra, she was from Philadelphia. She was born and raised in Philadelphia and her father was also born in the United States. Her mother came to United States from either Poland or Russia, when she was like about two years old. And let's see, she -- Sandra was also a night school college student. She -- She graduated with a degree in physics and math and she worked at General Electric. They had the research in the ballistic, you know, the -- what do you call it, the missile re-entry was GE's job. In the olden days, the missile would be shot up and out of the atmosphere and when it would come back, it would burn, because the re-entry was physically too hot, I guess. It would burn out, so GE was working on different projects and she was in math and physics and computers -- with first generation computers, yeah. And well, we got to know each other and we got married in 1970. I'm sorry -- '69.

Q: Was she Jewish?

A: The what?

Q: Is she -- Was she Jewish?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: She was Jewish. Anyway, let's see, I s -- I sort of didn't tell you anything about my life, but anyway, I -- at one point, I-I started work -- when I came back from the military, I started working for the federal government, and in the college, I had taken up

accounting, that was my major. And I had obtained like a certificate, which means 60 semester hours. Mostly concentrated in whatever my chosen field is, which was accounting, auditing, cost accounting and similar. And then economics, finance, things like that. And then, when I went into the military, I got a few credits to languages. They have a military college, it's a male kind of thing. You take a test -- You sign up and you take a test at the end, yeah. Whenever you're ready, you mail your lessons to them, they mark them, whatever. Yeah, so I got a bunch of semester hours from -- during the military stint -- stint. And then I -- And when I came back, I had enough that I could see my way, you know, light at the end of the tunnel, so I continued, and that's how I met her, you know. She was doing the same thing. She was working and going to college in the evening.

Q: Were you still living at home and taking care of your mother and father?

A: Yeah. At that point, I was. And then my younger sister got married and it was just --

Q: Esther?

A: Yeah, Esther. And at that point I decided that somebody like myself, I guess -- how old was I? It's -- I could have [indecipherable] to what I was, but anyway, it was time to leave the nest, sort of, even though I was supporting it, the only sa -- means of support for it. But I decided to leave and I got a job with the -- well, I was working at the arsenal in Philadelphia, place called Frankford Arsenal, doing what I'm trained to do, namely accounting work. And then I applied for an auditors job, and this was out of Columbus, Ohio. So in 1961, I guess I was 32 then, I left home and I went to Columbus, Ohio and I

worked for outfit called Army Audit Agency, and we did auditing of the military establishment.

Q: Was that a difficult transition for your parents, to have you leave? I mean, after all they -- they did depend on you very much, whether they -- your father acknowledged it or not.

A: Okay, well you know it's funny, because when I was -- when I was living there before, we were really living like church mice. I mean, life was not pleasant, we were not eating well, we were not having too much, you know, in the way of resources. And, I don't know if I can describe the life, it was so basic, you know, and the -- occasionally my mother would come and ask us for more money, because there's no money. What my father was doing is really hoarding the money, yeah. So he had accumulated some money that we didn't know about it. And he, after I left, they used that to live on. And it's funny, because my younger sister, she would pay bills for them and she knew how much they had. And it was just -- My father passed away at a young age, 63, I believe, 64, depending on how one computes, because they all had two different day -- birth dates, you know, different years, because like his father didn't want him to go to the military, compulsory draft, at a very young age, so he didn't register him when he was born, he registered a year or two later. Anyway, so when my father passed away, there was like 10 dollars in his account, you know, but they were using that up, whatever his savings were. So I guess they managed, if they didn't have any money, I'm sure I and some of my

sisters, maybe, I don't know, but I'm sure we could have given them enough. But anyway, that was -- it was a sad part of the whole story.

Q: When your father did pass away, what happened to your mother?

A: Well, my mother, she became alive then. She came to live with my younger sister. My younger sister had two little children. I don't know whether she had two or one at the time. And my older -- my other sister, had a daughter, a young daughter that she would bring to the other sister's house. So my mother would take care of these little kids and she was in seventh heaven. She really enjoyed that. And my sister, to her credit, would take good care of my mother, take her out all the time, you know, when -- when her husband would be home to stay with the children, she would take her out to restaurants. This is something that I guess I feel guilty, because we never took our mother out before, because our father would not want us to. And -- But anyway, my mother, all that stored up social, what shall I say? Expertise, and -- came out. She blossomed, you know. And my other sister, she -- she liked my mother, she took care of her, I mean, calling her glamour girl, you know, and all that. Her life improved 1,000 percent after that. So, she lived with my younger sister for a very long time, until my youngest sister could -- sh-she got Alzheimer's or maybe not Alzheimer, some form of dementia and then my sister had to put her in a home, yeah. But anyway --

Q: Tell us a little about you and Sandra and your children.

A: Well, Sandra and I, or Sandy, as we called her, we had a wonderful life. I may get choked up on this. We have two little -- two little -- two daughters, we're proud of both

of them, and I'm not just saying things. My children were everything to me and my wife. My wife stayed at home all our married life. Well, since the first daughter was born, a few months before that. I wanted her to make a home for our children. I had a job, which I enjoyed tremendously, but it involved travel. Different time, different extent travel, but always travel. There was a point where I traveled once a week for a couple of days. When my wife and I got married, I was just promoted to a manager's position in our office. And I had the luxury of not having to travel extensively at one time, but I would have different teams go out and do audits and I would just visit them for a day or two at the site. And still, that meant being away from home, so somebody had to take care of the children. I was used to living not very luxuriously. My salary --

End of Tape Four, Side A

Beginning Tape Four, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Isak Mike Danon. This is tape number four, side B.

A: Okay, yeah, what was I saying?

Q: You were talking about your job and how it made you travel.

