United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Norman Belfer
March 1, 2000
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Norman Belfer, conducted by Arwin Donohue on March 1, 2000 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview 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.

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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 Mr. Norman Belfer, conducted by Arwin Donohue, on March first, 2000. This is tape number one, side A, and this is a follow up interview to a videotaped interview that was conducted with Mr. Belfer, in 1995. So, let's begin by -- I'm just going to correct a mistake, it was -- the first interview with Mr. Belfer was done on May 31st, 1996, on videotape. Okay. I wanted to start by asking you a little bit more, going back to before the war. I wanted to ask you about your hometown, Wodzislaw?

Answer: Yes.

Q: Is that how you pronounce it?

A: Yes.

Q: And I wanted you to say, first of all, something about your family's history in that area.

A: We live in that town, my aunts, and my -- not only my parents, my grandparents were born there. And we were ver -- respected citizens of that town. My grandfather, and my father were running a business, and eventually my brothers helped also, alongside. The business was a processing of feathers, and down, which they exported from Poland to the United States, and -- and several European countries. And during the peace time, that town was a very small -- I'm not certain how many people, but less than 10,000, and

primarily Jewish. And I -- I lived there for my first, let's say 12th -- 12 years or so. Subsequently, I moved to Kraków.

Q: I -- I'm sorry, I'm going to interrupt you a little bit --

A: Sure.

Q: -- because I don't want you to feel like you have to repeat what you talked about in the video. My -- the reason that I asked you about Wodzislaw is that I wondered -- your -- your family had a long history in the town. I wondered if you -- after the war, you felt a sense of connection with the place, if you ever visited again. Anything more about that.

A: Yes. The only connection about that town was that I went back to Poland only one time. This was a dozen years ago, more or less. I think maybe more. There was a first march of Holocaust survivors and their children from -- to -- to Auschwitz a-and Birkenau, The March of the Living. And I -- I was one of them, and there were many others from United States, and Canada, even Australia, South Africa. There were about 2,000 young people. College -- college or high school age. And it was a very moving experience. There were very -- dignitaries from Israel, and the former president, Ithzrak Navonne. He ray -- he was s-speaking, you know, to us about it, and it's -- was extremely moving, and very, very upsetting, of course. Wi-With me went our -- one of our sons, Andrew went wi-with me on that trip, and also one nephew, Ben Belfer, and two c-cousins. And we were received by the Polish government, extremely well. They had all kinds of preparations, invited us to the Senate building, gave a couple parties, you know,

cocktail parties, where we me-met Russian ge -- Russian generals. One of the Russian generals spoke Yiddish. And also they per -- had a -- performed a Jewish show in one of their Senate -- what do call them there, Senate building, it was a theater there, a theater building. The show was all done ba -- mostly in -- in -- in Yiddish, Jewish, and some in -- in the -- in Polish. During intermission, I went over to the person who, I was very impressed with her singing. And I ask her how did she learn that, she was quite a young person. She says from -- there was a cantor, before World War Two in Poland, and he -- he survived the war, and he had a lot of records, and she learned it from the records, you know. The Polish government gave a special reception, because the following day, I remember, after the -- after they had that big performance, we had -- they invited about 40 people, I was one of them, to the -- the assistant to -- General Yarowzelski, and he gave a whole speech about the Jewish people should come back to Poland, they lived there for a thousand years, and since the Jewish people left -- most of them left, they were -- culturally, and business-wise, and -- and in many other aspects, you know, were completely eradicated, you know. There's no -- no industry, the -- and they had -- a matter of fact, ask everyone what type of profession or business, and when I told them what my parents used to do, say, "Why don't you come back, we will build a plant, we'll do this and that." So after he gave a whole big speech, the former president of Israel, Ithzrak Navonne said, "Too little, too late." He spoke very fluent English. He said, "What happened," and give all kinds of dates, "when the Jewish people came back to Poland, as

they came to their hometowns, what happened to them?" He said, "Oh well, it's a different regime." He asked, during certain dates, you know, so the -- there were all kinds of ordinances, you know, and if people came to the town, they would -- they were either shot, or they had to flee town, because their homes were occupied by Polish people, and they didn't want to -- they felt they may want to reclaim their property. So they had to flee. As a matter of fact, a school-mate of mine, he and two other people came back to town. Their house was all mostly demolished, but they had no place to stay, they stayed there. So one late afternoon, they knocked at the door, and my friend opened the door, and they shot him. So the other two left, you know. So my memories about it, is I would never want to go back there again. As a matter of fact, yes, I still remember, when I was there, with my son -- in -- in Wodzislaw, my son and my nephew, my cousins, we -- we rented a -- a car, you know. And we escorted to the cem -- I didn't remember where the cemetery is -- the Jewish cemetery is. We went to the cemetery, and there was not o-one tombstone [indecipherable] not at all. And there was a -- young kids, who were -- they saw a car there, they saw, you know, they saw people dressed differently, whatever. They came over and started -- I said -- you know, we asked him what about the cem -- what happened to the cemetery. They were teenagers, actually. Oh, well they were demolished. And they -- you want to see res -- where the tombstones are? They were -- they made walkways out of them, they made stables [indecipherable] floors, and so on.

Q: You had family, I assume -- you had family who was buried there, I assume?

A: Yes. I had f -- my grandparents were buried there, and other relatives.

Q: Did you -- while you were there, did you see any people -- any Gentiles you had known before the war?

A: No, but I did meet some pe -- a couple who helped -- that couple -- these were children of people were -- my parents and three sisters, and two children were -- were hiding for a couple months. And the parents were not alive, but I've been in touch with the daughter of -- and the son-in-law. They came to visit me, to Warsaw, and we met in the hotel. Of course, I was very warm to them, and I gave them a certain as -- cert-certain -- in Poland, it was a substantial amount of money. So a -- they appreciate it, and they -- they do write, send me a Christmas card, or -- or write to me from time to time.

Q: You mentioned this family in your first interview, and -- and you also mentioned that they had -- they had disappointed you and your family by really not -- by asking for more and more money when they were hiding, and -- and behaving somewhat --

A: Right.

Q: -- less than honorably. I'm wondering how you felt about meeting with them after the war?

A: I still f -- had a -- I would say a warm feeling for them, because they did risk their lives by helping, and the money, obviously, ha -- we had -- i -- if I -- I do remember that, we had a manager in one of our plants in Kraków, you know, manager who managed the feather and down business. He would go every two weeks to the place, and make sure

how -- how my parents are, and my -- and the -- and the -- and the sisters, and s -- and the children. And he would give money to that family for food, and other things, whatever. I don't know how much. My father felt if he has a money with him [indecipherable] the money wasn't so much valuable any more, but they would keep some jewelry, or some gold coins, or whatever, just for emergency. He was afraid that if he gives it all in one time, maybe the guy -- they were na -- she was always so -- they weren't sure, maybe, he would get tired of us. And it became also, very impossible to live there for a couple of months. Was in November, was very cold, they were in -- actually hidden in a bunker, in an orchard garden. And two little children, they were tall -- they were taught not to speak, and not to cry or anything. It was quite a horrible scene.

Q: I had a question about the manager, too, who had been helping out your family. Was he non-Jewish?

A: He was non-Jewish. He was a Christian. He worked for us for many years, was a very loyal person. But right after the war, the German put a trustee, you know. They took out all the inventory and shipped it to Germany, you know. But certain materials, they wanted to be processed there, so that manager worked there. He taught them. And subsequently, one of my brothers worked there. That -- he felt if he helps them and -- and so on, he will survive -- it'll be easier for him to survive the war, you know. But it didn't help.

Q: Did you have contact with him after the war, an-and what was his name, with the manager?

A: [indecipherable]. Yes, but we lost con -- he must have passed away after. We did write to him, and a matter of fact, we -- from -- at that time we lived in Italy, and we send him packages, you know, of certain delicacies, you know, which was not available in Poland. But then we st -- we couldn't hear from him. His name was Sh-Sh-Trzyna -- T-r-z-y-n-a. I don't remember the first name. I used to call him Mr. Trzyna -- Mr. Trzyna, yeah.

Q: I'm -- I'm wondering, obviously, it was extremely disappointing how little the -- y-y-you had had -- you mentioned in your first interview that your family had had good friends before the war, who were non-Jewish, and that they didn't, for the most part, help during --during the war.

Q: Didn't help at all. None of them helped. The only one is that manager who tried to help as much as he could. And that family who were hiding our parents. But they did it also for money, because before we vacated -- before we knew it's going to be very tragic, because we heard wa -- also, there were very little communications, we had no radio, no newspapers, nothing. Couldn't travel to one village to the next. But there were rumors that -- and there -- some towns, it was very -- the Germans came in, and took a lot of people out, or most of the Jewish people, because they killed some officer, some soldiers, which was just an excuse, you know. But we heard all this. My parents arranged to -- with these Gentile friends, they said, in case of a problem -- that we have a problem, we

want to -- we w -- would like to hi -- you to help us, we would like to hide there. And they gave him a lot -- a lot of silver, and anything that was valuable in the house. S-Special linen, flatware, you know, stuff like this. Whatever they could take out, even some art. We emptied everything out. So this was like a compensation. In addition, we made sure we paid them for the f-food, and we pay -- also f -- whatever else he asked for, you know. It -- but still, wi -- I feel with all that, he was a decent human being.

Q: I wanted to ask you, regarding that -- that experience of -- of real disappointment with the fact that these people who had been your friends before the war, really abandoned you and your family, an-and so many others. How do you --

A: Right. I had school friends, from high school, you know, in Kraków, and none of them really cont-contacted me, I mean even when still was pretty quiet, they all stayed away, you know?

Q: How do you -- do you feel trusting now, of -- I mean, after having that experience, do you feel that -- that as a Jew, you can really trust -- as a Jew living in America, and as a minority --

A: Yes.

Q: -- a member of a minority --

A: Right.

Q: -- an -- do you feel you can trust the majority to do what's right?

A: Positively, I wa -- I -- I am -- definitely would trust -- it's a different system, you know, in the United States, it's a democratic system, and every citizen has it's rights, and the Constitution protects every cit-citizen. S -- but in Poland, although the Jewish people lived there over a thousand years, as a matter of fact, there's -- in that small town, Wodzislaw, there's a synagogue which was over a thousand years old. But during the war years, it was -- made a stable out of it, the Germans, you know, kept horses there, and so on. And everything was destroyed. As a matter of fact, I was told it's being rebuilt now, they want to attract tourism, and so on, different parts of Poland, yeah. The -- the Polish people in particular are very, very anti-Semitic, and I -- and how can I -- I can explain it is, my own family and I had an experience, although we were very respected citizens. When the Germans came in, the first day they came in, they knocked at every -- they were shooting in front of your house, and there were a lot of screaming, and s -- and so on. We were -- we were hiding in a warehouse that we owned. And finally they came to our door, they were steel doors, they were banging and shooting, and -- and calling in German, "Get out, you [indecipherable] get out." You know, and eventually we had to get out. They were beating us, and we had to run to a square. And then, they shot several people, put some houses on fire. So people didn't come out, they put them on fire. And we are all this -- on that square they [indecipherable] on us, several -- maybe it's couple thousand, or several thousand people. Then they left. So once they left, my parents felt th-these were the first ones coming in, they were -- had tanks, you know, that we heard.

