

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Beno Helmer
March 3, 2000
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Beno Helmer, conducted by Arwin Donohue on March 3, 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: -- you thi -- what do you think of the weather, let's talk about the weather.

Answer: Living in Florida, it's gorgeous. I me -- it's a God sent weather. Nothing better than that.

Q: Is it always this nice?

A: It's always this nice, even when it rains, it's only liquid sunshine, so it's pretty good. Should have come here before we even was born, it's -- to be born here.

Q: This is your idea of paradise?

A: That's -- I think that's -- want me to hold it?

Q: No, I'll hold it, it's all right.

A: Yeah?

Q: Cause that's [indecipherable]

A: No. I think there's a idea of paradise. [indecipherable] wonderful friends, and it keeps me busy. Matter of fact, I have to get up every morning 6:30, seven o'clock just to keep busy, cause I go to school five times a week.

Q: Oh, you do?

A: I sure do, sure do. And I lecture on the -- on Holocaust and German history. I don't get paid for it, and plus I was a volunteer in an old age home, in an hospital, except I had to

stop it because I had a triple bypass, and a pacemaker, so I cannot do heavy lifting -- or very heavy lifting, so I stopped that.

Q: Okay, let's pause. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Beno Helmer, conducted on March third, 2000, by Arwin Donohue. This is a follow up interview to a videotaped interview that was conducted with Mr. Helmer, and this interview will focus on his post-Holocaust experiences. The videotaped interview focused on his Holocaust era experiences. We may go back and -- and discuss some of the Holocaust era experiences that weren't mentioned in the first interview. This is tape number one, side A. And, Mr. Helmer, I thought we would start with the moment of your liberation, and -- and move forward from there, and we'll see how -- how it goes, as far as going back before that. And you described in your first interview how you were -- the circumstances of your liberation, and how the am -- U.S. army came into the -- to the POW camp where you were. And I wondered -- you mentioned something about this moment of freedom, and I wondered if you would talk a little bit about what that -- what freedom meant to you.

A: Let me regress a little bit. The day of -- when I was liberated, it was -- matter of fact, I think to -- let's say 24 hours before I was liber -- I was -- got the worst beating in my lifetime. [indecipherable] I still have scars on my head and my shoulders, because the commander told us to march with him wherever he wanted to march, and I refused him. So he had a big, huge stick, and he beat me mercilessly. And I gonna die, but I'd rather

die instead of marching with him. Some hours later, down the road, we saw a tank with a big, white, five star -- s -- five star -- star emblem. W-We didn't know what that's -- I didn't know what that's -- this means the American army, I know the five star emblem was the Russian army, so we thought that's the Russian army came. But it wasn't so, because hours later, one s-single soldier came in, a short, little fellow what had a -- a -- a -- a rucksack on his back, and he said he is an American. It was a little fellow from Brooklyn. And the first thing he said, "Where is there water?" He was thirsty, so I said, "We have a water fo -- water pump, but you're not allowed to drink it," -- be -- matter of fact, the first time I went into the camp, the commander told us we are not allowed to drink from this water, because this may give typhoid. And he said if anybody's drinking from this fountain, he going to be shot. And he said, "To prove to you," he took out his pistol, took an innocent man, and shot him. A Russia-Russian worker. This camp consisted of building prisoner of war camps for the American flyers, which was never finished, and that's the reason we slept on sand. So now, let's go right -- back to the American soldier. He said he was thirsty. So we said to him, "You cannot drink from this fountain, because you're going to die." He says, "No problem." Took the water, put it in his canteen, and put a pill into his water, shook it, and he drank it, and I think this was the biggest miracle I ever saw in my lifetime at that time, that he survived, he didn't die from his -- because of this little pill. A few hours later he says he going to bring some food, give it to it -- va -- ba -- bring us food because we were starving. I mean, when I was

liberated, after aid already, I was weighing 92 or 94 pounds. So in that evening, or next day, the French came with a kitchen, a truck which had a big kettle of soup, in -- in the back, and the French men, they -- they said, "That's the fr -- thanks to the French liberation," which wasn't so, "we going to sing 'The Marseilles.'" And I had a friend of mine which name is ra -- Ravel Monya -- Monyek Ravel. And I said, "I will not sing the French national anthem, because they did not liberate us." So I said, "Ravel, since we are free, let's get out of here." He says, "No, I don't want to go." I said, "Ravel, good-bye, I am leaving." He followed me. And this how I left the camp, but it -- the biggest miracle I saw that time was the canteen with the pill in the water.