A: Yeah. Anyway, so I would go fa -- visit different audit sites and I was maybe even go at the beginning and get them started and they would be there for three, four weeks, maybe I would go once more, maybe I would go for final close-out with the installation that we were auditing. But somebody had to take care of the children and help them grow. What I started saying is that because of my modest background, I was able to

comfortably live on my salary, or my family was able to, you know. I provided them whatever comforts they needed. In my opinion maybe not so luxurious, but anyway, we took our vacations maybe a little bit out of the seasons. We -- You know, we took vacations four or five times a year, but maybe smaller ones, you know, when the [indecipherable] week-ends. And maybe before the kids started going to school, we go to the beach in June and September, which was perfect for me, because it wasn't too crowded. Anyway, we -- we didn't go to restaurants that cost, you know, hundreds of dollars. We found some interesting pla -- restaurants that catered to family trade and as far as I know, my wife was satisfied and the kids were satisfied. And anyway, so the children were going to school, and the older one especially, she did good work. I don't know why, but she always feared that she may not meet the standards that she sets for herself. Maybe she thought we expected a lot from her, maybe she thought I expected a lot from her. But she -- she participated in sports, swimming. They were not very big, I'm a small guy and their mother wasn't too big. She was about my height, maybe an inch shorter, and the kids are five foot one, five foot, you know. So they're not very tall and not very big. And anyway, the older one participated in sports, first swimming and then diving and that was a very active part of her life. In school, both of them were in the theater and they were -- they excelled, actually, in these things, both of them. And anyway, so the older one turned out to be quite a scholar. I feel a l -- a lot guilty -- I was going to say a little guilty -- a lot guilty that I didn't keep up fully with their development in scholastics. But, to tell you about the older one, and since I'm oriented

toward scholastics, I'm proud of her achievements. She graduated from high school with a four point average. She went to William and Mary and she graduated Summa Cum Laude, which is three out of the class were that. And then, to my surprise, she decided that she wants to become a rabbi. And she went to this school, University of Judaism. And of course, now the expenses started getting a little bit higher, because the second one was getting ready to go to college, and -- but anyway, we managed to send her and she's now a rabbi. She's -- She's teaching, because in -- and she married, what is -- we classify as Orthodox. We are not Orthodox, we are middle of the road, or Conservative, who -- Conservatives accept women rabbis, but Orthodox do not, yet. Saying yet, that's a political statement. Anyway, so she's now teaching. She's 29 years old.

Q: What's her name? Her name?

A: Oh, her name is Elisa Danon Kaplan. She married a young boy, his name is Three Jonathan Kaplan. He's a Canadian young man from Montreal. About a year and a half ago, a little less than that, we all flew to Montreal -- no, we didn't fly, I flew in my car, yeah, I picked up my daughter, and my -- older daughter and took her to Montreal, me and my wife and her.

Q: Your wife did go?

A: Yeah. That was -- After the wedding, she started getting worse, went downhill from there. But anyway, she was married 21st of September, 1997, my daughter, in Montreal. The entire family, on his side, was in New York, except his mother and father. And we were here, but the mother, she is the kind of person, the take charge person, and they

asked me if I would have objection if they have a wedding in Montreal, and knowing that my wife, Sandy was not in the best of shape, we agreed, and it was a very nice wedding. It's -- We have a lot of nice memories from that. And the younger daughter, she -- after she graduated --

Q: Her name?

A: Her name is Shoshanna. First one, if I mentioned, Elisa, yeah. Shoshanna is still single. She graduated from the same high school, in this vicinity. And then she went to Old Dominion University. It took her a little bit longer, because she was sick for one year, she had mononucleosis. That sort of slowed her down and then she -- I don't know, it took her a little longer, anyway. She was not the studious type. She just -- Two weeks ago she told me she's moving out. She got an apartment on Connecticut Avenue. She -- She graduated last June and she has a job with a private day school. Actually, it's a synagogue day school in Washington, on Connecticut Avenue. Yeah Adatz Israel Primary School. And she got an apartment there. I hope she finds good use for the apartment. Right now, she's still spending about four days at home. I guess she doesn't want to admit it, but she comes here for a good home cooked meal. So, that's it, but like I said, the life, for the past 30 years with my wife, was wonderful. And if I could change it, I would not.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Yeah. I mean, it's -- had everything that I needed, wanted, could e -- could expect, or wish for.

Q: When you reflect back on the experience that you had, of -- of growing up in Split, and having to leave and the -- spending time with the partisans and the -- all the upheaval, how do you think that shaped you? I mean, you were still at a point in your life, where you were being shaped. You were not 25 and, you know, already a fully made person. H-How do you -- How do you think that shaped you?

A: Well, I wish I had taken psychology in school, I might have been able to answer that question a little better. But, I guess everybody's shaped by the events. Many of these events take place, and the shaping is inside, th-that we are not aware of. We don't know what's causing what and how we're being affected. You hear about two brothers, genetically they are the same, maybe even twins. They grow up, one becomes a scientist, the other is a gangster, you know. So the -- I don't know whether we have the environment that's prevalent, that it's determinant, or whether it's genes or what. But I -- I have never stopped to analyze what made me what I am or what I was. I know one thing, that at one time, as I was growing up, I think I was very industrious and now I'm lazy. The only work I do, mostly it's volunteering for different things and that's what I have tonight, the volunteer job and tomorrow. But how we are shaped, that's for the psychologists and psychoanalysts and whatever. I know one thing, that I feel, quote, other people's pain. I know that's a term, I feel your pain is a common term that doesn't mean anything, but I do. And I feel that I'm conscientious. I know what my responsibilities are and I try to live up to them. Once upon a time, I think I had initiative. Now it'll take -- I don't know what it'll take to get me moving, you know. And it's not

lack of physical ability, because I work out all the time, in the gym. So, you know, I go through that, and --

Q: Do -- Do you mean since you retired that you've -- you call yourself lazy, is it -- is it just because you've retired?