So what -- my parents said, “Let’s go to the church, there’s a church nearby.” And we were there only minutes, I don’t know, less than a half hour. The priest himself, in charge, he said, “You Belfers, you zhid -- you Jews,” you know, “get out.” And actually pushed us out, you know. Said, [indecipherable]. So we ran to -- we had an uncle, you know, who lived outside -- a little far out -- outs -- outside town. We stayed there for overnight, a couple nights, I don’t remember, a few days, you know. I t calmed down, so we went back to the house. We got -- we got no help, really, to speak of. Not only that, I know of cases who were -- some people that I knew were hiding in the area, but if a neighbor would know, or found out, that they being hidden, they would report them, you know? And the people, not only the Jewish people got either shot, or sent to a concentration camp, or whatever, but also the Gentile. But there was no -- there were -- the Germans got only cooperation from everyone. The church leaders in particular, and it was a bad, bad time, and I can’t explain it even nowadays, why there should be such hate in a -- in some people’s mind towards the Jewish people. The Jewish people have contributed a lot, not only in -- in Poland, everywh -- everywhere they lived, in -- in many fields, whether it’s medicine, or whether it’s engineering, or -- or -- or so many other important fields. But obviously it goes back so many years, it goes back to -- it goes back to a thousand years, claiming that things that we did to Christ, which is a lie, and even the ner -- the -- the New Testament is not very accurate. Even the Pope recently stated that. And as far as Jesus, he was a Jew, he died as a Jew, and he was not killed by

the Jewish people, he was killed by the Romans. He may have -- may have -- he may have wanted to do some reforming, or whatever. But why they -- why -- it's 2,000 years later, why is this being taught, or when -- or when -- that's why there's that hate builds up, from childhood. They go to churches, they're [indecipherable] Jews, or other references to Jew, although it has been removed now from the liturgy, I -- I hope that futu -- future generations will not ever have to experience difficulties and obstructions in -- of justice and everything, because they have one religion, or another religion. I don't -- I don't believe one religion's better than the other, they're all the same, they all teach you to be a better person. They don't teach you to hate. And that's -- that's my message, in a way.

Q: Norman, how did it feel to be back in Poland, after all those years?

A: I've -- I've f-fell -- I couldn't sleep nights, I was so upset, you know. With all they tried to do for us, it's amazing, they even send someone to the hotel, one officer of the government. He introduced himself, and I had met him at the cocktail party. He showed me a -- gave me a card, I may have it even, I don't know. He says, "Why don't you come back to Poland? You built the industry. We need you people, we need more culture, we need -- we need help. You were born here," he says, "I understand you -- your parents, grandparents, great-grandparents all lived in this country. Why do -- why don't you come back?" I said, "Why not come back? They -- everyone was killed. None of them survived, except myself and two brothers. One brother was in America at that time on a

business trip, and that's why he never came back. Only I and a brother of mine survive. And yid," I said, "what help did we get? What did we get when we got back -- came back?" And so on. "Oh, was a different regime, was dif -- it's different now. As a matter of fact," he said, "that time, you know, we are not like in Russia. In Russia," he says, "the government dictates what the people should do, and in Poland, the gover -- the people dictate, not the," -- which we all almost laughed, they were under Russian regime, and -- but we felt, how can they even say that, not being afraid to say it, but they probably felt nobody's going to go tell the Russians what they said. But only --

Q: What -- what year was this?

A: I can't remember. Must be 12 - 14 years, something like this.

Q: So, it was before the --

A: [indecipherable] the Russian regime was still the ware -- already talking about -- maybe a year or two later that -- that broke away completely, yeah. It could be one year later, I'm not sure.

Q: Norman, I wanted to ask you about your -- your family, and your siblings, because in the first interview you -- you mentioned that you had, I believe, four sisters, and two brothers, but I wondered if you would name each one of them, and -- and say what their ages were relative to you. And also say specifically what the fate was of each one, just so that we have the names connected with -- with a -- with what happened to them.

A: My oldest sister, her name was Bluma, which is actually in Yiddish, or German, it's flowers, yeah. And she had I think three children -- I'm not po -- I believe three, either two or three children, I'm not positive any more, and a husband. Her husband, [indecipherable] was a watchmaker, and he had a lot of friends, Christian friends, too. And one day, when we heard what's going on, he said he -- he made arrangement with some good friends of his, next town maybe 10 -- 10 -- 12 kilometers from Wodzislaw, to the town called Jarlnoveeitz. It -- it -- this friend came with a big wagon, and -- and horses, you know, in the middle of the ni -- one night, and they loaded up s-stuff, personal belongings, and so on. And while they were traveling out of -- outside Wodzislaw, maybe a -- one kilometer outside Wodzidslaw, the German SS, or Gestapo, whatever, intercepted them. And they shot them all.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: Was that in -- around 1940 - '41?

A: Jus -- let me just think. This must have been 1942, right. When the wa -- it was in the fall of '42, in the fall time, fall season, yeah.

Q: How much -- how much older was Bluma?

A: Bluma must have been 17 years older than I. About 17 years. So I -- at that time, in -- in 40 -- 40 --'42, I was 19 or 20 years old, you know, tw -- actually I -- about 20 years.

Q: And your next -- the next oldest, after Bluma?

A: The next oldest is Arthur, my brother. He was 16 years older than I.

Q: And we know what happened to him --

A: And he went United States --

Q: -- he came to the United States.

A: -- on a business trip, yes. My next one was my sister Mindla -- Mindla, they call her Manya, you know, Mindla, yeah. And s -- she -- let's see, was two years, or one year younger than Arthur, yeah. I would say, she must have been 15 years older, or 14. 14 or 15 years. Then I have a brother Maurice, who survived the war wi -- with me. But he -- he passed away, unfortunately, let's say about -- almost 20 years ago, yeah. He was much more affected from the war years than I was. He -- his wife and a child, the child was only three or four years old, maybe three years old, was in hiding near Kraków, also some Christian friends. And one day she went shopping to -- for groceries, you know, with the child. She didn't look specifically Jewish, you know? She spoke very fluent Polish, and all that, like -- like a native, of course. Somebody reported to the police while she was walking out of the store. They waited for her, and shot her right -- right there, because she started to cry and protest. The child, we don't know. There -- there was a witness that we met, after the war, told us that he was -- he didn't -- he -- he didn't actually see it, but he was in the same town, hiding, and he -- he was told that the child had just walked away, or whatever. Somebody may have taken the child, they don't know what happened. I've done a lot of investigation, we can't find any trace of it. And the

reason I -- we did some investigation, in po -- in Warsaw, there's a hotel called Belfer. I thought, maybe, you never know, you know. I -- through the Red Cross, then through friends of mine who were in Poland. When I was in Poland, I didn't -- I wasn't aware of that. May have been built after, when I was in Poland with that mission, you know, to [indecipherable] I was told by the Re-Red Cross in a letter, and also by some friends subsequently, that the reason the hotel is called Belfer, Belfer in poli -- in -- i -- they -- in school, they called it Belfer like a nickname. Professor they called a Belfer. It's a pension fund for teachers, and they have investment there, and that's why it's all -- called Belfer. There's no relationship. I was about to s-s -- aba -- was Maurice, and I had a -- a sister called Sheindla, or Sheindo. Schein means pretty, beautiful, you know, it's -- and sh -- she must have been eight -- seven or eight years older than I am -- than I was. She was a very beautiful girl, very, very intelligent, and very high marks always a s -- in school, she always was the top of the class. Then I had another si-sister, Helena, or Hya. She -- she must have been only two years older than I am. Two or three, I'm not sure. She also was a lovely, lovely girl, and they all are actually -- what -- what tragically happened to my sisters, they -- the three sisters, they were in camp wi-with -- with my parents, an-and me, and -- and Maurice, in Plaszów -- in Kraków, the concentration camp, Plaszów. And after being there a year, more or less, they were -- all the women were taken out. We didn't know where or what. My mother, and my sisters. And one child of -- of -- of my sister Mindla, she -- her name was Sarah, the little child, and she was maybe eight years old, or

so. First they took -- there were several hidden children, she was one of them. First they took the children out, then the women, we didn't know where, what, you know. They always would tell you, "Oh, they're going to a much better camp, and much easier ts -- it's overcrowded here." They had all kinds -- they had a -- schemes developed to fool y -- us. We had not -- we tried to believe, we had no choice, you know? But not believing was worse. But after the war, when we were liberated, we tried to contact -- we met different people in different areas, in different camps, you know, we went to Salzburg, and -- and it's in my tapes, I went to Italy, but I came -- from Italy, I went back to Munich. I heard in Munich there were big gathering of survivors, you know, from all over Germany, you know, Austria. And when I came there, I met some people. And they told me that they all were sent to Auschwitz. But subsequently, maybe a -- months, or a year later, was a woman who was a sis -- a friend of my younger sister Helena, and she said, "I was with your three sisters in Denya -- Diensk -- that -- Polish ports, one is German, one is Polish. Your sisters were there, and I was there, and only days -- ma -- a week or less before the Russians came into that section of Poland, they put -- they told the people they -- they had pr -- factories, they were the -- sewing uniforms, they told them that they going to be exchanged for German prisoner of war in Sweden. They gave everybody a piece of bread, and tried to calm -- this was a way of calming, you know? Put them -- loaded them on boats, very a -- packed them in like in cattle cars, you know, the same way. And they say going to Sweden, but they torpedoed all the boats. We don't know, there could be 10,000

of them. Only about a hundred were left to clean up, and th -- one of the hundred was that friend of my sister, yeah.

Q: How did you find her, or how did she find you?

A: In Milan, also, were, at that time -- this was almost a year after the war, there was a place where [indecipherable] where displaced people would stay. It used to be a -- a military pl-place, you know, a caserba, you know? And I would -- we already had an apartment in Milan, we -- that we rented, yeah, my brother and I. So we used to go there, daily almost, just -- just meet some people, see who -- who -- what -- always new people coming there. Many of them were -- intended to go to Israel. Th-They stopped there for some reason. Also to look for other people. She heard -- she was talking to people that the Belfers are here in town, because she met some other pe -- so, one day we came there. She met us, you know. And she told us the whole story, you know. My mother, however, did -- did perish in Auschwitz.

Q: How did you find out about that?

A: Because that's -- that was obvious because the -- the trains from Plaszów all went to Auschwitz, and they segregated the people. Young people looked fit, they put on one side, and my mother that time was a -- in the 50's -- maybe 50 -- 56 or 57, something like that.

Q: So were you sure -- after the war, and you were in Italy, were you sure that your mother had perished in Auschwitz?

A: Y-Yes, because the whole -- most of the women were per-perished -- ya -- only young, fitting w-women they kept. The others were gassed. They told them they going to get -- have to shower, the delousing, they called it, they give them new clothes, and they gas them, yeah.

Q: I wanted to talk more about that period in -- in Italy, right after the war, and --

A: Yeah.

Q: So you, at that time -- well, you mentioned a little bit about that time in your first interview, and you mentioned how you had first gone to -- from Salzburg to Modena.

A: Mo -- yes.

Q: And I wondered if, in Modena were you living in a DP camp, or --

A: In a DP camp.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Yes. Also was -- I emptied out some military building, and we lived there, yes, for about si -- five, six weeks.

Q: And were you getting help from -- from any organization like the JDC, or -- the Joint Distribution --

A: UNRRA -- UNRRA.

Q: UNRRA?