Q: I should just say that in your first interview, you did talk about that period, and you talked about your liberation, so I asked the question just to find out a little bit more about what was going on inside of you at that time, as far as what you -- you said, you know, this was a moment of realizing that you were free, and -- and what -- and whether that meant -- did you have any sense of allegiance to any country, or any people, or -- or what -- what were your thoughts inside, at that point?

A: No, thi -- at that point, I felt I was an orphaned. This the first time I felt I was an orphan, because it was bewildering being free. What does that mean being free? Do I go wherever I want to go? Or do I go where they going to tell me to go? And in -- I -- I didn't have anything, no clothing, I had no food. I left the French camp, and I -- I start missing people. I missed my parents, I missed my sister. My sister, I thought she was

perished anyways. She was a very, very skinny, little girl, so I said she cannot survive the camp. But I had a brother of mine, which was six years younger than I was, I said, "He was a strong lad, maybe he survived." But unfortunately, the fate wa -- dealt us a different card. The only one who survived was my sister, nobody else. So when I walked out, I wanted to go back to Prague, to Czechoslovakia. And -- and we marched, Monyek and I, we marched, and I'm sure I told it before, this -- I was -- first time I was encountered with baseball. I spoke about the baseball, so it's -- I don't have to spay about that any more.

Q: No, you don't. Yeah, you did mention that. And you also mentioned -- when you mentioned Monyek, did you -- yo-you told about how you took leave of him because he had wanted to go to Paris, and you had --

A: Correct.

Q: -- you didn't want to stay in the detention camp.

A: Correct, correct, yes.

Q: I'm wondering, did you ever have contact with Monyek again?

A: No, I found out Monyek went to Sweden. I wrote it to the Jewish HIAS, or it was some organization in Sweden, to get in touch with Monyek Ravel, but it never, never got -- never I got an answer, never heard from him since. That's correct, I completely forgot. He want to go to Paris, and I want to go back home. And I'm sure I told you I finally wound up in a DP camp. The American took me to DP camp in -- I told him I was Polish,

and I decided it's going to Poland, it's closer to go to Poland, from Poland to -- to Teplice, to Czechoslovakia, than -- than staying where I was. So you know the story about the rape of the women in the -- in the -- in the -- in the garage, and I don't know if you know this, when I came home, finally came back to Prague, I got sick. I was sick, and I was in the hospital, and the clothing, I was changed because I was full of lice. Told you this story, too.

Q: No, the -- not about the clothing.

A: No? I -- I went back to Prague, and I went back to Prague with fu -- for I could -- at that time you had to get a permission to -- they put you where -- where they have to -- for housing and food. So, before I went to the office, I saw that they was checking your clothing. So I was lice, I was very filthy and lice, because I still had that regular shirt, except I took somebody else's shoes. So I took my -- I saw somebody had a bag there with clothing, so I took the clothing out of his bag, and put my clothing next to his bag. And so I went for -- and I went there, and since I was a citizen of Czech-Czechoslovakia, that time they gave me, and I stayed in the Hotel Prague -- excuse me, Hotel Paris, except I got sick, and I got rheumatic fever. And they put me the hospital to -- hospital name of Boulav cabbage, I spent some time there, and I was in the wo -- in the room with some Russian soldiers, and they were feeding me vodka. So the medication did not help too much, because whatever medication they gave me, the vodka counteracted it. So finally the doctor said, "You know, by now you should be having the results." So finally he

found out, he saw a glass of vodka there, so he put me another room, and -- and finally I got better. It was quite bad, I couldn't even feed myself because I had no muscles in my hands. And after this I went to Teplice.

Q: How long were you sick in the hospital?

A: Approximately two to three weeks. Quite some time, was coots -- three weeks. But it was terrib -- matter of fact, they fed me there, they -- after we got out of the ward where the -- where the Russians soldiers were, so I started to gain weight, and I got back mobility of my hands.

Q: When you went back to Teplice, you mentioned in the video interview that you had -- a little bit about what happened, that you had met your former --

A: Maid.

Q: -- maid.

A: Yes.

Q: And that people were -- were helpful to you, because you were the only survivor.

A: Only [indecipherable] yes, yes.

Q: Can you talk in more detail? Did -- did -- were people asking you about what had happened, and were -- did you form friendships, or --

A: Nobody asked me what had happened, because I didn't want to be the oddity of the whole town. And I tell you something funny, thing is, by evt -- everybody spoke Czech at that time, nobody want to speak German, but the first opera I saw in Teplica, was

[indecipherable] Bride, in German. Nobody spoke German, [indecipherable]. I couldn't go back to my father's -- my parents's house, because there was an engineer, a German engineer, who had the plans of the coal mines, we had the coal mines underneath Teplica, and so they didn't want to antagonize him that he should not destroy the maps, or should not destroy the ba -- ma -- the -- the coal mine, yeah coal mine. So they gave me a lovely, lovely apartment, a big apartment that compensated for the house, which I didn't have at that time, and they gave me a big store. It was a business, this was electrical business. I don't know if I told you about -- did I speak about the electric business?