A: Yeah, [indecipherable], yeah, I think so, yeah. I retired because my wife needed a lot of help. She -- At one point she was like a quadriplegic. I-It just went downhill. And you know, th-that may be one reason. Another reason, it's -- the -- the s -- well, the atmosphere at work changed. I don't know if this is appropriate to say, but I'll say it anyway, you can clip it out. But white males over 45 or 50, were not preferred species in the government service. In fact, they wanted us out. So, because of the circumstances and the offer they made me, I jumped at the opportunity to leave. Anyway, the -- you know, the work situation was not conducive to a happy feeling, depending on who you were and how you fit, you know, but being who I was just -- I didn't find it any more chal -- not challenging, any more acceptable, anyway, for me.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about when you got here to the United States, ho-how you continued with your faith. You mentioned that your father was -- I mean, it was a very strong component of your life, when you were growing up in your house, you were taught about it. In that period, when you were working and trying to, you know, get ahead, and then also, in the 30 years with you and your wife, how -- how was that part of your life?

Q: Well, my faith actually -- we were brought up in the faith when we were children. However, when we went to the partisans -- I have to tell you that partisans were Socialists, in fact Communists and faith was not one of the accepted -- what shall I say, orientations. You know, they were not known for a-ad-advocating religious faith. So, at that point, the faith, because I was in the formative years, I had dropped some of my religious convictions and swung over to the other side, if you will. And then, in this camp in Oswego, well, we had the opportunity to practice our religion. But at that point, I was sort of rebelling and my father would force me -- of course, kids are forced to do their religious obligations, but -- and then after, when I started working in Philadelphia, I would go to services not as often as one should, but maybe once a month and for the high holidays. And we didn't maintain a kosher home or anything. And then later, when I left home and I was traveling. I was traveling -- When I was single, I was traveling hundred - - no, 90 percent of the time, yeah. Because we would go to an installation, and these installations were in the boonies, you know. I mean, no, it's -- maybe -- first one that I went to was in Arkansas, you know? West Memphis. Then I went to Clarksville, Tennessee, it's Fort Campbell, it was big installation. Then I went to -- near Lexington. And then, after that, well, I was traveling a lot. When I came to -- In Department Interior, I was traveling through what they call Job Corps sites, which meant in the woods, you know. In the -- the areas where they would put these young people that they had to teach how to work. They would take young -- the young teenagers in this -- 15 -16 - 17 - 18 years of age, from downtown Baltimore and New York, and take them into forests and

the national parks, and wildlife preserves, and to build things and they would -- and teach them how to -- well, some of them had fi -- completed 11 grades of high schools, but couldn't sign their name. Yeah, this was -- they called it conservation work. Okay, so I was -- be visiting these and spend a month there. There's no ci-civilization. There was -- be no synagogues to go to. So, I think I was not diligent enough in my religious orientation, and -- but I knew who I was and everything, along those lines. I met my wife, my -- the la -- the woman that I married -- well, when we met, again, as I mentioned before, in the Catskills Mountains -- I say mountains, it's a -- a place called Concorde, which was a quite plush resort. I remember one night I counted 17 bands and orchestras, different location, within that one hotel. But anyway, after we started dating, I was working in Boston, commuting on weekends to visit her. And then, when we got married, which was 1969, March '69, we moved to this area, that's where my job was. She still lived in Philadelphia. We moved here, first thing we did is look for a synagogue. She was, well, ma -- we found a synagogue in Alexandria, where we still belong, or I still belong. It's 30 years ago, and our first child wasn't born yet, but she already knew that she was expecting when we joined the synagogue and I remember when my young -- m- my older one was like six, seven years old, we started coming every Saturday to the services and it was like a comeback, yeah. There's a Hebrew word -- and I'll give you the Hebrew, Baltishua, which means somebody who comes back to the faith, yeah. So I would classify us as such. But this took place like 28 years ago. Yeah, and again, my faith is still very important to me. Currently, I started sort of socially seeing a lady. She's

Italian, Catholic, very observant in her religion, but we're socially, what is it? We're getting along fine. That's -- I haven't told that to my daughters yet, but anyway, that's it.

Q: I just have a couple more questions. You mentioned to me, before we began this interview, that when you did your videotaped interview in 1989, it was one of the first time you'd really talked about the fact that you'd -- that -- that you're a survivor, you --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- you had it -- an experience in the war that many others have had and I'm just curious about that, why you didn't talk about it, and then, at what point after you did begin to talk about it, did it shift a little bit?

A: Okay, well, no, the reason I didn't talk about, is because I didn't believe in victimization. I didn't want to center my life around history, memories and all that. Lots of people have adverse conditions in their earlier parts of their lives, and if they dwell on it and make their whole life based on their victimhood, if you will, then they're not going to be very functional. I did not want to think about those things. But then later, when I was being pressed by different people, including my sister -- my younger sister, Esther, why don't I join the survivor's groups and why don't I do things to, you know, to bring out situations, to sort of tell people about our history. I -- For awhile I said, "What's the point, what's the point?" But then they might think that I was being obsessive on that part. So I said, "Okay, so if that's what you think I should do, fine." And that's when Martin Goldman asked me to do this video and this -- the synagogue was getting ready to put out that book a year or two later and like -- when was it, recently, there's a Jewish in -

- there is a day in the Jewish calendar called Yom HaShoah, which is a Holocaust memorial. Shoah means Holocaust in Hebrew. I was asked to give it -- a speech, a talk. In fact, they asked me to read this letter. It's like a memorial service for -- for the area. This was in this northern Virginia. Different synagogues ha -- different years they hold it. So I spoke at my synagogue one year and last year was to another -- when I say I spoke to my synagogue, it was a community -- not celebration, what do you call it? Commemoration like --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, yeah. And I spoke to another synagogue in Reston last year, which had this community service. And so, today I have no problem talking, although you did see how at certain points, I get a little choked up, but it's not an obsession with me, either way. And it's not a big event that made me either block it or release it. No, it just sort of flowed on itself.