A: UNRRA would send packages and so on.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: However, I believe I mentioned in the prior tapes, you know -- video -- video tapes, while we were there, one American officer, some -- I could speak some E-English, because I studied English in high school, I -- he took an interest in me. So I told him, you know, I have a brother in -- in New York, but there is no mail, you can't -- there was no mail there, no official mail -- military mail, where they could help me. He says, "What is his name, where does he live?" I say, "I don't know." My other brother Maurice was with me, he says he -- he -- he used to stay at Hotel Broadway in New York, but he doesn't know where he is now. This officer wrote to Hotel Broadway in New York, and asked whether or no -- whether a name by the -- Arthur Belfer, his name was Artur, but he changed it to Arthur, you know. So, a letter came back, and it -- but -- I wrote the letter, and I told him, we are here, we are -- we survive, we're -- and we don't know whether anybody else survived. We -- we are afraid to -- I'm afraid to say that no one else survived except me -- I and -- and Maurice. And Maurice wrote a few lines. He s -- he wired us 500 dollars, to a bank. I didn't even -- I didn't even tell him anything. So, the bank knew displaced people, so they walked around with a sign Belfer, sent somebody over. So I went over, and I sp -- couldn't speak to this guy. I tried to speak to him in German, I was -- I was fluent in German. He couldn't speak English, I couldn't spe -- he couldn't speak Polish, he couldn't speak Hebrew, so I couldn't -- so he said -- in Italy, they say come, they say like this. I didn't know [indecipherable] what it -- what it means. Finally he said -- so we went to the bank. My brother and I, then we had a few friends

walk with us, too. We went in -- my brother and I went into the bank. They were [indecipherable] waited outside, I said, [indecipherable] I didn't know why, but I -- I assumed there was someone. So the manager spoke German. He says, "Hebert kinder," you know. He was very, very -- w-we have money for you, you know, 500 dollars. Said okay. "But, I ca -- I am not going to give you the money now, come after three o'clock." So, my brother and I say, "Why after three o'clock, I want the money now." He says, "Leave it kinder," you know, you're children, [inaudible]. "It's much better come later. I'll give you now te -- 10 dollars Italian money, you know?" And when we came after three, he told us, you know, the Black Market is -- no -- is a -- a thousand lira per dollar, and officially it's a hundred lira, and he paid us out of the Black Market. He saw the way we looked, you know. So he had some compassion, yeah. So after we had all that money, we went -- all the -- the friends, we had [indecipherable] we went to a restaurant, and we -- they displayed in the window there, looked like chicken, but a-after we bought it and start eating it, it was rabbit. We had a -- we bought wine and bread. We had a big party, yeah. We stayed there another several weeks. They said -- because we -- the reason we went to Italy -- I wanted to go to Israel, and they told us then, the UNRRA had offices of people, you know. People like you who he -- look healthy, and young, you most likely will be intercepted by the British, you know, and the -- when you go by boat, and they send you to Cyprus, because they -- they send a lot of people to Cyprus. So my brother and I stay from one camp to another camp. So then we decided we'll go to Milan. We

atch -- actually hitchhiked to Milan, because we didn't know where a railroad -- we didn't know any -- couldn't -- nobody understood anything pr -- pr --

Q: Before you go into detail about Milan, I just wanted to ask a couple other questions.

A: Surely.

Q: What were the conditions like in the DP camp in Modena?

A: It wasn't too bad. What we were used to wasn't too bad, you -- they had -- you could shower there, you could -- they had bathrooms. We still were wearing a milit -- the -- the -- the British and the American army gave us work clothes, you know. The shirts we were -- during the war you didn't change it for a few years, so can you imagine? There, we changed it every two weeks. So, it was a big --

Q: A big step up for you?

A: Yeah. A tremendous sh -- luxu -- luxury.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: By comparison. They key -- the Italians were -- treated us, I have to say, perfectly fine. If you w-went to Israel, it wouldn't have treated us nicer. They were very -- when I lived in -- I fell in love with the Italian people, really. I would have never come here to the United States, because my broth -- my older brother encouraged me, he needed me, he -- whatever he -- he was sick, and so on. Other that that, I would have never come. We had establish a business there and so on. So we went to Milan.

Q: One more question before Milan.

A: Fine.

Q: Did -- did you have a -- a passion for going to Israel, or wh-what was involved in that decision?

A: I had a passion -- a passion to go to Israel, yes. Yeah, I spoke Hebrew that time, and I was -- I just felt we were -- we were so brutalized, and lost everyb -- thing, and every -- lost my entire family. We just felt -- my brother and I -- but anyway, we came here. But w-went to Milan, we a -- we didn't know what -- we had money, we didn't know where to go, we -- we were -- way we were dressed, they probably wouldn't let us in a decent hotel. We slept on the railroad station. One of -- one of the Italian people, we ask him, you know where we can stay, in -- in German, you know. Many business people in Europe spoke German. This -- like now, everybody speaks English in Europe, but they used to speak German especially business people, yeah. He said why don't -- the -- he said the railroad station were benches covered -- had -- covered th-those, if it rains, or whatever. The next morning, we ga -- went to a public place where you can wash up, and shaved. We went out and bought clothes, and we called -- my brother, remembered we have some business friends in Milan, Italian people. He remembered the name, we looked up the name. We called e -- the name was Guardini, and Fachikani. They had a lot of -- many stores, poultry stores, you know? All over, not only Milan, outside Milan, many city -- many cities or towns. We -- they used to ship feathers to us, to Poland. So we call up, they say, "Pronto, pronto." I don't know what [indecipherable] even I couldn't -- I

said -- I started s-speaking in German, they didn't understand, so I hung up. So my brother and I said, "How do we talk to her? Let's go buy a dictionary." Bought a dictionary, we wrote out padrona, you know, going on. "Bolea polari con padrona," said, and yeah -- so we called again, and afa -- and I asked for Mr. Guardini, you know, Senor Guardini, padrona. He came to the phone, and he spoke fluent German. He says, "Why don't you visit us, please come up, come up for lunch." So, we took a taxi, we went up. We tal -- he knew what was going on, but didn't know -- we told him about our experience. He says -- they took us out for lunch, and during lunch they said, "We know you have a brother in New York, because he was in correspondence before." When the war broke out, the first year or two, Italy was not so aligned later with Germans. So, they were in touch from New York -- from -- from Milan, to New York, you know, these people. They said, "You know, we have a lot of feathers and down accumulated." During the war years you didn't do any exporting. "So why don't you take some samples and send it to your brother? And this way you can make some money." [indecipherable] I said, "Be happy." She, "Come tomorrow morning [indecipherable] there." And ship me -- that's how we started making money. Then we became -- we organize a firm, we hired some people. Now, we did some processing also in Milan. We set up equipment, and we bought feathers. We traveled all a -- that's probably what takes me out of depression, you know, trudigu -- faster. We went to Czechoslovakia, to -- we went to Hungary, Yugoslavia we went. We went -- bought as much feathers as we could get because there

was a shortage in the United States after world -- during the -- World War Two, they used up all f-feathers and down, only for military use, for sleeping bags. And there was very little for public -- for private, yeah, people. So a big market for it.

Q: How did it feel to be traveling in -- in countries that -- in H-Hungary, or in Czechoslovakia, or Yugoslavia where -- where there had been so much destruction, and --

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A: Was just -- we felt -- we want -- you know, I wanted to prove to the world, and I -- that's -- that's probably why I'm -- we are -- I'm successful, that we are not stupid people, that we have ambitions, and we have knowledge, and -- and underst -- we have intelligence, and whatever -- ever did it in my life, after World War -- I did only things -- not just to make the money, to -- to show that I'm a decent human being, you know? I've never -- I -- I ca -- I -- I be frank, I have a big resentment with the Germans. Maybe more for the Germans than the Poles, although the Poles were pretty bad, of course. And the resentment would have been -- lasted much longer if I ever went back to Poland, you know, which [indecipherable] nobody there, or any other. The Italians, for some reason, were so friendly. You know, even when I couldn't speak English. I remember the first time we asked -- we wanted to go to cort -- coursa teachanase, how we go there? The Italians would say, "Go straight here, make a right turn. Oh no, made a mistake." They showed us, or they took us there, you know? They very, very friendly. We just -- and I had some friends there, eventually. We loved Italy, because we were used to deplorable

treatment, so anybody who was nice, we found aba -- w-we fell in love with them. I had -- I really loved Italy, and we go there every so often. I -- I love Italy.

Q: What about being in -- in Hungary, for example?

A: We dealt only with the government there. There was no private industry, or Yugoslavian. Strictly, you know, how many pounds do we have this, that, they made a whole list. We negotiated privately, [indecipherable] on this -- you know, this. We had -- if we wouldn't have done this, I think we would have been lost more. I -- we had a one -- yeah, brother-in-law who survived the war. One of my sister's -- my sis -- Mindla. And he survive, and he -- he never was himself. He was such a wonderful, nice guy, brilliant. But he was so damaged, he lost two children and a wife, he could never come back.

Q: What was his name?

A: His name was Motl, li -- li -- Motl, like in motel.

Q: That was his last name?

A: Sorry?

Q: His last name?

A: Yeah, Finkenstein. Yeah. He was a -- he was a broken man, and he was such -- he came to visit us in Italy, we encouraged him to s -- he say that he couldn't -- he just couldn't function too much. He went back to Poland after the war, and he -- and from him we know for sure, he -- he says, "There's nobody, nobody." Eve -- from the same

town, only two people survived. No, nobody. Besides his wife and -- and kids, he lost his whole, entire family, no one else survived. His brothers, and others.

A: You were -- so you're -- you're in Italy after the war, and you're just starting to learn -- I think you said in the first interview that you -- you were not aware during the war, of Auschwitz.

A: No, I wasn't aware of any camp.

Q: S-So, when you started to learn about what had happened, and the scale of the killings that -- the murders that had taken place, after the war, do you remember the -- how you learned about that, and the effect that it had on you then?

A: You know, I'm not sure whether I understood you, yeah -- will you -- I just was thinking of something else.

Q: Yeah.

A: Could you please repeat it?

Q: Yes. After the war, when you were in Italy, and you started to hear about the camps, and what -- and the -- what had happened there, and how many -- h-how many Jews had been murdered -- Jews, and others too, ho -- do you remember the effect that that news had on you when you learned about it?

A: When I learned about it, I did not know about any -- I mean, I learned about camps subsequently there were many, because I went back to Munich to look for my -- I thought maybe my sisters survived. And there were people [indecipherable] some of the camps.

We didn't know there was organized there. We thought maybe just this happened here, just happened in [indecipherable]. They were so organized, they did town by town, village by village, and there was no communication at all, because peop -- there was no radio -- ra -- for ra -- if you had a radio, a death sentence, like arms, or radios. No newspapers. Didn't know, didn't know what's going on. They kept many things so secretive. This way, there was no uprising to a degree. If we knew how they -- be more uprising, even if we had no arms, nobody helped us. Eve -- if anybody had arms, had to -- they were afraid to keep them, they turned them in, se -- except in Warsaw, they had uprising, and that's the only wa -- place.

Q: So when you -- when you s -- after the war, and the information is flowing more freely, were you --

A: Yes.

Q: -- were you shocked, or -- to find out what had happened, and --

A: I was very -- of course, very, very -- I was very depressed about it, yeah.

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is tape number two, side A, of an interview with Norman Belfer. Wer -- were you -- did you have much personal contact with people who were coming from the camps while you were in Italy, and -- and was -- did you form friendships, for example?

A: Yes, I did make personal contacts with a number of people. Most people left -- migrated to the United State, to Canada, to Australia, to -- even some settled in Italy, which I still have one particular friend who lives in Italy, in Milan, and there may be more living there, but I'm not f -- f -- I don't know them. They all had to s -- make a living, so they all looked for jobs, they looked for some profession, and some even went back to school. I knew a doctor, and -- in Great Neck, New York where we live, part time, who went to -- became a medical -- who became a physician, went to medical school in Italy. I knew an engineer, very brilliant guy, he's deceased now, and he went to engineering school in Munich. So there are -- these are only a few individuals that I know.

Q: And did you talk together about what had happened during the war, or did -- were you more focused on the future?

A: We talked, but very little. We -- we -- we would say where we were, what we lost. We -- we didn't -- it was too painful, still, to talk, you know? As a matter of fact, my brother Maurice, who lost a wife and -- and a child, he remarried, you know, in Milan. And he

never told his wife, and the -- all -- and his children, that he lo -- he had a wife before, and a child thas -- because it was too painful to talk about it.

Q: He never told them?