Q: A little bit, a little bit.

A: Yeah, they gave me the electric business, which was good, and they gave me liskies, s-slips -- food slip for the privileged class of -- of -- of Czech Republic, a matter of fact, this where I met Czech -- Czechoslovakia, this -- matter of fact, I met my father's old maid. Except, ventually, when the Russians start taking it over, they ask me to join the Russian army, which I said, "Why should I join the Russian army?" Actually they wanted join the Russian Air Force. They said, "Because, let's me truthful, you have nobody here who will miss you." And to prove, they -- that gave me four or five weeks to make up my mind, and the first thing what they do, they took the store away from me -- the business away from me, and I became the helper, because you have to be employed, I became the helper to the -- the fellow who they gave the business to. Good Russians -- a good Czech Communist. And it's be -- they made it quite in -- unpleasant for me. So I decided is --

more they took away my food stamps, also. So I -- this -- me -- just prove to them this they meant business. So eventually I smuggled myself back to -- to Germany, to Hagana - - the Hagana smuggled me back, and I wound up in Munich.

Q: Can you -- before all of that happened in Teplice, did you have any interest in staying there, or were you hoping to leave?

A: I never wanted to leave. I loved Teplica, I loved Czechoslovakia, I -- I never encountered ani -- any i -- da -- anti-Semitism. I really loved it, my father who loved it there, all -- the whole family loved it. I felt a hundred percent a Czech citizen, I liked that -- by the way, let me go back a little bit. At same time it happened that Jan Maserik allegedly committed suicide, mer -- Jan Maserik was the son of Thomas Caric [indecipherable] of the president. And he committed suicide in Rachen. Rachen is in a castle. I was in -- in Prague at the same time, at that time. The window he -- he -- he was a corpulent man, he was a heavy set man. The window in the bathroom was approximately six or seven feet high, in -- in -- in the bathroom. Even if you stood on a commode -- on the toilet, you couldn't squeeze through the window. Not only this, even if he could, he couldn't get through the window voluntarily, because the window was too narrow for him to jump out the window. So when he landed, he f -- they found, on his clothing they found -- they see somebody's pushed him. So, you know, it's what -- the clothing was ripped on the side where he went through the mindow -- window. And -- and th-that's also added to it, this -- I was scared that's -- whatever they said, they meant

business, there was not -- no bluffs. It's a be -- they -- they -- they meant that I was scared of them. I was scared of the Russians, because a -- what I went through with this -- with the raping of those women and -- and the be -- they behavior, that I -- I was scared of them, because I don't know if I said it, when I was freed finally, they drafted me in the Russian army for a few days, where I escaped, because we -- thanks to a -- a bag of sugar. So -- so I didn't want to deal with them.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And I still was by myself, I didn't have anybody. Nobody came to me, nobody knows me. I came there, I was a newcomer of the block, so [inaudible]

Q: So you didn't have any strong friendships there, that --

A: I di -- never made any. I wasn't long enough to make any strong friendship, plus my Czech wa -- wa-was not as good as it should have been, because I've -- through all those years, I always picked up all those different languages, so sometime my Czech was mixed in with Polish. So a lot of them were not -- I don't know, a lot of them, some of them didn't even believe -- believe me that's -- I came from Teplice.

Q: Another question about Teplice, you had mentioned just briefly in the first interview that your -- that your father was a refugee, but your mother had been from the area.

A: My mother is from Austria. My mother is -- my moth-mother -- my mother is from Salzburg. Her older sister was married to a colonel -- a -- a corporal in the -- in Austrian army. He was stationed in Teplice. He was stationed in Teplice, so his wife, which now

she was his wife, came to stay with Teplice. Since -- since my mother was in Salzburg, she -- and she was the youngest one, she took her to stay with her in Teplice, in this house she -- they stayed in Teplice, but they actually come from Austria. My father's a Swede. He came to -- to Teplice only because in 1920, he couldn't make a living in Prague, so he decided to go to Teplice. And I don't know if I told you the story, he met my aunt -- no, he went to Teplice, and when you go to Teplice by rail, from Prague to Teplice, you have to go to a city by the name of Owseek. Owseek you change your train, you go to Teplice. Sitting in a rail from Owseek on the way to Teplice, he sees a lady sitting across in -- in the railroad. So he says to the lady, "You think you can -- there is any jobs available in Teplice?" So the lady thinks to herself, "That's all what we need is another refugee." So she tells, "Young man, I tell you what you should do, go back to Prague where you came from." He said, "Tell you truthfully, I don't have any money to go back." Long story short, two year -- two years later, she was my mother's sister. And that's how my father wind -- wound up in Teplice and -- and when I was born they were quite, quite poor. A matter of fact, my mother compensated, or my parents compensated. Their livelihood is they were stuffing geese with -- s -- geese int -- ag -- stuffing the geese, so they -- the liver became big, and they was selling the liver to export to France, and so they had the meat for nothing. Some years later, when my sister was born, we were quite well off, we already had six people in help. So -- so it's changed quite dramatically.