End of Tape Four, Side B

Beginning Tape Five, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Isak Mike Danon. This is tape number five, side A, however, this is being done a week later, on March fifth, 1999. We are still in Springfield, Virginia, it is just another day and it is still a follow up interview to the first videotaped interview with Isak Mike Danon, of November six, 1989. I want you to think back to that period when you have your first job, you're working in that felt factory. You have described it as very difficult, you also describe your whole family as living like church mice. Can you remember at all what was in your mind that kept you going, or that you were striving towards? What -- What was giving you strength?

A: Well, I di -- I don't remember ever thinking too deeply about these things. I know somebody in our family had to earn a living and I was the logical candidate at that time. I was also having fun with -- with the kids my age. We would -- I would say we would run that factory, you know, we'd go wild sometimes, get yelled at, you know, things that 16 year old do, 16 - 17 - 18. And that's how the time passed. And of course, one thing, I always tried to work overtime, to earn a few dollars extra, because I knew the need. And later on, maybe I was a little bit resentful that I had to turn over my entire check to my father, but I guess we just lived on, you know, from day to day and like I said, I started going to school and I had too many other things on my mind that were more important than worrying about injustice and hard work and all that.

Q: Y-You mentioned turning over your check to your father, and in our interview a week ago, you talked about your younger sister, at a certain point, when she began earning money, refused to do it. She said, "Nope, this is my money." How do you explain -- I mean, she grew up in the same family, how do you explain her rebellion, really, against this sort of family authority? You were the good son, you were doing what you were supposed to do. Your younger sister, Sarah said no. And so she had acquired a different mindset.

A: Well, I guess she became Americanized earlier than I did, that's one possibility. Another possibility is when she started working, which was several years later, after she graduated from high school, at that time, I guess I was earning a little bit more, my mother already started making some money -- not much, in the factory. And so, th-things weren't as tight as they used to be. Plus, both my d -- my sister and I would be -- s-started going out, you know, so you spend some money and the need is there. And so she got backbone earlier than I did.

Q: You said maybe she was Americanized earlier. Wh-What -- What finally Americanized you, or ha -- when you think back on it, when did you first start to see some ideas that you would consider American and not Yugoslavian, old -- old country?

A: Well, maybe it's not Americanization, maybe it's gen -- a generation gap, that started sinking into my psyche, you know, my mentality. I don't know what -- at what point I started and what did it. I guess I started going out with some of the friends that -- where I worked, in the factory. And also school, I started dating a young lady in the class. So, you

know, you pick up things here and there, and you -- especially now, you -- and I had the support from my younger sister, so that was the point where I could assert myself in that particular area. But there were other things where I had differences with my father and I asserted myself to a -- to certain extent, but as I look back all the way to my life, I was always low profile, always avoiding confrontations. So maybe that's the reason. May -- May not be Americanization at all, just the term that I use to explain it.

Q: When you think of your friends, h-how would you describe them? Were they a -- a mixture, or did you tend to become friendly with other immigrants, within the Jewish community? How would you describe the people that you were spending time with?

A: Okay, there were three or four families that came from Fort Ontario with us and is several in Philadelphia, there weren't too many. And my parents were in constant contact with them. They would meet once a month for like, what do you call it, potluck kind of affairs at different houses. But I was very close with a family -- not family, but with two boys who were from Ontario. And I might have mentioned it in the earlier interview, two brother, by name of Barney. They were French and -- French and Bulgarian, but they lived in France. And the older one, Raymond Barney remained my very best friend, all throughout my younger days, but much of my limited recreational activity was also with my co-workers in the factory and they were 100 percent Italian. They were un -- living under the same restraints and restriction and limitations that I had, because their parents had the same kind of rules. The parents, or grandparents had come from Italy and they were like second generation Americans. So, I hung out with them and we would go on

vacations to Atlantic City and things like that. So, one more area where I made friends, was every Sunday afternoon, we would go to the Jewish Y in Philadelphia. And that's where -- for working out, swimming, and after that, we go maybe to a movie, or restaurant or something like that. Yeah?

Q: With your Italian friends, were you speaking Italian?

A: No, no, they -- they just knew few key words, which they couldn't be mentioned in mixed company in those days. But anyway, no, they would take me to their homes and I would talk to their parents or grandparents, Italian. But their Italian left something to be desired, because they spoke dialect. Many of them did not know the real Italian language. And Italian has so many dialects, like one city that's separated from another city by 30 - 50 miles, they don't understand each other. That's -- You know, they were city - states in the olden days.

Q: And then with Jewish friends, were -- what were you speaking?

A: Oh, my Jewish friends, we s -- they didn't speak Jewish, this is a younger generation. And I don't speak Jewish, so -- no, we spoke English. All the young people, even in Fort Ontario spoke English. We had, I forget how many different nationalities. I think they said 160 or something, you know, large number of different nationalities. And English language was the unifying element.

Q: S-So, by the time you're in Philadelphia, how is your English?