A: Never told them. How I know is, after he passed away, I wa -- I was discussing it. He may have told her that he had a wife, and a child, but the children, you know, they're in their 20's, didn't know. He wouldn't talk about his experiences. Was too painful to him. My children, I did tell, over the years, yes. Little by little, yeah. They ask questions. But he never told his children. He -- if the children would ask him, he would say, "I don't want to talk about it, it's too painful for me."

Q: That must have been --

A: I think since "Schindler's List," -- you know, that movie, a lot of survivors, for some reason, that I -- that I know, you know, in the -- in New York area, have been talking more openly, for some reason. I don't know, I mean it's -- many years past, obviously, from '45 to now, you know? It's 55 years. But people in the last few years, you see, are more -- talk more about it.

Q: Are -- is it important to you to have friendships with survivors, people who have been through something similar to what you've been through?

A: Only some, obviously. Not too many. Cause the area we lived weren't any, really to -- that I know of.

Q: In Great Neck?

A: In Great Neck. Th -- if there were any, I didn't know. In New York I had -- in New York City, you have Brooklyn, and you know, the Bronx there was some people. And especially I got to know them after -- in the last 20 years, Yad Vashem became very active, and I'm one of the -- I'm the international vice-chairman of Yad Vashem.

Q: I want to hear more about your work with Yad Vashem, and -- and the museum, but first -- maybe we should do that a little later --

A: Surely.

Q: -- and -- and stay with -- I wanted to ask about Maurice's -- you mentioned in the first interview that Maurice married in Italy.

A: Yes.

Q: And he married a German woman?

A: She was German Jewish, yes.

Q: German Jewish, Okay.

A: Yes. Actually more in the -- more French than German, she c-came from a town, S-Sowerbriken. I don't know the English way of --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: It's on German- French border. She spoke French and German, and Italy -- and Italian, yeah.

Q: And also, regarding -- you mentioned a little earlier that -- that you've -- that it's been difficult for you to forgive the German people, or that you -- you don't want to forgive them. Have you had to -- in your business, have you had to deal with Germans, or is --

A: I never wanted to deal with them.

Q: And y-you haven't had -- had to do that?

A: As a matter of fact, one time si -- I was building a major project in New Jersey, on the Palisades, and I was working -- Citibank was my sub -- bank, and one of the officers from Citibank said, "There's some Germans who would be very much interested in buying your project or become part of this." I said, "Tell them that I would never deal with Germans because of my background." I -- just simply not -- and the same -- Arabs approach me, over the years, I don't want to do any business. It's not just making money, it's -- I wouldn't just sell myself because to make money, you know? I'm still very hurt about it, obviously, but I -- I -- I try -- I don't think about it, I try not to. I'm a very, very disciplined person, you know. I ha -- I learned how -- things that are not important, I -- I never think about it. I try to get it out of my mind. Otherwise I couldn't -- I couldn't live properly, I was -- as -- or do anything the ri -- you know? If you're filled with all kinds of emotions, you couldn't make decisions, you couldn't be successful in any type of profession or -- or business, or -- or teaching, or whatever.

Q: When you were in Italy, did you travel around much in Italy --

A: Yes, yes.

Q: -- were you interested in the culture?

A: Yes, I -- I -- I remember the first time I went to Rome. And we went -- with my brother, Maurice, and we went to the Vatican, and was so impressed with the grandeur, with all the -- the art, and everything so impressive. Very imp -- I was -- had a -- I never expected this to be so -- so interesting, and when I wa-walked out, there were mothers with little -- with children, begging for a penny, you know? That I couldn't stand to see, the richness of the Vatican, all -- even gold jewelry, and all this, and couldn't support these poor mothers, you know? And you saw two, three year olds, five years olds running around on that square, and some would tr -- even had maybe 10 year old boys, or maybe 12, they were selling pornographic pictures, you know? I tr [indecipherable] I -- I couldn't understand that. But we also traveled you know, and I loved Florence, and Venice very much, and also some [indecipherable] you know. Shallite, and I like Kromo, near the Swiss border, you know? That beautiful hotel there, and Straza, and Terrona. I know a lot of it. And southern Italy, there. I knew Ispia, and Capri, and Naples. I-I -- I made a point, the first few years, you know, the fir -- after a couple years I said to my brother, "Y -- we have enough money now to -- we don't have to work so hard. Now, let's do some traveling, and so on." And we didn't have a lot of money, but to us it was a -- a lot. We had 10,000 dollars, we -- we were millionaires in Italian liras, you know? 10,000 dollar was like 10 million liras, you know? So -- so [indecipherable]. So we traveled a lot. We had a -- made a lot of nice friends, some Italians, and non-Italian.

Q: Did you practice Judaism at all?

A: Did I what?

Q: Did you -- did you practice Judaism at all? Did you go to synagogue?

A: Not really. Not really at all. Not at all. Also, I be -- I was interested, and during high holidays I would go to a temple there. It was like a Reform temple. But I -- I was angry about this whole thing, you know, other religions. It -- however, it's -- you get older and older, you start thinking maybe -- I don't understand, I can't explain it, but where is God? Why have you punished? And so on.

Q: Y -- we didn't hear anything about your religion, or your religious education before the war. I know that your father was Orthodox, but were -- did you have any natural inclination or interest in -- in religious issues, or -- or natural faith as a -- as a young man?

A: Yes, I was -- as a young man, I was very -- I would say very observant. But I was not a f -- never was a fanatic, you know. Neither was my father, he was a very Orthodox, but he was -- he di -- but he was active in the business world, and so on. But I went to Yesh- Yeshiva, you know, before -- til ma -- maybe I was 13 years old, you know? And then I went to Hebrew high school. That's where I learned spa -- I knew -- I knew Hebrew, but I didn't know it was a spoken language [indecipherable]. My family all were very learned you know, and very broad minded. And I must have had a very strong background, or whatever. They gave me a lot of -- they brought me up right, obviously. I love people, I trust people, I -- I can read people. Maybe that developed a little [indecipherable] too. I

can read who is sensi, who isn't, you know? I lo -- now I say I lost a little bit of it, but I -- I don't, know, I can read people. It's amazing how well.

Q: You think that you could do that during the war, as well, or --

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Yeah. Do you think that helped you to survive?

A: Must have, yes. I always kept a straight face, I don't know [indecipherable] such horrible things, I would not -- some people got very upset, and they would be part of that they were -- they didn't survive after that, you know? They would cry and scream, or whatever. You had to be made of iron.

Q: Can you say something more about -- about the -- about your religion now, a -- your faith now? It sounded like y -- it's developed.

A: I am -- I am, I would say, Conservative. In other words, I go to temple only on high holidays, and also when I have -- you know, Yahrtzeit, what -- what it means?

Q: Remembrance?

A: Where you go -- yeah -- you -- we -- we approximate our dates when I lost my parents, then I go to temple, or my sisters [inaudible]. The one th -- there's a date, and they -- it's a memorial day for that person, whatever, I would go. Otherwise, I don't go. What I found interesting, I don't know, very few people know that, when I lived in Italy, I had a girlfriend. Her fa -- I met her father, the father was Jewish, the mother was Gentile. And she was a lovely girl. She told me she's Christian because her mother's

Christian, and her brothers are Jewish, because the father is Jewish. It's -- it's the only place I've heard of is in Italy, yeah. They will go to church, all of them, let's say Christmas, and high holi -- Jewish high holidays all go to temple, to synagogue. That's -- and -- and it was very, very normal there, it wasn't -- there were a number of families like this. I've never heard of it in any other place.

Q: Does that -- how do you feel about that now?

A: I think -- I think it's better than hating each other. It's a very good compromise, its' a very good compromise. Because very often I hear you intermarry, and when something goes wrong, they right away pick on religion, yeah. They don't blame, because he -- you don't -- well I don't focus on -- on it, you don't understand it, but I -- people get angry. [indecipherable] call you -- you're a Jew, or you're this, or you're that, you know? Had nothing to do with the religion. What I was in -- what amazed me a bi -- the reason I loved Italy so much, there was no -- I couldn't feel any anti-Semitism, none whatsoever. I told people, they ask me, yeah, I say -- I'm a -- a brayer who is Jewish, you know. Some even -- I had some Christian friends that we made over the years. I met them during -- in the hotel, you know, when you're on vacation, became friendly. So they ask me one time, "Where you going for Christmas night, where you going? Which church do you go to?" I said, "I told you I'm -- I'm a -- a brayer, I'm Jewish." He said, "You're Jewish? But you poli -- you come from Poland." They don't understand. Poland all Christians. I say, "Yes, but there were some Jews there." And they don't -- didn't matter at all. [indecipherable]

years after. As a matter of fact I have one guy who've send me a present last ti -- last year. We exchange presents occasionally. Sent some shirts with the name Belfer. There's a company, you know, in Italy, they make very fancy sports clothes, and he sent my wife and me shirts with Belfer and Belfer, printed in, some logo. So he found it in a store in Milan, so he felt he has to send it to me. We're going to see him this summer, too. It's -- th-th-the Catholic church actually is the major -- all of the maj -- the major, the pope, and all the cardinals, and all this, all operate from Rome. And I couldn't understand why there's so little anti-Semitism in -- in Italy, and so much in -- in other parts of the, in Europe. I couldn't understand that. They weren't preaching it, maybe, at their home base.

Q: Di -- have you had any -- how do you feel about Catholicism in general, I mean, having lived in a Catholic country, do you think that -- that most Catholics are anti-Semitic, and it was just the Italians who weren't, or --

A: It's -- it goes by country, so it's almost -- like Czechoslovakia let say, I know it from people that I knew, and I traveled after the war to Czechoslovakia. There was no -- not quarter as much anti-Se-Semitism as in Poland. Maybe because in Poland, there were -- the Jews were there longer, for over a thousand years, and there were more Jews there. I don't -- we don't know. And also, they were less educated. The Poles were not very well -- there were many illiterates, it -- maybe than other countries. But see, let's -- but at the same time, look at the Germans, very -- they're very -- the most educated people in Europe, they were, and what they did, you know. They did it, I think, because the whole

world, nobody actually protested, nobody came to help. All -- by -- by being silent is like acquiescing. And some even helped. Like a small country like Denmark, they told them the -- you know, to wear -- the Germans told them to wear these Star of David, you know, on their clothes, or whatever. They said no til the king himself put it on. And more s -- more over Bulgaria was a country where they told the Germans, “If you co -- if you take one of our citizens out, there’s a war.” They never went in. Other countries let them in. And the worst, I feel, was Hungary, you know. They were occupy -- the Russians occupied most of Poland, all Poland. They were close to their borders, they were -- still was -- only a few weeks before the war, the entire war was over, they were still sending people in April. The war was over, let’s say, in some parts was over already, they were sending Jewish people to Auschwitz. I mean, that’s unheard of. They just [indecipherable] us. It’s -- it’s painful to think about it. Why would you do that to another human being?

Q: I wanted to ask you, you had, as a young man, your education had been interrupted.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you --

A: I never finished high school.

Q: Did you ever have the desire to -- to go back to school, to continue your edu -- your education, or did you ever do that?

A: I did go -- I di -- I had private tutoring in Milan, you know, especially wanted to learn Italian. I also started -- took some business courses, and when I came to the U.S., I went to -- I became interested in real estate, you know. I -- I attended NYU, New York University, you know, has classes for j -- for drawings, and construction methods, and so on. And -- and also American history. I took courses night -- at night. That's -- and I self educated myself. I -- I read as -- I -- when I have free time, I read, about everything that's going on, you know. The New York Times specifically, I read from all cover to cover, in a way. And my wife is very -- she's very intellectual. As a matter of fact, she is a founding chairman of Fellowship of Christian Jews, in Palm Beach. She been the f -- she's a -- she can -- this organization's only about maybe six, seven years old, you know. She's on the board, and [indecipherable]. And Palm Beach itself was very anti-Semitic y-years ago, but it much, much, much less now. We have -- once a year, we have a big ball, you know, and [indecipherable] the Breaker's Hotel, where many Christian Jews come, sit at the same tables. In -- in general, the -- the atmosphere is much, much better than it used to be there, because we have a dialog, they see we are not different than they are, really. We have -- here, we have a number of very Christian friends, very lovely people. I hope they think of us as much as [indecipherable] very lovely. I -- I don't know, that's why I can never understand the hate it build up. That -- that put a -- it bothers me, because if you're not going to be aware of it, like in history, if you're not aware of it, it's

doomed to repeat itself. In other words, if you don't learn from the history. So you have to try to correct whatever is possible.