Q: So your father's training, his profession before he left --

A: My f -- my father comes from a family of bookbinders. Po -- anything which bo -- er -
- had to do with book. My father's youngest brother was doing lettering on the covers, in
the gold leaf ri -- my father learned bookbinding, leather book binding. My father's oldest
brother learned -- I don't know what -- it's something to do with th-th-the paper,
whatever you do with the paper. So all of them were involved in bookbinding. My
father's parents perished in the first World War, his mother and his older sister. They
perished in -- in Berlin. And this where he comes -- came from -- eventually wind up in
Teplice.

Q: Did you ever return to Teplice after that?

A: I was just there last March. I took my children back to Teplice, all my children, I
treated them a trip, we went to Teplice, we went to Munich, went to Dusseldorf, went to
Prague, and went to a -- the Theresienstadt where approximately 21 members of my f --
my parent's family perished. So I took them to Teplice, and I took them to
Theresienstadt. And coming back to Teplice wasn't anything I saw. I saw my high
school, I saw my elementary school. I s-saw where -- where -- the park where we left, I
didn't see the -- by the way, the house we owned was taken down, and they built big
blocks of -- of apartment houses, Russian style drab, and -- and ugly, and square. So -- a
matter of fact, th-the market, which was called the Mozartsplatz became the Leninplatz,
which now has now stopped being the Leninplatz, so they called it the Marsarekplatz.
And the statue of Mozart they put in the other par -- in a different park. A matter of fact, I

was looking for the Mozart, finally I found him not far, which now it became spar -- [indecipherable] spar, which called -- became the Beethovenspar. So I went to Teplice, but the funny thing is, I almost went as a tourist, no -- very little emotional about it, because this was hundreds and hundreds years ago.

Q: Did you see anyone you knew from there?

A: Nobody's there, I am the only one. There is -- matter of fact, I just f -- read recently, Jews in Teplice are -- s -- b -- lived there since 1414. During the war -- after the war, I was one of the few. Now they had the little bit, they coming from S-Slovakia now, it's -- it's a -- become a Czech Republic, they come in from Slovakia, they live in Teplice, but now again, it's diminishing. The population of Teplice are diminishing. The temple, which was a huge, beautiful temple is only -- and now they have a -- a stone is set on this place, in this platz, on this place stood a synagogue, that's all what it says. At this place stood a -- stood a synagogue, and that's was Teplice.

Q: What about non-Jews?

A: I don't know anybody non-Jew, because I was young. I was young when I left, I mean -- and my friend, my best friend, I mean -- I don't know if I told the interviewer, my best friend was -- name was Horst, and -- by the way, let me emphasize, I never, never encountered anti-Semitism in -- in ch -- so long I lived in Czechosl-slovakia that time. And we had a big house, and a b -- in the backyard of the house we had -- I had -- part of the garage, I had rabbits. And we're playing with -- this fellow Horst, we're playing in a -

- and he says to me -- me, "My father said that you are Jewish, are you Jewish?" And I truthfully didn't know what he meant, because religion never came up as a subject in any conversation. Anyways, this was the last time I saw this fellow. From there I went to university th -- Budapest, you know, because Hitler showed his ugly colors. So I left Teplice, and I finally came back in Teplice in 1999. By the way came back very sick, I ga -- I got pneumonia.

Q: And it -- and you really didn't feel much emotion being back there, it was -- you were -- felt --