A: Oh, my English was quite good within a month or two that we were in United States. No, I -- When it comes to learning languages -- and I have a little key thought on that --

when it comes to learning languages, total immersion is the only answer in my mind, because I saw how long it took us from nothing to total, well, fluency, if you will. When we came to Fort Ontario, when we started going to schools, what happened, they put us in a school with the rest of the kids. There was no issue, you know, you speak this language or you speak that language, so keep you separated. So, for awhile we just sat there, like bumps on the log, you know, not doing anything or not responding. But, it was sinking in and I remember like in the school where I went to, we had maybe about 16 - 17 kids from Fort Ontario. I was the first one that got on the dean's list, and that was within second -- well, the second report card period, and we had six each year, like three in the first semester, and three in the second -- every six or seven weeks. So, I got on the dean's list the first time. The very next time, was three of us, but the others were on the high ca -- high honors and I was still on the dean list. Next semester I got on the high honor list. It was like a competition, yeah. And the language was not a barrier, especially we excelled in English grammar, because there was no grammar to worry about, actually, whereas the kids that were born here, they struggled, they didn't know objective case from nominative case, whatever. We were familiar with other languages, which had much more complex grammatical structures. So, that and of course, many of us were a little bit older than the other kids. Not all, but I was older than others in my fir -- class, where I was first assigned. So, they kept promoting us, you know, social promotions, if you will. And the language was the easiest thing to absorb. That was not an issue.

Q: What were your parents speaking at home?

A: My parents spoke at home, Serbo-Croatian, or Ladino, which is --

Q: Okay, okay.

A: -- yeah, if you -- if you remember, I explained last time what it is.

Q: Did you ever learn to speak Yiddish?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: No, we were not exposed to that particular a-area of, you know, people who came from where Yiddish was spoken.

Q: You were Sephardic.

A: We -- Yeah. Ours was what we call Sephardic, so yeah, Ladino was the spoken tongue.

Q: I want you to think back about -- we've been talking a lot about what was going on with you, but what was going on in the country, in the United States? I want to know if you have any memories, in 1954, up to 1960 - '61, of the beginnings of the struggle for American Blacks to get equality in education? Do you remember hearing about that, thinking about that, even witnessing anything?

A: Well, let me take you back a few years, to 1944, when we were put in, in these classes with regular American kids. And I, and many of my contemporaries, the immigrants, we were very, I'll use the word rebellious. We couldn't absorb the American way of, I am number one, always yelling, you know, because some of the proverbs that I knew, and

that we were brought up under, tell you, if you're the one that's praising yourself, you must be pretty low on the totem pole. So we did not accept when the teachers in the Social Science class -- Social Studies class would tell us how Americans have the great democracy and you know, justice for all and saying your Pledge of Allegiance, allegiance with liberty and justice for all. And we would say, "Yeah, what about the Negroes?" That was the term that was used in those days. "What about the Negroes?" And one time the teacher says, "I'm sick and tired of you guys bringing this up," you know. And then I would start saying, "Well, how about if I mention South America and all that?" Now, we were politically aware of what was going up, so this is like an introduction, so you can see what was in back of our minds. When the -- When the Negro movement started coming out, you said in '54, I was totally involved in my studies and you know, work full time and trying to take as many credit -- credit hours that I could at college, and there were too many things on my mind to get involved politically. I -- I sympathized with the cause, but there were other conflicting things, such as I was attending a university in Philadelphia, called Temple University, which was located in a section which was referred to by the newspapers as quote, The Jungle. So I really -- night I would have to come there and try to park my car, and it was located on Broad Street, which was a pretty well lit street, but then it extended several blocks deep, into what I would call projects. They were pretty poor areas, they were hundred percent Black. And that was pretty dangerous, at the time. Every so often there were killings and stuff. So, I don't know -- I - - I cannot recall how this conflict played in my mind. Struggle for independence versus

the criminal elements that were roaming in their sections. So, I just don't know how I felt about that. But later on, when Vietnam was came, then I started participating, because, yeah I was fully free of all my educational requirements. I had graduated from college by then and I was doing mostly traveling at that time, so my time was free, and I was one of the protesters at one time or another, for different causes.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about that? Think back to one of the protests, and --

A: Well, you know, to -- There were protests for equal rights. I participated in those. And there were protests for -- against the -- the Vietnam war. I did some participation in that, although I was turned -- turned off, because of the -- some of the characteristics of the people who participated in there. There was a lot of anti-Semitism by the Blacks at that time, and I -- there was a lot of Jews, young, you know, Jewish students that were participants, but what bothered me, that they never stood up and objected to the overt anti-Semitism by the quote, leadership of the -- this anti-Vietnam movement. And even if you went -- tried to participate in the Civil Right activities, there was lot of anti-Semitism, so I f-found this dichotomy, I said that, you know, it's making it difficult for me to participate in one cause, while they're acting in this manner. And there was, of course, lot of drugs going on, which I never, never touched. I was single in those days, just to remind you. So anyway, but -- So I sort of pulled back from that, and I put it back of my mind. I don't know that I gave it another thought since then.

Q: I just wonder, I have heard of anti-Semitism in the Black community that might have effected, for instance, Jewish Civil Rights workers, but I have not heard too much about

anti-Semitism in the anti-war movement. I just wonder if you could say a little bit more about that.

A: It was rampant. There -- They were accusing, well like now, they are accusing them of spreading AIDS and you know, in through certain times way back in history, they accused them of poisoning wells and drinking blood and all that, you know, it's -- and lot of them -- I don't know who the leaders of the anti-Vietnam war movement were. There were many Jewish names, if you think of the -- what is it, Chicago seven, you know, and all that, there's a lot of Jewish names, but of course they were not participating -- I mean, they were not practicing Jews, number one. Number two, they were blinded by the purpose of their cause and everything else didn't matter. And number three, I guess they were afraid to be it -- if they objected, they were afraid to be accused of not being quote, good rebels or something, you know. So, and maybe they were even anti-Semitic themselves, in -- there's self hate in every group and I know there's enough of that among the Jewish rebellious youth. So, you know, I really don't know what I can say about that subject.