Q: Maybe we should talk about how you came to the United States. Do you want to say something about that?

A: Surely. My brother Arthur would come to Milan, Italy because we lived there, and he wanted to buy more and more feathers, so he came every -- every year for awhile, see what we doing. And we had -- we were well established, and he was on the -- on a weekend, he went to the Lido Hotel in Long Beach -- Long Island, you know, he would -- he would go there always in the summertime, he and his family. He was swimming, and the undercurrent, he almost drowned. He, and a couple of other people, I -- I believe one of them drowned, or -- or two, I'm not sure, really. And he -- they operated on him be- because he had the lung -- they had to cut part of one of lung off -- he was -- so he asked me to come, he wasn't doing well. Took awhile to get all better. I couldn't refuse, so that's how I came. I didn't like it, really. I went back a few times, just for a short time, to visit my other brother. And finally I met Eleanor, see. And when I met her, so -- of course, we got engaged, and awhile later, and then we got married, so they went to Italy, and I stayed there. We stayed there for five weeks, my brother was calling me after two weeks, when are you coming back?

Q: So he really needed you?

A: Yes. When are you coming back? So we star -- I he -- you know, that time, Eleanor [indecipherable] her parents heard that you going to Italy, going to Italy, and I'd say that they were not very sophisticated about Europe, you know. Oh. They said, "Why would you go to Italy, so many places in the United States." I said, "I like it." But Eleanor loved it, too. I was considering staying back in Italy, coming back. But I had s -- a feeling for my brother, and we got married, and I -- we settled here, you know.

Q: Can you say something more about why you didn't like the United States, or why it didn't appeal to you as much as Italy?

A: First off, when I arrived at the piers in New York, the screaming, and the yelling, and the taxi drivers. You have to wait to get a taxi, everybody was trying to get taxis. And the noise, and the overhead west side highway, you know? And there were so many people in the streets, and all types of people, and I just took me -- took me time to get used to it, simple as that. Not I didn't like it, but I -- I didn't like the food, either. However, my brother and his family took me out to a steak house, they gave us steak for three people, you know? I remember [indecipherable] I couldn't -- I wasn't used to this type of food, I liked Italian food. And little things, nothing. Once I learned more about th-this -- the American system in amer -- and the way things are done here, I started to love it. It took me -- it took me a short time, it took a couple of years. Then I became more used to it, you know. I love it now. I'm very proud to be an American citizen [indecipherable]. I do anything that is proper there to any citizen, I don't care whether they're -- or what color

or what religion I-I'm not this way. As a matter of fact, when I came am -- to the United States, I never saw Black children. Where -- I could see Black people aft-after the war, because in Poland, never -- I never saw a Black person, never. In Italy, you see th -- I saw some, and Germany, cause soldiers, you know still were after the war. But I never saw a child, or a woman. A woman I saw, only in a film, where that -- the, "Gone With the Wind," had that -- I remember distinctly. I used to go to English movies in Milan, I wanted to improve my -- my English. So I ha -- I -- I had no prejudices. I mean, that's how I was raised, obviously, it comes from childhood.

Q: When did you become a citizen?

A: I became a citizen in -- let's see -- in '52, I believe, 1952. I believe you have to be -- if you're married to a -- an American citizen, I believe after two years -- is it two or three years, I'm not sure, you become -- I got a passport, yeah. And if you are not a -- if you're not married to an American, it's -- takes five years to get a citizenship papers.

Q: And by that point, did you feel very loyal to this cou --

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: -- or really interested in this --

A: There's certain things I didn't like. People were -- some people were -- I find European people -- and I'm talking about Italy, I cannot -- I cannot speak about Poland.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

A: Their behavior -- the behavior was more refined in Europe than in the United States. It may have change now, you know. Matter of fact, American used to dress differently, you know. In Dearborn, I -- I remember, I had the custom made suit for coming to America. I thought I want to look proper, you know? And they -- the first thing my brother says, "You look like a greener." You know what a greener?

Q: Like a greenhorn?

A: Greenhorn.

Q: Yeah.

A: And this American says, "Why don't you come and buy some suits?" He wanted to go -- this was around the year end. So he wanted to go a hotel in the Catskills, he says, "People don't dress like this." I said, "Okay, let's go." I tried on -- everything was so big -- I'm sorry -- big, and -- I d -- as -- I couldn't find an-anything, but that -- so I bought some -- one suit, but I don't want to buy any more. But also ties, at that time they were big ties, and very loud. I was not used to it, so -- anyway. But I feel in the United States, you don't have this -- you still have some resentment, and -- but it's more civilized. It's a ver -- if there is a resentment -- in Europe they were all open, you know, and -- and I continued, it's -- it was a continuous problem, you know, whether you're Jewish, or non-Jewish, German, or Italian, or this. Even then -- between nations, they were hating each other. That's why they had wars every -- every 25 years, or twen -- every -- a new war.

Q: I wanted to ask you just a little bit more about Israel, or wa -- Palestine, wa -- your plans to go, and did -- was it difficult to disc -- to change your mind about that, or did -- how did -- how did your -- how did that desire to go --

A: I definitely intended to go, I definitely wanted to go there, and so did my brother. We felt that we have been abused, and -- and murdered, you know, and we just wanted to be in a Jewish state, you know? It was not a state yet, but we hoped. We will fight, we were ready to fight, and do anything, to have a -- a sovereign Jewish state, because we felt then, and now, if we had a Jewish state, this would have never happened. Maybe people would have been killed, but not by the -- by the millions. Nobody he -- you know, even the United States, th-they could have helped, they didn't help. None of the European countries helped, and -- nobody helped us. And nobody gave us weapons. If anybody had weapons, had to turn them in, in the beginning, you know? The first two years, you hear they would shoot somebody, or put you in jail for nothing, [indecipherable], but then gradually became harder and harder. They fooled you in such a way. Very little was known, what was going on. And even the best of your neighbors, some of them, they want -- if they, let's say, wanted to help, were afraid to help, see? But they're very few. As a matter of fact, I was in -- at Yad Vashem, it's going to be two years in j -- this Ju-June, yeah, where [indecipherable] the 50th anniversary of the state of Israel. I believe that's when it -- yes, '48, yeah. Yad Vashem invited 60 families from Europe who helped -- Righteous Gentile, you know?

Q: You mentioned -- we were talking a little bit about -- about Israel --

A: Yes.

Q: Is there anything else you want to say about that? Maybe w-was it -- have you always followed closely the -- the political situation there? For example, when the sic -- six day war came along in -- in 1967, was that an -- was than an important event for you?

A: It was extremely important, because we -- we felt -- I felt that they liberated the land that th-the -- that the Arabs felt is their land, but if you go back in history, a lot of it belonged to Israel. And even now, the dispute about the Gaza Strip, and other areas, you know, that belong to Israel, but Israel is not a state. It's Palestine, and -- there's a conflict, of course, and I hope they -- they will have a peace tre-treaty, and try to live together, and they'll be much better off by -- they don't have to love each other, but at least they should co-exist. By co-existing, the Arabs would definitely benefit, and I think even Israel would benefit, having peace, not have to arm itself, and lose people, you know, and -- which is completely a waste of human life. They can -- but what is -- what is bad in -- in -- in -- in these Arab countries, like Saudi Arabia has all the money, and other, and Iran, and all this, they all -- they hate each other to -- they don't hate only Israel, they hate each other. Iraq, you know? They depressed -- they oppressed the people, and they live like -- all the leaders in these countries li-live like kings. You see them when you go to Europe, in some hotels, I've met some -- I was in Switzerland maybe 10 years ago. They take entire floors, they come with a whole crew, you know, they all -- a cook, and help, and what

they love most, I've seen, they go to gambling casinos. They gamble maybe thousands, or millions, who knows? They just -- the disgrace of their own people; instead of building them up, they build themselves up, the leaders themselves. It's unfortunate. Also the market, let's say, the Arab -- because of the standard of living there, their wages are so low by comparison to Israel, or by com -- comparison to European's standards. And even s -- Far East -- the Far East was -- China, or any of these countries, exporting a lot of goods to the United States, because their labor is extremely -- 10 cents an hour. In the Arab countries some ma -- don't make more, they're making less. They could build up their economies, like Japan did after World War two, and others, with the help of the Israelis, but they -- their leaders are fighting, not even knowing what their -- they want, and every [indecipherable] they make, they don't live up to, you know, it's -- it's a constant problem. I hope the new generation will understand that better, be more educated, more broadminded, and there'll be peace in that area, and by having peace in that area, will be peace also in many other areas, because we are interrelated in a way, one country with a -- with another. I hope th -- Iraq, in particular, and Iran, that they have some new governments, you know, which are more for the people, not for themselves.

Q: When did you first travel to Israel?

A: I went to Israel, I -- I believe the first time in -- in the late 50's, early six -- yeah, 1960 I know I was there, you know, 1960 [indecipherable]. That was a time which was very unusual. That -- Adolf Eichmann, at that time, when we were in Israel, was brought from

Argentina, or whatever, and was a big, big celebration, in a way. Sort of tragic, but -- that they caught him and brought him to justice. And I was -- the streets were full of people, and s -- and was so much excitement about it. Was very -- I wa -- we were very happy to be there, to be -- to have been there, yeah.

Q: Did you follow the trials closely, the Eichmann trials?

A: To a degree, yes, yes I have, definitely. As a matter of fact, we were in Israel the two years ago, I started to tell you about the -- I don't know whether I finished it. Yad Vashem invited 60 families from Europe. These 60 families, whose -- who were -- helped Jews, they didn't have to be the -- they could have been children, or grandchildren of them, the whole families were invited for the -- they were put up in the Hilton Hotel, a very fine hotel. Made big dinners, and we were -- the big ceremony at Yad Vashem, and the many -- there were dignitaries from different countries, and -- and there was a discussion, one of the speakers said, I'm -- I'm not sure whether it was Netanyahu, or somebody else, during the war, World War two, there were 400 million people in -- in Europe, and how many do you think -- Gentiles -- helped Jewish people? Under 14,000. A fraction of -- less than one -- a fraction of one percent, you know. In other words, that's -- that tells a lot. The people who -- who were invited, were given special medals, like [indecipherable]. They were treated royally, they were invited to the -- to the president's house, and that really -- they -- they were so -- so amazed, and some of them say they want to come and s -- and retire there. They were so -- so amazed, yeah. Yes, what I

wanted to say, we met yes -- we met an elderly lady wi-with her son, from Holland. No -- not -- not from Holland, from Austria. She was put in a camp in Auschwitz. She was a German physician -- Austrian physician who helped Jewish people -- or Jewish friends, you know? She helped them, something, she was put in -- into Auschwitz. And she said that she worked under Mengele, you know? And he experimented with human lives, and so on. He gave and she was supposed to give him certain pills to take, you know, make sure that they swallow, and so on. A lot of them she did not distribute, she di -- she disposed of it, you know, she -- and so on. Certainly she -- and she even said what -- what the drugs were, certain drugs. She was a very elderly, and she wasn't in good health, she was wearing a -- sh -- with crutches, you know. But her son was very intelligent. Nice man. And he explained the whole -- what meng -- what Mengele, what he did to the prisoners, you know. He kept them out nude in that na -- in the -- in the freezing weather, to try -- how much you can stand. There all kind of experiments. Whatever she could help avoiding, she would -- she was risking her own life, but she said she couldn't say one hu -- why one human being could do this to another. And many of these Christians who were invited, they were very loving people. They say what they did to -- to you. They call us brother, and you know, they said -- they even said, you know -- I remember he said, we are brethren, beca -- we -- we believe in Jesus, and Jesus was a Jew. They even brought up, why would I hate the Jews, you know? He actually -- the Jews with the 10

commandments, all kinds. We tried -- they tried to explain their reasoning, tried to find why would this happen. It's -- this was quite interesting, and moving, of course.