A: At the ti -- th-the emotion wasn't there, because whatever I knew, wasn't there. The house which we lived in, wasn't there. The only -- the emotion was this, I can't believe it. There's the high school -- there the la -- no, there's the elementary school in -- up the hill. Was the high school I went to. Spoke to a lot of people, none of them knew where -- where I -- what [indecipherable] Mozartplatz, because it was a huge, gorgeous statue of Mozart, and the city all was be-behind it. I said, "Was -- where's the Mozartplatz?" First thing, very few of them spoke Czech. It's amazing that's very few of them speak Czech. And most mas -- not all -- most -- all of them, nobody -- nobody knew where Mozartplatz was, there -- this was there 50 years ago. So went to the city hall, and all of them are young people, they said, "We have no archives of it." No archives. I came the wrong day anyways. So, by coincidence, when I went to -- my mother was in charge of the theater, the opera and the theater, cult -- cultural center. So we went -- at least I went to see where

my mother stayed the cultural center, and all of a sudden I see Mozart statue, oh it's very interesting. We-Went to see that the spot where Moz -- where Beethov -- I don't know if I said it, Beethoven, and -- and Gerta walked. Gerta and Beethoven used to come that summer. And Gerta says to Beethoven, "Move aside, the Kaiser is behind you." And he said, ger -- ber -- Beethoven said to Gerta, he says, "Remember one thing, in hundred years, nobody knows who the Kaiser was." And this is -- it's all written up, all over. And -- so I went to this place, and matter of fact, as a child I remember my father took a picture of my sister and I, before my brother was born, right on the same spot where Mozart -- which I happen to have the picture, my aunt gave it to me.

Q: It sounds as if you had a very artistic family, is that right?

A: No, I -- I don't think art -- artist -- artistic family doesn't come through genes. It's just if you have it, you have it. If you don't have it, don't have it.

Q: Were you always -- always interested in art?

A: I was always interested in art, even as a youngster, I went -- not as young, but when I went to Budapest, when I lived in Budapest, I went to museums. I loved to go to museums. And so I always loved art, loved a lot of -- I loved architecture, I love bridges. I love bridges a lot. I found bridges just something -- something wonderful about it. So I like that.

Q: I should mention for anyone who would listen to this tape, that your house is filled with beautiful art works, and paintings, some of which you've created yourself.

A: Thank you, thank you.

Q: And when did you start painting and -- and making art yourself?

A: As a hobby, as a hobby, started as a hobby, because I tried to fill my day. I'm quite busy now, so as I said, I'll get up 6:30 in the morning, but always try to squeeze in a few hours, if i can do it. I ben -- had -- have it easily, but i -- I started to paint some, but it's just -- I didn't feel a ba -- if it's not emotional, I don't do it. Has to -- has to be emotion -- I judge -- as you notice it, I've completely different -- different form of arts, but I do it emotion -- I buy a picture emotionally, not because it fits a décor, because blue doesn't fit with yellow. So this how I do it. Matter of fact, I -- I did this sculpture, too, which is called "The Tower of Babel."

Q: Does it have any more of a story to it that you want to say?

A: Yes, it has a story. There is -- it's -- actually, it's happen under the Babylonian king, and they decided it's go -- they're going to build a tower to God. And this happened right after Noah, and what happened is everybody spoke the single language. Everybody sti -- stood each other. So they decided they're going to build a tower all the ways up to God. So the angels came to God, he says, "You know somebody is building a tower, it's high up to You." So God said, "Nobody does it." And He destroyed the tower, and everybody spoke a different language. And the consequences was, there's nobody understood each other. And there's the reason you have all those crazy colors, nobody understands each other.

Q: So this has -- this story --

A: It's a Biblical thing, yes, yes, yeah --

Q: -- has a special -- but it has a special, personal meaning?

A: No, no, no, nothing personal meaning, I -- the -- the personal meaning is all those languages, and nobody talks the same one. We don't understand each other, we don't understand each other.

Q: You -- your education was interrupted when you were a young man.

A: Yes, was a young man, because I was at college in Hungary, and I was deported, because I was a Czech citizen at that time, it was a skirmish between Slovakia and Hungary, and they arrested me, and I shall never forget it. I came home from the movie seeing "Modern Time," with Charlie Chaplin, and they arrested me, and they deported me. No, s -- I was in jail. Was jail for two or three days, and they w-wanted to deport me to ch -- back to Czechoslovakia. So I didn't want to go back to Czechoslovakia, because he already occupied Sudatenland in Austria. So the only language I thought is similar to Czech, so I was deported to Poland. By the way, I want to -- I don't know if I said it, when I lived in Hungary, I played in the movies. I made two or three films with quite known actors, which came finally to America, and became quite known actors here in America.

Q: You did mention it, but I wanted to ask if you -- were you always really interested in movies, or did that just -- was just a matter of chance?