Q: A little more on the anti-war movement. What -- How did you reconcile, or was it necessary for you to reconcile your love of this country? You mentioned how quickly you became a citizen and the sometime anti-American sentiment that came out in the protests -- I'm thinking, of course, of the burning of the flag and that sort of thing. Did you have any conflicts about that?

A: Well, you know, like there is a saying, my country right or wrong, but that's just part of it. If wrong, then to correct it and set it in the right direction. So, I had no problem. I mean, burning the flag is a extreme act of some -- of desperation, I would guess and even Supreme Court says that that's acceptable way of protesting which, it goes against my grain, you know, it's disturbing to see that. But I was opposed to the war and I didn't see a need for it and there's been wars there forever, it was imperial wars. Just a substitution of F-French left, Americans stepped in. You know, it wa -- continuation of the same and I knew how French had treated their imperial subjects and the Americans just continued the same way, so I -- I wasn't happy about that. But that did not diminish my love for this country. If we can correct it's ways, you know. Every now and then, the best of us go in the wrong direction. If always, somebody would put us straight, you know. So I had no conflict, as far as that goes.

Q: It's very interesting, because while you describe as a young man, you, as a young man essentially obeying his father's authority and really doing everything he's asked to do, but from very early on, when you come to this country, you're quite comfortable s -- pointing out what is wrong with the country. You referred back to saying, "What about the Negroes," when you were probably only 14 or 15 years old, and then questioning the Vietnam war. That's an interesting outlook, I think.

Q: Well, there is an explanation for that, too. I -- I was always interested in taking -- well, approaching things in an ac -- academic fashion, debating the pros and cons of different issues. But when it came to confrontation and swinging punches, I ran. So, in case of my

father, he was the authority, the physical strength, if you will, because he had used his superior power, physical power on me in the past, so that's one area. When it came to objecting to things the way they were, like I think a first recorded objection, when we came to Fort Ontario, was the barbed wire. I used the word wi -- fence, but it was a barbed wire fence. We objected to that, of course. That didn't mean that we want to go and have -- fight it out, you know, with the government. And when it came to protesting, I was just one in the sea of protesters. And, as a matter of fact, when I lived in Philadelphia, these protests -- Vietnam war, I was already in Washington. Well, I was in Columbus and then in Washington. But when I lived in Philadelphia, they had these coffeehouses. This was way back in the early 50's, and the people would go there, these young protesters would just read poetry and we would drink coffee and well, I guess there was something else going on, maybe drugs or something, but I was not privy to that. I would just go there as a date, you know, a place to take your date and sip coffee and watch these people try to perform, sing, recite, play the guitar and all that. So it was, you know, in the vogue, everybody was doing it, in my circle of friends. And then one time, well, when we were there, the place got raided and we were all taken in, you know. But it -- you know, it doesn't change my character, I did not go there to have a -- a you know, showdown, to beat up people or get beat up. I just went there because it was the thing to do and everybody else did it and I didn't see any harm in it and whatever else was going on there, that prompted the police to come and arrest everybody in there, well, that's something that I did not prepare for, you know. And later on, I would engage

people in an academic discussion of different political viewpoints or economic viewpoints or anything like that. Again, it was non-physical, just debate.

Q: Does that mean you have an arrest on your record?

A: No, no. They -- They -- You know, they held us there, they asked questions. It took a few hours to let us go, but, in fact, we were able to -- I was able to return the girl home before anybody was aware of anything strange happening, you know. Her parents did not know about it.

Q: Were you frightened when that happened?

A: Terrified. Oh, yeah. Like I said, I mean, I was not out there to challenge authority at that time.

End of Tape Five, Side A

Beginning Tape Five, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a US Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Isak Mike Danon. This is tape number five, side B, March fifth, 1999. I wanted to ask you, jumping around a bit here now, with your children, have you -- how open have you been about your history, or h-how detailed? Have you been able to speak openly about your life in Split and your time with the partisans in Italy?

A: Well, here comes another conflict within my psyche. First, let me say that the -- the answer to your question is -- it's no. I have not spoken freely with --

Q: So you were -- you were beginning to say that -- that the answer to the question is that you haven't spoken a --

A: Yeah, okay, and the problem is that I never wanted to impose my will or my history or my anything, on anybody, unless they really showed, to my extreme satisfaction that they were interested. So, my kids, I didn't want to teach them the languages that I knew, I didn't want to tell them about my history, because this fell in this particular category, when I was saying, when they are ready to hear my story, if they ask me, I'll tell them. Otherwise, I'll just keep quiet.

Q: Have they asked you?

A: Well, they started asking, the older one. At one point she sort of said, da -- "How come, Daddy, you never told us about your history and all that?" So I told her, briefly. And then, after the Holocaust Museum made that tape, they saw it and they did not know most of it, so I guess one of the usefulness of the tape, was to transmit my story to my children, to that extent that it was done.

Q: Has it changed, has it gotten any easier to talk about it? You actually did refer in our interview that, you know, you -- you -- you have sa -- spoken about it now several times within this Virginia community.

A: Yeah, I don't think that I have any difficulty speaking about it. I c-certainly don't have any problem in willingness to talk about it. Sometimes, as I talk about certain things, there's subconscious sensitivity on some points or issues, and I couldn't even tell you which ones they are, but sometimes I feel that something is happening to my eyes, you know. So -- But no, there's no problem, no reluctance on my part, to speak about it.

Q: You mentioned, it was right at the end of our interview, this idea that perhaps you had come back -- that you have come back to your faith, and you mentioned a Hebrew word for it. Bal --

A: Bal Tefulah, yeah. I'm sorry, Bal Teshuah.

Q: Bal Teshuah.

A: Yeah.

Q: I -- I just wonder if you could talk a little bit about what is that like to be back with your faith now? You mentioned that you had come back to it, you had explained why you had drifted from it. What does that -- How does that play out in your life now, this sort of reaffirming your f -- Jewish faith?