Q: Maybe this would be a good time for you to talk more about your role with Yad Vashem, and -- and with the US Holocaust Museum, and how you --

A: What -- yeah.

Q: -- how you became involved with helping.

A: I -- I couldn't hear the last.

Q: How you became involved with helping to develop these --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- organizations.

A: I ha -- I have some friends in New York, and this happened, I mean, 30 years ago. They said, you know, the Yad Vashem -- they built -- the government actually supporting it. But Israel at that time was not in finan -- well, not in very good financial status, and they wanted foreigners who have some means, to help, and w -- they formed an organization New York, and I was invited to come and -- and I took an active role in -- you know, at meetings and so on, and I became a vice-chairman. Also went to Israel, and to the museum on many occasions, to have meetings there s -- and that's how I got involved. And once a year we have a meeting in -- in New York, where there are over a thou -- 1200 people show up, you know. More, on account of it's -- the -- this is the largest room in New York, the Hilton Hotel, it's -- that can accommodate up to 1200

people, otherwise there would be more. It's not only survivors, many Americans will come there, and I'm -- I'm active in that organization, I'm active in many other -- several others, there. But that, primarily.

Q: I was wondering whether I -- I saw in your first interview that your mother had told you s -- before she died, that she -- she had told you to talk about -- to survive, and to talk about what had happened.

A: Yes.

Q: And I'm wondering how much that -- those words stayed in your mind, and influenced your -- your work, after the war.

A: This -- the words stuck in my mind very -- and still now, you know. Especially during the war years, there was a time at the end of the war year days, the last week of the war years, w-we went through hell, and I -- I could not -- I wanted to give up, I couldn't give up. I -- I mean, I couldn't. I couldn't walk any more. I just -- but I was thinking of my mother, I have to survive and tell the world what happened. She -- that's what she told me. She told me, you're the youngest -- and she told it to Maurice, too. Wa -- say -- to me, she says, "Remember, you are the youngest, you are the -- you look strong and healthy. You never -- y-you always have been healthy. You eat right, [indecipherable]" -- you know, after it happened to my father, you know, the -- they shot my father, that's -- that's the time she told me. "You have to tell the world what happened, because this -- this is a tragedy that is going to go down in history for -- for hundreds of years, wh-what

we see, what they doing to us here. And do your utmost to survive. I am," she said, "I am old." She was, that time 55 - 57, something that -- I'm not sure, maybe 57, or fi -- or 55. And that -- that always has been in my head, you know? So when I have an opportunity, we have some Christian friends here in Palm Beach, even they talk about -- talk to me, they -- they indirectly find out I -- I'm a survivor, or -- or Eleanor would say, you know, "I -- I'm European, and I am survivor of the war." So, they want -- some want to know. I showed some of the films, the videotapes, they can't believe it, you know. They say it's mindboggling, you know, it's -- but that's -- that's -- that's how it was.

Q: When did you start to speak about your experiences during the war? Di -- when you met Eleanor, did you talk to her about it?

A: I told her a little. I told her that I was in a concentration camp, but I didn't tell her that much. Gradually, I would tell her more and more, you know.

Q: Was sh -- did she encourage you to talk about it, or discourage you?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: Did she encourage you to talk about it, or did she discourage you from talking about it?

A: I would say she -- she would ask questions, but I -- I never wanted to elaborate too much. I felt it was too upsetting to me, and it upsetted her, you know. She's very se -- very sensitive, you know, about th-this, you know. She can't understand why these things should have happened. And a lot of it could have been avoided, but nobody cared. It's as

simple as that. Nobody cared. Y-- with the boats, you know, came to the American shores, and sent them back. Most of them perished. And now, anybody wants to come to America, comes in. Including criminals can come in. Nobody stops them, to -- the way they stopped civilized people, educated people, and so on.

Q: Did -- was there a point where it became important to you to talk about your experiences, and what had happened, or is it still --

A: I would tell -- yes, I was honored by Yad Vashem, I would tell my story. As a matter of fact, only a couple weeks ago, I was honored here by American Jewish Committee, and they wanted me to talk about it, and I did, yeah. And they said they never had such -- so many people came, and so many money. They raised ever -- they never raised as much money. Was a fundraiser. American Jewish Committee, you know, they -- they fight bigotry, anti-Semitism, racism, all that.

Q: Where did you say that was?

A: American Jewish Com-Committee.

Q: And -- and that took place here, in --

A: In Palm Beach, yes. They have a -- usually a dinner, or a -- every year, you know, or cocktail reception. And it's like ADL, you know, Anti-Defamation League is the same thing, yeah.

Q: And y-you felt -- was there a time when you -- when you felt like you couldn't talk about it, and that you were able to later, or how -- how did that happen?

A: I -- I never encouraged it, you know, I never, unless somebody asked me, yes, I would have. But I would never start that. There are many friends who know me for 40 years, they -- they ju -- and they just found out last year, or two years ago, whatever. But it became more among survivors, after “Schindler’s List,” I notice they talk more openly, everybody talks more openly. There was -- not they didn’t talk because they were -- they didn’t ha-ha -- crimes they didn’t want to, it was too painful to them to talk about it, because it’s -- it’s -- it’s very hard, you know, God forbid if people lose a whole, entire family. Parents, sisters, nieces, nephews, friends. It’s just -- it’s -- what I’m saying it, I -- I don’t understand. I -- it’s -- it’s painful, I don’t understand it. But that’s -- that’s -- that -- that is life, it happened. We have to make sure it does not happen again, and that’s why I’m active in that, every organization who fights, bigo -- bigotry, and anti -- not only anti-Semitism, anti-Black, anti-thi --whatever. I am strongly against. I support every organization that I -- this is no -- no rhyme or reason for it, except, I would say -- I would say ignorance. Plain ignorance, and stupidity. We can live in a much better world, why fight? Yes, we may have disagreements, or dis -- different approaches to different si -- certain problems, but you -- we discuss it. You --you compromise, or you convince the other person. Why -- that’s one thing, I never -- since World War -- since I was liberated, after the World War two, I never had a fight with anybody. Never sued anybody, never a -- nobody sued me. Except when I had -- about 10 years ago, I had some guy here in Palm Beach -- not Palm -- west Palm, whatever, a builder, who -- who took advantage of

me, anyway. Financially [indecipherable] nothing, you know. He forged statements and stuff like this, so -- I'm bigger and better, and I blame myself, I'm very trusting, you know. And this person was recommended to me by my attorney, is why I felt he can trust -- but -- but I -- I say, material things are -- I'd never -- ha-have never been a problem to me, I could somehow managed. Whatever I did -- I -- I -- I did almost to perfection, you know? And people like to deal with -- with me. My reputation is ses -- is great, and -- and I -- I hope the future generations will be free of all these prejudices, and mistreatments, and so on.

Q: Let me ask you so -- clearly, you're -- you've had a great deal of success with -- with your undertakings in -- in life, and -- and I think that's not a -- many Holocaust survivors have been very successful after the war.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And you don't -- you -- I might think -- one might think that after what Holocaust survivors have been through, that -- that it would be very difficult to -- to achieve so much --

A: Right.

Q: -- after the war. Do you have any explanation for that, any person --

A: But ma -- yeah, the majority did not achieve anything. You know, a lot of them -- a lot of them I know are poor, and depend on help wi -- from others. You only -- the -- the visible ones, are the ones who have been successful. Because they travel, they go around,

and they see them at charity dinners, and so on. I think the rea -- I can explain my -- and I believe I mentioned it before. And I f -- I find every survivor who's successful, is he wants to prove that he's not treated like an animal, you know. That they've been so mistreated, they want to prove to the world at large, that they are decent human beings, they're productive in soc -- in society. They're knowledgeable about their work, whatever -- whether it's professional or otherwise. And even as employees, you know, many of them, they try harder, they have to work harder, they had to work, first of all, by starting with -- with nothing, you had to work hard to get up the ladder a little, you know, and it's very hard to make a living. I was successful because -- and my brother, because we had some contacts -- business contacts before one -- most of them didn't have any. Had to -- had to work very hard. I know people with two jobs, you know, for years. But eventually, they started to make money, and -- and try to live better, and -- and di -- build some trust among business people, or professional people. I know some survivors who are wonderful architects, bright as -- or engineers I work with. But we never discuss any of it, that stuff, unless I meet them at some of our dinners where they discuss, you know, Holocaust matters, and so on.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is tape number three, side A. You mentioned in your videotape interview, you -- you said at one point that -- that you -- that during the war, you became numb to the violence after awhile. And I -- I wonder if you could say how you became sensitive. I mean, you're obviously a very sensitive person. Was -- was it a long process to kind of get -- move from being numb, to being more sensitive again?

A: The way I felt, obviously, it was -- every bad incident, you know, were -- it like multiplied, worked on you, and you -- you -- you had to feel a l -- that it -- almost, you don't see it, you know? You had to make believe you don't see it, because otherwi -- it was -- it -- it was so painful, you had to give up, you know? There were times y-you felt, you know, you'll jump on one of these SS men, you -- even if he kills you later, you want to kick him in his -- some places, you know, and do whatever. But that's what I mean, you get -- you get so -- you get numb, because you can't do anything. You can -- y-you, it's not only they'll kill you, the rule was there, let's say one prisoner disappeared. Because, we had to line up every morning with the same people, and the same -- you know, to march, you know, there were four or five of us, in width. If one disappeared, 10 people were shot. So, we had to police each others, nobody should disappear. Some people even wanted to give up, they would lay down, they rather, instead of running away, they just sat down on the floor, and later they killed them, and put them on a truck, or whatever. So you become -- that's what I meant.

Q: Yeah, okay. I under -- I understand that, I -- I think, and I just wondered if -- if it was difficult after the war, to -- to come back from that -- that experience of having -- having to numb yourself so that -- so that you wouldn't g -- ex -- so that you'd be able to just control yourself.

A: Right.

Q: But I'm wondering, a-a-after the war, how did y --

A: I must have been very, very strong, you know, mentally strong. And if I could have seen such atrocities that -- I don't think -- I don't want to think about it. If it comes to my mind, I try to shut off my mind at -- about it. It such -- just -- in-incomprehensible, you know? I don't know how I did it, I just did it. You know, it's just -- maybe it's -- I had that mission from my mother. I had the -- also the anger, to get even with these criminals, you know? And -- and ulti -- mayb -- I wanted to prove to myself, after the war, that I am -- I am a decent human being, and I'm better than -- than most of them. And I'm going to show it to the world that I -- I'm a good person. Why would the people who were l-like me, or better than me, had to -- had to -- had to die because of being one religion or another religion, or -- it's -- it -- it's -- it's -- it's a crazy, crazy world. Crazy, and no sensit -- without any hearts, without any sensitivity. They may have had a mind, but not a heart at all. To be a good person, you have to have -- not only you have to have a good heart, above all, and a mind, too. That's all I really can say about it.

Q: Why don't we go back to after you arrived in the United States, and you -- maybe you can say something about how you -- you established your business. You -- you told the story on the videotape about how you -- you met Eleanor, and h-how much that turned you around, and -- and your willingness to -- to settle into life in the United States.