A: It's -- it's came to be just by chance, and it suppl -- supplemented my income, because I -- I didn't have too much money. A matter of fact, the worst thing I could do, I was peddling vegetables, and this was -- I don't know why, it was extremely degrading for me, but not only this, I had to study at the same time. Usually you don't have a time to do those things. B- But so the -- when I got the job in the summertime, playing in the movie, supplemented my income quite well. And in Budapest I was quite a -- quite a bright man, because we had to do an essay, in the college we had to do an essay about -- I forgot what it was. And I and another fellow won the essay. And for my college, or all the colleges in matter of fact, the compensation was this we allowed to -- we had a interview with the prelate of Hungary -- of my -- my so-called friend of mine, I went by ra-ra-railroad to a city by the name of Ester gum. Did I ever mention this story? I went to the city of Ester gum, and we have int -- audience with the archbishop of Hungary, in the city of Ester gum. So it wasn't only for my college, there was a lot of the college -- enormous, big, big hall, gorgeous. And we staying in -- and we staying in a -- in a -- in a -- in a semi-circle, and the -- the archbishop comes out with a entourage of four or five people, and he go -- starts to face to the left, and he goes around, he goes around, everybody kisses his ring. And I said, "I will not kiss this man's ring." So finally he comes to me -- in th -- in -- in Hung-Hungary, you say, "Kasi chuclum," as a salutation. What this means, I kiss your hand. So I said, "Kasi chuclum," I shake his hand, no problem. Walks around, fine, a -- finishes, goes to the door, this one good looking, tall fellow, turns

around, and to the t -- says something, and t-to the archbishop, see, and he turn -- the archbishop turns around, and the other fellow turns around, he looks at me, and does f -- points me. I said, "I know, I'm going to the execution. They going to kill me." I mean, why should he point to me? The -- the archbishop, and two more, three more men walk in, the tall, tall fellow. Those -- this -- me -- w-wave to me, and I should come to him. I said, "Definitely this is it, firing squad." Walk into the room, walk to his office, huge o -- marble, with a wonderful design on the floor. Takes me around the shoulder, and he says to me, "I hear you're from a different per-persuasion." I said, "Yes." He says, "What are you?" "A-A-A Jew." So that's fine, says, talks to me -- matter of fact, everybody got sandwiches, or some kind of -- like a box lunch, it was something that I ate with him. I ate with him. And during the conversation, he says to me, "Would you like to see where I going to be buried?" I said, "That's very unusual to ask somebody [indecipherable] to be buried." He says, "Sure." He takes me down, he takes me down to the catacombs. So when you walk down to the basement, or so-called catacombs, th-there's a -- a double staircase -- one -- both sides, there's a staircase going down. So on each one on the end, there's a statue. So he says to me, "I bet you you don't know what those statues mean." I didn't know a Jew is allowed to bet. But it was very easy. One statue was a black statue, had a f -- a torch facing up, and the other side the statues had a f -- torch facing down. I said, "This is life, and this is death." So he very s -- was very impressed with it. And I walked down, he showed me the niche where he's going to be buried, and we walked

back up. And was for quite a pleasant thing, and a matter of fact, I was extremely flattered, oh, I was so flattered. The fellow who I came on the railroad, wasn't too flattered with me. Matter of fact, he never spoke to me since. Not ev -- since, now I don't know where he is, but h-he wasn't Jewish, he never spoke to me, he was so jeal --

Q: Why do you think that he was jealous?

A: He was jealous, just jealous.

Q: And this was the actual archbishop who had taken you down, and showed you [indecipherable]

A: Yes, yes, the archbishop of Hungary, yes, yes, yes. Or this tall fellow, I was -- oh, he looked like a movie actor. Yes, this was arch -- the archbishop, in the city of Estergum.

Q: I wanted to ask you a little more about your -- your education, what you were studying, and --

A: At college I was studying architecture. I was studying architecture, but we stopped with it, so we didn't do it. So Hitler took care of this also.

Q: Did you ever want to go back and study architecture again, or do that?

A: I would love to go s -- I wanted to go [indecipherable] but except I have to make a living. I came to America with six dollars in my pocket.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: -- again that --

A: Which one was it? When -- when I came to America, I came with six dollars in my pocket. Actually, they gave me 10 dollars before I left, except I spent 21 days on the -- on the -- on -- at sea. I left in a ship by the name of Ernie Pyle, and landed with Merle Marlane, because we had to transfer inich -- in the English channel, from one ship to the next, and the waves were tremendous, it was a tremendous storm there, and England wouldn't let us in, the 800 refugees, they wouldn't let us in. Even I came as a political escapee, but anyways, as it was part of the 800 s -- passengers. I came -- we landed April the first, 1947, in the harbor of New York, and I decide I gonna s -- la --sta -- start my life all over. I had an old, old overcoat. I took the overcoat and dropped it in the Hudson river. So I came with a thing, with a s -- only suit, a -- a suitcase of books, and six bucks, and this how m -- I started my life. So I had an aunt of mine, which I went to stay with my aunt for a little while, except they was almost as poor as I was. So, I had to find a job. I -- I -- since I sub -- mentioned before, I played in the movies, I got a contact to Eddie Cantor. And Eddie Cantor was in contract at that time to RKO, and they offered me a job, a job o -- to be an usher in Radio City Music Hall, or become a waiter in -- up in the Catskills, some hotel in the Catskills. I didn't want to do any of those two. I didn't want to be a server, be an usher showing seats, or being a server in a hotel, so I declined all those offers. So I got myself a job -- actually, my cousin got me a job in S. Klein, there was a department store, an S. Klein, I got a job for 28 dollars a week, 60 hours a day. Six