A: Well, I never really abandoned it, or anything like that, no. What was happening, after the destruction of our synagogue in Split, and after we left Split, really, I was at that particular stage in life, age had lot to do with it, another one is the surroundings. I was with the partisans, wearing a red star on my cap, he -- you know, the hat, or whatever it's called, the military hat. And they, as you know, and everybody knows, Communists are the opposite end of religion, you know, they are -- and not only agnostic, but they're really opposed to any form of religion. So I was being at my very vulnerable stage, I was being exposed to the opposite side of religion. And I guess I absorbed some of that. But then later, when I was in the -- back in the Jewish surrounding, in Fort Ontario, so I accepted, I realized, you know, and there was no problem. I never denied being Jewish or anything like that. And later on, when I left my parents house, and I went on my own, I

was working out of Columbus, Ohio, but they were sending me to Tennessee, and Arkansas, and Oklahoma, you know, th -- for months at a time. Well, maybe not months, four or five weeks at a time. And in some places, the population was 2,000, you know, the nearest big city. I was doing audits of different installations and there wasn't very much Jewish presence. Well, sometimes I s-searched it out. It was always a little bit of an effort to -- you had to travel 20 - 30 - 40 miles, to the nearest Jewish community. So, sometimes I guess I got sloppy, you know. Friday night, it's customary to go to the Jewish religious services, well the guys are going out carousing or whatever, you know, so there is -- there was this conflict. If you can imagine when you were in your 20's, you know. So, that might have been a problem, but when I got married, and I married a girl who -- her father and her household was non-religious to put it mildly, but yeah, we searched that synagogue, within the first year we joined the one that was near us -- well, not too near, but anyway, and we were active participants and then as our children -- as we got children, and as our older one started attending school, we started coming more often -- well, regularly. And it's funny, because the rabbi asked for a commitment from congregants. Any kind of commitment and he says, you know, it was like a -- it wasn't a fund-raiser, but says, "We're asking you to commit yourself to something, to tell you that you know who you are." So I said, "Okay, attendance once a week of the religious services." And since then, we would bring our daughter to her school this -- on Saturday, anyway, we'd stay for the service, and when the other girl was born, then we bring her when she was small, and we attended regularly and I don't think I missed one, even with

the big snows, so we been quite observant. And then, later, when my older daughter became, oh, I guess conscious of her religion and all that, she got her mother to convert the kitchen into, you know, kosher home and all that. And I don't know where we fit on the spectrum of religiosity, but I feel very comfortable in it.

Q: And both of your daughters are very ha-ha-have the religion woven into their lives. One is a rabbi. Your youngest daughter is working at a day care center that's within a synagogue.

A: Well, yeah, that's true. As a matter of fact, the telephone call was about that. My younger daughter, when we goes -- when she was here, we would go Saturday for the services and the -- just to let you know, we have three services every day and Saturday it's important to have, like in the morning services and noon services, or afternoon, the big -- the central theme of the Jewish religious observance or ritual, is reading the Torah, and the Torah is read Saturday morning and Saturday afternoon. So, my younger daughter got accustomed to leading the service, the Saturday afternoon. And this was the cantor from our synagogue, says he is not going to be here March 12th -- 12th and 13th and he wants to know if he can count on my daughter to come and lead the service. And she did that when she was at college and she has been doing it when she was home, here. We would go Saturday morning and stay for the Saturday afternoon service. So she's quite knowledgeable and it's not something I taught either one of them, they picked it up on their own.

Q: What is the name of your congregation?

A: Agoudas Acheim, which means congregation of brothers. It's not a sexist term, brothers. Brothers includes sisters, also.

Q: And where is it?

A: It's in Alexandria. It's near Quaker Lane and what is it, 395.

Q: Have you ever been back to Split, where -- where -- where you were born, since you left, with the partisans, really?

A: No, I have not been back. At one point I was considering it seriously, but somehow other things got in the way. When I was in the military, during the Korean conflict, they send me to -- first to Germany and then France. And at several times, like during vacation time, I would go travel around Europe and I never went back to Yugoslavia, because it was still under the Communist rule and I didn't know what kind of foolish things they might do, like oh my papers might show that I was born there and they might retain me or something and that wouldn't fit too well with my military requirement to be on the post, you know. We -- Anyway, no, that was one fear. And one time, I went to a religious retreat in Bavaria and we went to Salzburg, Austria, which is not too far from Yugoslavian border -- Yugoslav border, and I'm -- I was toying with the idea, going across, well, I had a few days free time, so I figure, maybe I rather spend them in Munich and was some -- Salzburg and those areas, than take a chance going across. And I didn't know what kind of roads they had and I read about lots of accidents, traffic accidents and we were, well, limited time, so I didn't go. But, all my o -- both of my younger sisters went there. The younger one went in 1957, the youngest one. That's when she was

earning enough money on her own to have her own kind of vacation. She went, visited my older sister there. And she enjoyed her stay and the country seemed even prettier than it was in her mind, in her imagination. And the middle sister, Sarah, she went right before the war, this present conflict, like 1990 - '91, I think. She and her husband, and they toured the country and she retained quite a few good memories of her visit. But I never went back, even though my brother-in-law keeps bugging me, keeps asking me to come there, and visit.

Q: What have been your thoughts as the present conflict in -- in a very horrific period of war in the country have -- have played out over the past few years?

A: Well, I knew what was happening in that country and anybody who was interested, could have read a little bit about what the -- the basis of the country and the influences from outside, and I can be as specific as you want me to be. But I'm not too proud of the staff in our state department. If -- If you want me -- okay --

Q: Te-Tell us some, yeah.

A: Okay.

Q: I am very -- This is an interesting point, and I would like to know what you think about it.