A: Right.

Q: What -- what else happened in those early years?

A: When I came to the United States, I came at the invitation of my brother, who wanted me to work with him. At that time, my brother was in the feather and down business, but when I came, we bought a building on Staten Island, a-and it was formerly Wrigley chewing gum building. And since there was a shortage of feathers and down still, we went into -- to manufacture foam rubber. We hired some engineers from Firestone, I believe Firestone company, and chemists, and we built a plant. Then the Korean war broke out, and there was a shortage of latex. We had to buy latex via Europe, where there's other cu -- via Canada. We had the -- then they established quotas. So we worked for several years, then we had to sell the plant, you know, for a -- maybe two, three years later. [indecipherable] company [indecipherable]. At that time, my brother and I, we started investing money in the oil business, in -- in Texas, and Wyoming, and so on. I invested a certain amount of money, and he had most of the money. It didn't go too well, and then I met Eleanor, and I -- around that time, and my brother Maurice came to the United States, about three years later. And he said, "Why you -- ano -- you have been

losing money there. Why you stay in the oil business?" The first -- so, and -- I was more close to Maurice, he was close in age, and went through together all the -- all the war years. So, I went back to the feather business, but my brother Arthur stayed in the oil business, became very, very, very affluent. Was listed on the New York Stock Exchange, and so on, became a public company. And I then went into real estate, into -- used to buy some buildings, renovate them, then I went into -- I had a -- a structural engineer, and -- and a architect. I had a -- a partner who was an architect. We started building -- put up some buildings, and -- and I became successful with real estate. And my other broth -- Maurice was -- still in the feather and down business, until he passed away about 18 or 20 years after [indecipherable] -- about 20 years, yeah. So his son came in, he was running it, and we sold it only a couple years ago. So, I was involved in these two businesses. Did I answer -- I hope I answered the question.

Q: It seems that your family stayed very, very close. The -- those who survived, and maybe -- d-do you want to say anything more about your relationship with Maurice, and -- after the war?

A: Right. I was much closer to him, yes. My brother Arthur was 16 years older, and he has his ways, a certain way and I didn't always see it his way, you know? He was more -- I was more conservative, he was more -- he -- he would take chances, and so on. But he -- he succeeded, you know. And he -- he passed away only about six years ago. He was 86, then, you know?

Q: Did your relation -- I mean, you had been so -- through so much with Maurice during the war --

A: Yes.

Q: -- di -- was your relationship with him very important to you, afterwards?

A: Yes, I would say so. I don't know, if I had Maurice, say -- or if Maurice had me there, whether we would even have survived, you know? It just -- just helped each other. A matter of fact, he wasn't well, I would give him my food, you know, he didn't [indecipherable] food, and vice versa, you know, so on, it's -- and we always said, we must survive this, and we will -- we will show them. We'll take revenge on them, what kind of revenge, yeah. No, we'll never go to Germany.

Q: Did you ever talk, beyond that, about your -- about your experiences, or reminisce together, or was it --

A: Wi-with Maurice, yes.

Q: With Mauri --

A: We did, but not too extensively, but we did talk about different -- about the family, about different -- other different things, yes, over the years. We did. We were very close. Was close to Arthur, too, but different. He didn't go through the war years, h-he was -- he was more of a free person, you know?

Q: You mentioned the Korean war starting.

A: 1950, yeah.

Q: Did -- did you -- did -- did -- did you have a -- a strong feeling about th-the Cold War, about politics in the United States at that time, was that something that you took an interest in?

A: I -- I only was ups -- upset, and I should say, whenever I heard every day, so many Americans were killed, and so many were killed that I was very upset about it. But I didn't think of politics, took me quite awhile. And I didn't understand much about the system. I knew it's a democratic system, but I didn't understand the standard, to what extent. It took me awhile to -- to recognize every -- everything. And once I recognize it, I -- of course I read about it, and spoke to people about, you know, different happenings. See, you get -- you get enlightened.

Q: Was there anything that you can recall that -- that held a particular interest for you? I me -- maybe the Civil Rights movement, or McCarthyism, or anything that you can think of?

A: I remember about McCarthyism, yes, that I took an interest, and I've -- I've felt that it is a -- I don't know whether it's the right expression, demagogue, you know? He also accused people of being Communists without having any knowledge, or enough to prove th-that they're actually Communists. He -- he was a -- I think he was a disgrace to the ga -- to -- to the United States, and yeah, I -- I still feel that, if I think about it, h-he wa -- he was doing more harm than ever did good.

Q: When were your -- when was your first child born?

A: My first child was born in ’53. His name is Andrew, and he’s an attorney, but he works wi-with me in real estate development. We had another son, James. Unfortunately, he -- he -- he drowned. He went on a vacation -- not actually on vacation, he went to fee -- Eleanor -- Eleanor, my wife, Eleanor has a sister in Phoenix, and she had -- she has two sons, they were -- and -- and James, and Andrew were very close to their sons, they were a similar age, only a couple years -- the others were a couple of years younger. When their son George was accepted at University of Colorado, and Eleanor’s sister called up Jim, he was very -- George was very close to Jim, he said, “You know my -- my husband George,” senior, okay, “would like to take little George,” they call him, “to -- to college, but he has business appointments, and it’s difficult for him to go away. But like Jim, let Jim take him, because he likes Jim, so how about Jim?” Eleanor was hesitating for awhile. She said, “I’ll let you know.” She call, ask Jim. Jim would love to go. And he -- he said when geor -- when they were here -- during Christmas season they were in Palm Beach, and they talked about it, ef -- that he would take him to college. So he went. One day, Jim called us up on Friday night, to tell us that -- when he’s coming back from Colorado, which plane on -- on Sunday, because he had to start school, you know? He went to University of Pennsylvania War-Warton school. He was a year ahead in school, you know, very bright. Come [indecipherable] on Saturday, at four -- four o’clock or so, we got a call from Colorado, or from Phoenix. From Phoenix, probably, that Jimmy drowned. What happened is, Jim took George to college, to the university. Then th-they

rented bicycles, and they drove to a waterway nearby, a few miles away. The waterway had coves for swimmers, and the buoys, you know, that separate the waterway from the coves were not -- weren't there, because there was a storm a coup -- few days before. So a boat -- while Jimmy went swimming laps around the cove, a boat came in. There were -- there were other kids swimming, a little further, he may have been 20 yards, 10 yards, I don't know, away from, cause you know, he was an a -- he was on the swimming team, as a matter of fact, at the University of Pennsylvania, so -- boat came in, he saw the boat coming in, he took a dive. When he heard the boat passed, he came up, so that he didn't realize that the skier -- the skier was a woman, she hit him in the head, and he -- he drowned. They thought he took another dive. And the boat never stopped. And he drowned. And you asked -- we had depositions, we asked the husband and wife. First of all, on that waterway, they had to sign a statement that they can be only in the waterway, they cannot go into the coves. He violated that. Then, we were in a conference room, I would say less wide than this room, about a little longer, but narrower. We're sitting at a conference table, and there was a -- a pic -- a painting on the wall. So my attorney asked her, because she was wearing thick glasses, "Can you tell me what you see in this picture?" She said no. "Okay, are these reading glasses?" She said, "No, these for distance, and sum -- I can't read with them, they're mostly for distance." "You cannot identify the picture?" "No." "Did you wear these glasses while you were skiing, while you on the skis?" She says no. "Why didn't you wear the glasses?" "I would lose them,

they would fall off." She thought it was a dog swimming. She killed him, actually, you know. And that's the story about.

Q: Was sh -- was she prosecuted in any way, or did you press charges?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: We press char -- we spent a fortune in legal fee, couldn't do it. They wouldn -- didn't want to make a criminal case out of it, because they have too many cases for killing people. Colorado's a funny state. You know the maximum you get for killing a young person is only 10,000 dollars. We spent maybe 60,000 dollars in legal fees. [indecipherable] come there many times, and always they couldn't do anything. We even had witnesses, you know, that -- we hired a detective to figure out -- our lawyers hired one to -- the whole report, but didn't -- it was nothing. They say it was not intended -- the -- the intention was not to kill, but whatever. We couldn't -- we couldn't get -- there was no cooperation by -- even by the court. The ti -- it's an accident, they say. And the kids -- his cousin was standing in -- looking at where Jimmy was swimming, and so on, but he didn't realize it, he's not going to come back. And the boats left, couldn't -- you know, it took several days to find him, we had to hire -- we had -- it's very deep water there. We -- we had to rent a -- from California, the s -- a special -- what do you call it? [indecipherable]

Q: Special boat of some sort, a net --

A: Un-under the water, yeah, the boat, the -- pardon me?

Q: -- net -- net -- with a net, or with a --

A: No, it's -- no, no, it's --

Q: Oh, a submarine?

A: It's a little -- small submarine, to find him. Took three days. And that's something we can never, never talk to Eleanor about it, or the people ask how many children, and she breaks down at times. [indecipherable] Yeah, doesn't want to -- she doesn't want to say we have three, not four, so --

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, he s -- was such a wonderful, bright guy, sweet and --

Q: How old was he?

A: 20.

Q: Mm-hm. I'm sorry.

A: Yeah. Strong. He was one of the best, one the best swimmers at the university. Even in -- even in high school, he loved swimming. Good athlete. But --

Q: And your other children? You -- you mentioned --

A: They're wonderful, yeah.

Q: -- you mentioned Andrew, and --

A: And Lauren is -- works -- she was married for a short time, she's divorced. She works in my office as an executive. And then I have Carol, and she is married. She's the

youngest, and sh-sh-she has three children, two boys and one girl, they just were visiting us here during school vacation. They just left this past Sunday, yeah. They have a boy of 12, and a boy of 10, and a little girl of five. All lovely, beautiful children.

Q: When did you move to -- I'm forgetting the name of the town in New York where you lived?

A: We lived in Forest Hills. No --

Q: You lived at first in Forest Hills, when you first moved to New York?

A: When I -- when I moved -- yeah, I lived in Brooklyn with --

Q: Brooklyn?

A: -- my brother, yes. I shared a room with one of my nephews for a few months. They did want me -- I wanted to go to a hotel, but they felt it'd be lonesome, so on, so I stay there. But then I moved to a hotel, Saint George Hotel, in Brooklyn, was an old hotel. And subsequently, we moved to s -- we built a plant on Staten Island, so I moved to Staten Island, rented an apartment there. And then we got married, we moved to Forest Hills. And we lived in Forest Hills for about five years. We got married in '52, and then '57 we moved to Great Neck, we bought a house. And we still -- we don't have the house any more, we sold it in '79, so about 21 years ago, yeah. But we have an apartment in Great Neck, yeah, and an apartment here.

Q: I -- you ma -- I don't think you mentioned on tape, but something that I was interested in -- in hearing you talk a little bit more about, you said when you first moved to Palm Springs, that there were --

A: Palm Beach, yeah.

Q: Palm Beach, I'm sorry -- that -- that -- that there was a lot of anti-Semitism here --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and that it's changed. Would you say something about that? How you noticed it in the beginning, and how it's changed? And --

A: Because we were told then that the Breaker's Hotel, 30 years ago, na -- maybe 25 years ago, actually did not permit Jews, you know? Some people say about 30 this -- but I remember 25 years ago, that was the case. I know even a person who wanted to check in with his wife, they said no you -- you can't. Also, the people in -- if you went to stores, and so on, you look like you are -- you don't belong here. They gave that feeling. They were not friendly.

Q: You personally had that feeling when you went to stores sometimes?