days, 10 hours a day. After tax and everything else, I came home with 24 dollars. Out of the 24 dollars, I had to give 15 dollars to my aunt for room and board. Actually, it was only room, and a Sunday dinner. Everything else had to be my own, so with the subway, which I think at that time was a nickel or dime, I didn't have too much money. So I lived on one sandwich a day, and I lived on salami sandwiches for months. Simple reason is, I didn't speak English -- I hardly spoke English, and I go into the cafeteria, I saw on a board, salami. So I said salami in [indecipherable] language must be salami. So I walk down the line and I said to the fellow, the server that was serving, "Salami." He says something to me, I didn't understand it, but he had a long knife, and he pointed to a rye bread, so I wave my head, and so he made me a salami sandwich, and when you got the register, there were kind of small containers of milk, so I took two containers of milk. After one week, or two weeks, he knew already. So I went to the -- came to the end of my line, my salami sandwich was waiting on -- for me. After this m -- I found -- my sister came here, found my sister, so I had to save some money even to send it to her. So, I lived on salami sandwiches quite some time.

Q: Tell me -- it was so -- you did mention in your video interview how you had thrown your coat into the Hudson river, and that was so remarkable to me that you had done that, and I -- I wanted to hear a little bit more about what made you do that.

A: I-It -- oh, it was -- actually, it was a rebirth. I was born again. That's what I felt. By the way, I didn't see the Statue of Liberty that day, it was foggy. But I felt, I want to start

with zero. If I could ha -- cou -- dressed completely naked, I would have done it, because I found out this my new life. It's wa -- the past, and I don't -- I don't want to dwell of my past. Plas is -- pa -- past is only history, so maybe it should teach you some -- but I cannot dwell on it. According my father -- my father said, "Hate takes a tremendous big effort." And I don't have this effort, I just can't take this effort to hate. I -- that's the reason -- maybe it's wrong, I don't hate. I just don't know how to hate. In coming to America, I felt this was the only thing that you ca -- I could shed. If I would have clothing in my suitcase, I would have thrown out too, but I only had books, and those I wouldn't part with. So, this was a rebirth, this was definitely a rebirth, throwing the coat.

Q: What books did you have in your suitcase?

A: Concentration camp history. History of concentration -- some prints from Kaita Kolbitz, a lot of prints, and matter of fact, I wrote a book. And I was introduced to Walter Winchell. Not a very pleasant man. Matter of fact, the first day I met him, it was quite a shock anyways. And I wrote a book, an outline of a book which -- with -- with -- with diagrams, which I wanted to publish and -- through him, I think through him, I met Dotty Schiff, which was owner -- owner of The Post. At that time it's called the Piama Post, and I -- she was a very gracious lady, and I showed her the outline of the book, and she said, "Young man, if I am you, I would not do it, because we don't want to awake bad feelings, or bad precedent. Let's stop hating." Or something in this context. So anyways, I was a little disappointed, and I took my diary, and I threw it away, which I always

regret to this day. But thanks to her, I -- I didn't write it. So I came here, so I had to -- to -
- to -- to make a living, so -- and, by the way, two years later, I was drafted in United
States army. And I've been -- I'm one of them who went to the Korean war.

Q: You went to the Korean war?

A: Yes. I was drafted -- I was -- never been overseas. I was -- became a surgic -- I went
to Texas, and I became a surgical technician, and they send me to Fort Lewis,
Washington, and I worked in the infirmary there. Let me tell you an incident in -- two
incidents in the state of -- in -- in the fort. I-In -- in Texas, in San Antonio, Texas. This
was the first time the two integrated battalions, we were sleeping with blacks, and whites,
and everything together, except when we went on a subway, or we went on the trolley
cars, we were not allowed to be together. S-So, this was the bi -- the President Truman's
idea, but anyways, didn't work out very well. After this, I went to Fort Lewis, and I
worked in the infirmary til I was discharged.

Q: Had you ever seen a black person before you came to the United States?