A: Okay, well, first of all, the country was created from all these different, southern Slavs. Many were under Turkish occupations and others, even more, were under Austro-Hungary empire. And the -- some under Italian occupation, but these people were brought up differently. They had different religions, different scripts and different

history. So they were not the same kind. Ethnically, I guess, many years back, they came from the same origin, but because of these power -- super-power interplays, and controls and agitation, they -- the super-powers played on the differences and they instigated these people. Divide and conquer, it's a old expression and it's -- it was true. So Germany and through Austria, actually, was funding the protests and the uprising of the Croatians and the Serbians, they were monarchy for a longer time and they had fought the Turks and so there was -- the conflict was being raised. They were supported -- Serbia was supported by Russia, of course, because that's the big brother, Russia, and was supported also by France and England. So there was that inner conflict. Now, what we call Bosnia today, actually it's Bosnia and Herzegovina -- nobody can pronounce the Herzegovina part. Anyway, these were just two little provinces. As far as I know, they never had a political autonomy. And they were shuffled back and forth between Turkish empire and Austro-Hungarian empire. At the time when my parents were born, this was under Austro-Hungarian empire, but there was enough Turkish influence there, from various periods. Anyway, so as I was trying to emphasize, there was a lot of the conflict fueled by the outside powers. So, when the Germans came in the play, of course they made the supreme break, they armed the Croatian, you know, and they -- they gave the Croatian authority to kill and the Croatian outdid themselves killing Jews, of course, but Serbs, too. And that was in everybody's mind after the war. So Tito, when he became the leader of the partisans, he tried to unify them back to where they could live with each other. And whatever it took, I guess we heard about pax romana, but we had pax Yugoslavia,

whatever. Tito, you know, he was -- yeah, he was the dictator, no question about it. And he was a Communist, but he was very pragmatic. He allowed anything that worked for him, so economically, he abandoned Communism and put in some form of free ownership, private ow-ownership and free trade and all that. But anyway, I knew when he would pass away, that there was -- something was going to happen, because he didn't build a natural succe-succession force. He did provide the mechanism, but no way to enforce it, because the control of the country was with the secret police and the army and he didn't have people who -- who were going to take over those phases after he was gone. But anyway, so when -- whenever it was, six, seven years ago, when Croatians declared themselves independent, first it was Slovenia, and the Yugoslav army tried to put down the insurrection, if you will. And they were not successful, because they had to cross Croatia and Slovenia was in the mountains and it was not the most effective way of conducting a war. So Slovenia succeeded in seceding from Yugoslavia. Then when Croatia seceded, they had all these people from way back, the ones that were Fascists and they -- they took over the power. And when there was a conflict in bosni -- yeah, well, I want to say the Croatians -- the Fascists took over the power and the Serbian government, under this guy Milosevic, and he must be some kind of a kook, you know. He's -- I guess he's a Yugoslav Saddam Hussein. But they tried to punish the Croatian and instead of taking, let's say territory, they would just go there and destroy. Like, that was their way of discouraging, but not a very civilized way. But anyway, the Croatians were not very civilized either, so -- and when I look at it, that's all evil, it's all around and which one is

the worst, and in my mind, I say Croats are worse than the others. But unfortunately for my viewpoint, American government encouraged the Croats, funded it and we were there, we were in a position to pacify that area, we didn't do anything. In fact, whatever we did was -- this was, much of it was done under Jim Baker's rule. Jim Baker, he was George Bush's Secretary of State, but I -- I would call him president, because he was acting in that position. So, I didn't like what was going on. Libya and Iran were sending arms to Bosnians, to the Moslem side and of course, they had no way to get the arms through, except through American controlled areas. So we just let them and the Croats would take half for themselves and give the Moslems the other half. And that encouraged, you know, s-stri -- fighting. And I think we picked the wrong side in that conflict. We could have pacified it, we didn't. And that's my viewpoint.

Q: I'll just ask one more question, and this is about your eldest sister Blanca, and her life. How did she fare in Yugoslavia? What kind of life did she lead, un-under this Communist regime?

A: Okay, the kind of life that my sister had under the Communist regime was not pleasant. Number one, when they were -- she uses the term demobilized, after the end of the struggle, she came home to Split. Of course, everything that we ow -- had owned, was taken, but she was able to find out where some of the furnishings were, like the bedroom set and the dining room and the, you know, just the furniture. And she tried to recover that and they were giving her a hard time. The government was not very friendly toward the Jewish returnees, if you will. People who had been either in the armed services, or

who had escape and came back. Either -- Well, I don't know if anybody who listens to this, whether they remember what happened when the Jews tried to come back from the concentration camps. In Poland, they would be attacked and many would die and all that. So, the anti-Semitism was rampant, just as much after the war as it was during the war, except now it was not under the approval of the state, but just -- the state would sort of turn away, or wink, or whatever. So, it was difficult. She used to tell us how she had different problems trying to reclaim this. And then finally, she went to court and very unsympathetic. No, it was very uns-unsympathetic government and when she did get it, it had the -- the furniture had degenerated to a point that it wasn't worth anything, so it was dumped. And she didn't have any means of support. She lived with her uncle, who was a barber and she -- there was an aunt that came from Fort Ontario, went back. She lived with them also. And they were very poor. The life was difficult for everybody after the war, but especially for her and she was by herself, there was nobody there. And we suggested several times that she should try to come and we could try -- work on it, but either we were not energetic enough or she was not enthusiastic enough, so nothing was ever done. Then she met a young man and she wanted to marry him and we were opposed to that, because of religious differences. And I -- They married anyway and then life improved for them as -- well, she was still studying, and life improved as he started making a more comfortable living.

Q: This concludes interview with Isak Mike Danon -- Holocaust Memorial Museum
interview with Isak Mike --

End of Tape Five, Side B

Conclusion of Interview