A: I didn't have it as much, but people talked about it. Maybe I'm more tolerant than others, you know? And you just sense it. You know, wherever you went, it was -- they didn't treat you politely. It was an -- little edge, you know? They didn't want Jewish people to come to Palm Beach. Obviously it used to be, very -- almost no Jews. But as the Jewish people came more and more s-successful, and so they -- they used to go to M-

Miami, and the sometime Miami too busy, they came here. And now they say many of the Gentiles moving out. They go more north, you know. Some of them, yeah. They don't -- that's the story. But we never were insulted by anybody, any -- but they were cold to us, you know? I didn't feel any particular pressure, but some people did.

Q: And how -- how did that change? What -- what made that change? Can you --

A: I think we became very active in the hospitals, two hos -- Saint Mary was the Christian hospital, and Good Samaritan was more like a private estate operated -- Jewish people, I would say, made major contributions to the hospitals. And eventually the two hospital merge. Many Jewish doctors came from -- from New York, or wherever. Chicago, and so on. And Christians. The hospitals became much more staffed better. They bought equipment, you know. Here, you need a major operation, you couldn't -- you had to go to Miami or New York, or wherever else. Now, the hospitals are very well staffed, very good medical research they're doing, and they are connected with New England Hospital, in Massachusetts someplace, and also Mount Sinai, New York. Videotape -- they can videotape operations, and there -- there's a big, big, big change. People, when they took sick, they used to go to their hometown, back to their own doctor. Now, they don't do it. Plus, we also helped building the Kravitz Center, which is a -- a place where they -- they have operas, and they have shows, and -- and all that, and I -- I think it was mostly Christian and Jewish, but a big -- I -- I -- I would say at le -- more than half the money came from Jewish people. There's a little more -- more culture. I

would say they contributed money to the -- to small museums, and s -- and now the Jews, and the Gentiles work together in all these places, so it's -- it's a very good relation. Once a year they have a ball for the -- for the hospital, you know? You have -- we have many fine Christians, and fine Jewish people meet, and also the Kravitz Center, they meet, have special gala nights, you know? So at least once, or more than once a year, different artists come from all over -- from all over the -- the country, and -- and Europe. The Moscow orchestra recently, and the -- some French theater -- what do they call, I forget -- artist performing, and so on.

Q: You -- you mentioned -- oops, I'm going to flip the tape.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: You mentioned Eleanor's involvement with the -- what was the name of the organ --

A: [indecipherable] Christian and Jews. She was the -- the first person, with a few other, with some Gentile friends, to start this organization, and sh -- and she was the education chairman. She knows a lot about Holocaust, and about general inter-religious, you know, differences. And so she's very, very knowledgeable, and she served for a couple years in the -- they wanted her to stay. I discouraged her from staying long, I said, "Give somebody else a chance," and -- and so on. [indecipherable] felt very dominating, you know? So the one attorney took over, [indecipherable] or Brian, what is it? I can't remember his name, he's very good, but he also, after two years, he starts his third one

now. Christian, lovely -- they all -- tell you a -- I find it may be my -- I -- I hope I'm not wrong, I find the -- the educated people relate more, cause the Jewish educated people, yeah, they have something in -- in common. The uneducated are -- are more hateful, for some reason, on Jews, I don't know. Ignorance. And that probably is everywhere. They don't understand that we -- we are people, we are good and bad in every religion, every race, I find they have good and bad people. People who contribute to society, and people who don't. People who try to make it a wor -- a better world, and people who don't care, or obstruct. But that's society, that's -- who knows how many years this will take, how many generations, you know, for this to improve and vanish? We all want a better -- better -- better world for our children, grandchildren, and so on.

Q: Yo-You mentioned in your videotape, you -- you told of two dreams that you had during the -- during the war. One during the war, and one after the war --

A: Right.

Q: -- which were very important in some way, and I --

A: Right.

Q: I was wondering if you have any -- if you feel -- do you have a strong -- do you believe in -- in intuition versus rationality, or --

A: I -- I tell you, I don't -- I don't know whether I believe in intuitions or not, but I ha -- I really don't know, but I know that was a dream. It was not just imaginary, it was 100

percent dream, that I was -- I -- if your may -- shall I repeat the story, or you know the story?

Q: You can if you want to, but we do have it.

A: I will brief -- I'll make it brief.

Q: Okay.

A: In my dream was a l-lady who was a neighbor of ours. She was childless, and she, when I was young, as a child, maybe even when I was seven, six, seven, she always liked to play with me, and see what I've done in school, you know, she wa -- she was like my second mother. She was -- she just li -- we were next door neighbors. I woke -- and she [indecipherable] she called me Nockmush. My name was Nochman, my Hebrew name, and she called me Nockmush, you know? "Nockmush, Nockmush, don't go there. Don't go. Listen to me, don't go," she told me. "Don't go to meet these people." She told me several times. I woke up. I was suppo-posed to meet these two individuals. I was -- I was -- I don't know what to do. I said, "I'm not going." I didn't go, and these two guys, one was Christian, one was Jewish, they -- they had all people getting out of -- from Poland, young people, military age. They -- they must have bribed some Italian who were in charge of -- they went by -- in Kraków they used to stop, for some reason or another. So what they would do, they would get uniforms, and bandaged up, let's say like -- a guy like me, they put [indecipherable] bandaged up, and make believe you can't talk. They put you on the train, you know? Take drove you up there, put you on the train, and you

can't [indecipherable]. That's what I -- my parents and my brother felt, let somebody at least get out, so they -- maybe you'll be able to get in touch with Arthur in the United States, and so on. Something -- do something. But I didn't go. So, now I lived in Italy, and after I was there maybe a year, I had a very strong desire to go back to Poland. And -- and my brother Maurice, too. He di -- I was hesitating a little bit, for one reason, but he definitely wanted to go. I wanted -- what we wanted to do is, we wanted to -- we -- we marked up where they shot my father, and they -- they left him there, and then we buried him. We -- we measured how f -- how many feet from that tree to this tree, to this location, that location. And there were two other men [indecipherable] put them in that burial place, not just -- so my father came to me, he said, "Don't come. I -- we were all burned, you won't find any -- you won't find any ashes even." All burned. What they did, they excavated men from wher-wherever they were buried, and they put them in fa -- put them in one group, and burned them. So I don't want -- the other reason I didn't want to go, right after the war, I le -- I learned in Munich, if you go back to Poland, they draft you -- if you -- in the 20's, you know, from 19 to 28, or to 30, I don't remember exactly. They draft you in the Russian army, they put you. So I was that time 22 years old, so I didn't want to go. That's one of the reasons why I never went back to Poland. I don't want to go in the ar -- in the Russian army after all this. And my brother felt -- he's nine years older, he -- he -- him they don't want to draft. He looked a little frail, too, that time. He -- they probably wouldn't ha -- but I -- I -- I felt pretty -- for all that I -- pretty healthy.

Q: Did you ever have any other dreams in your life that were important to you?

A: No. These two [indecipherable] these are the only two. I believe there is something to do it. I have other dreams, similar, not -- not as strong. I -- because I don't even remember. I know I had certain dreams, but I don't remember them. My sisters came to me [indecipherable] like -- like not -- I would see my mother or my father in my sleep, just like it was, you know, 50 years ago. But they don't usually talk to me.

Q: They just appear?

A: Yeah. But this, actually were words. I -- I'm convinced something must be superhuman, to -- to -- to have -- to witness that, to experience that. But it happened. Maybe somebody's watching over me.

Q: Why don't you tell again, how -- you said it in the videotape, but it might be more complete if you said how you found out about what had actually happened to your father's body.

A: It came in my dream. He came and told me that they burned all of me, and the two others.

Q: But didn't you have a brother-in-law who -- who had told you that -- cause he -- yeah.

A: Oh, that's right. When my brother-in-law came to Italy then, subsequently, I ask him, did you -- because he returned to Poland, and he was not of military age. And he stayed in Poland for maybe a year, or less. At least six months to a year. And I -- we ask him, did you go to -- because he was with us in that brush factory, you know, the -- and he saw

when they took my brother out and two of his, you know, friends. Whoever buried him, he was part of it. Did he ever go back to Plaszów to see about our father, you know? He said, “Yes, I went several times. I found out they ex -- they excavated everybody, and they burned them.” The whole -- they -- when they liquidated Plaszów, before the Russian came, there were couple hundred people to clean up. Course, what they did there, I -- I think they -- they killed tens of thousand of people there, from med -- I -- I would say mostly Gentile. They brought in from outside the camp. I don’t know for what charges, whether -- they mostly young people. They were -- they brought them on open trucks, because they -- they brought it up to a hill there. And what -- what they did is they beat them, and they had to undress, and they were all -- they -- during the day, they -- every -- they were excavating trenches, you know? Maybe a hundred people excavating the -- prepare for loads, and then they buried them, covered them up. So that wa -- they excavated the -- again, and burned them, you know? That’s what I was told by my brother-in-law, yeah.

Q: How did your -- how did Maurice respond when you had that dream? Did he -- did he take it at -- at -- did he believe that it was true, or how --

A: He believed it was true. Because the fact is, that two people were killed. He said, “You -- you -- you were told, you were gi -- were given a warning by -- how to explain that?” Believe in -- believe in God, or -- or -- or some superpower? I -- We don’t know. If -- if you’re religious, it’s a message from God, if it’s -- or, they can explain it many other

way. I don't know. I would say if -- after the war, I did not believe in God. It took me a number of years, and I do believe in God. But can I prove things? Of course not. Certain things, but it's -- but you have to accept it. Eleanor, not having all this experience, she doesn't believe much in God. She says why -- especially since we lost Jimmy. Says why, why, why, was such a wonderful boy. We -- we all did things -- right things, and so on. And -- and I suffered so much, and [indecipherable] you know? So it's hard to -- I -- I keep telling her I don't want to hear that, that she shouldn't discuss it. I believe in it. Why I believe in it, I don't know. Just -- I feel it's easier maybe on your -- on your mind, and your spirit to believe than not to believe. Because otherwise it -- the whole thing is nothing.

Q: Do you have any interests or hobbies, or pash -- passions, outside of your work things, that you love to do?

A: I love the work that I do. I really do. I like to build buildings. The reason I like it is I see in front of my eyes, take a piece of land that nothing [indecipherable] mud or grass, and -- and you build something that is pretty, that people want, and people are happier, you know? Whatever we build, one the biggest pr-pr-prize is revenue. I -- only the best that can be done. It's my nature, and I like to play golf, but I not -- only on weekends, I play golf. And I swim, walk, you know, when I have time. I have a treadmill here. I don't -- I walk more on the treadmill. And I am in good shape. I got -- except for hearing. I'm in such good shape, doctors don't believe. Anyway, I've never been to hospital, sick.

Q: Really? Wow?

A: I never had a cold.

Q: Wow.

A: I don't get flu's or colds, or --

Q: Great.

A: Never. I don't know, maybe the immune system built up there, I don't know, you know? They -- they can't believe it.

Q: That's good.

A: Yeah. I don't tell anybody that. Very few people I tell that I've never had a cold. [indecipherable] this a problem, that -- this problem, that problem, I said no. I used to have b-big problem with my hands, I couldn't, I'd say, I could never hold even a cup of coffee or tea, had to hold with both hands. But I was talking to my fingers not to bother me.

Q: And they listened?

A: I really said, "Give me a break, don't bother me." I used to soak in hot water, in the morning, and at night, you know, that what I -- and massage it, all this. And it -- over the years it's got better and better. Some medication I took, it were -- upset my stomach, and I stopped taking it, and all this. But after that, okay.

Q: Good. All right. Norman, do you have anything that you would like to say that I haven't asked you about?

A: The only thing I have to say that you're a -- a very good interviewer.

Q: Oh, thank you.

A: You're a very, very intelligent, and very -- and I feel you have a lot of understanding, and compassion when you talk to people like me.

Q: Well, it's been a great pleasure for me.

A: Thank you.

Q: I enjoyed it very much.

A: Thank you.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Conclusion of Interview