A: Yes, I saw them twice. There was a circus by the name of Hargendorf -- Har-
Hargendas -- something Hargen something. And he was part of the circus performance.
Otherwise, I never saw a cir -- eventually I saw a circ -- when I was f -- liberated, I saw
these black soldiers. I saw them in the camp, they were playing baseball, but not -- never
saw one before.

Q: Did it surprise you that there was this prejudice in the United States against black people, that there should be this segregation?

A: I don't know if it was surprise, because I went through quite a few years with that same prejudice, and -- and I had no -- no -- no contact with them at that time. The first time -- the contact that I had was when I worked for S. Klein department store, and I -- I'd never saw the prejudice. In the city of -- the subway of New York was not segregated, so I didn't see it til I wa-wind up in San Antonio, Texas, where the -- su -- where the fact of segregation is true. The fact of segregation.

Q: Did you experience anu -- any of that prejudice personally?

A: In the army. Sure there ba -- in an army, but a matter of fact, a incident, I took basic training in fort -- in Fort Dix, and there's -- I'm sitting, we having lunch, all -- wa -- something, sitting in the mess hall. And there's a fellow across from me, his name, I shall never forget, his name is Deutsch. And he says to me, talking -- let me emphasize, we in American uniforms. And he says to you -- me, "Are you a German?" And I knew something going to happen. And I say, "Yes." He says, "You know, Hitler did a good job?" And I said, "What did he do?" He said, "He killed all the Jews." So I had a big, big pitcher of hot, hot -- they just poured the hot, hot coffee. So I held his collar, and I poured it over his head, and he got third degree burns. And he dropped in agony, so the captain comes in, he says to Deutsch, he says, "Hereby ordering you to press charges against," -- me. Fine. He walks out, and I bend down to b -- said, "Deutsch, if you press charges, you

going to die.” I said, “Not only this, as long as I’m in this army, you going to be with me.” He says, “I going to get out of the army before you.” I said, “Never going to happen.” Sure enough, Deutsch, every morning after you -- with the band -- they took off [indecipherable] with the red -- red face. Every morning, before he got out -- after he got out of bed to urinate -- before he got out of bed, he urinate in the bed, and walked out. And after a month, they discharged him. Deutsch got out. This what I experience in -- in the army.

Q: I want to talk more about your early years in the U.S., but maybe before we do that, we should go back, because I had a question about your time in -- in Munich, and before you came to the united --

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: -- United States. You talked a little bit in your video interview about it. You mentioned that you were working for the counter-intelligence.

A: CIC, CIC.

Q: And also that you were working -- were you working for the Joint Distribution Committee?

A: I was -- only as a job. This was only as a job. I worked for CIC. During the war, I worked in it -- for the CIC, through -- through my professor, I had the professor by the name of Zahn.

Q: How do you spell that?

A: Z-a-h-n. [indecipherable] think about this, this man was always -- was -- fascinated me. He had one eyebrow, went from one side of the head to the other side. It's str -- one, single eyebrow, which was very, very dynamic man. He was not my idol, I had a idol of professor of philosophy. But anyways, through him I -- I went to the -- became -- went to the underground, til finally, I we -- we -- went to CIC, and I worked in the CIC, and I worked in a -- I worked in a place called the inflowsunkunstad. Inflowsunkunstad means they were delousing uniform which came back, and not only this, they were fixing uniform. So my job was -- I had liaison only one woman, her name was Renées, I don't know what the other name is. She was a French lady. I don't know if she was Jewish or not. She with one daughter in -- in Paris, and a husband who was killed, he work -- worked for the underground. So we -- so when we saw a uniform come with a patch, let's say, from the third panzer division. So I told her, you know, we got 19 uniform which came from the city of Pulsk. So she g -- I don't know what she did with it, but this how we did that thing -- we did -- she found out where every division, or what division came from what -- where -- plus we had a lot of cape -- lot of concentration camp women sewing strof boots, for the Russian army to put over the shoes, because the winters were very severe. And that's when I worked for the CIC, and til -- til finally -- til August the third -- August the second, I went back to the concentration camp where my parents was, because I found out through a -- through the grapevine that -- I don't think it was through

prof -- professor Zahn, that my father was dying. So I went to see him, and I brought -- matter of fact, that's m-my -- the only thing my sister remembers, I brought -- bought -- break glucose sugar, something, because this -- he needed glucose for whatever he had. Anyways, unfortunately, the next day they rounded us up, and I was one of them, and they send us to Auschwitz. So this was my job with the CIC -- with the CIC drop, there -- but I lived in the city of Transtahova as a German. My German was better than any of the Germans lived there, even the -- the bullov, the head of the thing, my German was better, so except -- wherever I was, my German was not the right dialect where I came from, because what I speak is holkdeutsch, which comes from one section only, which is Hanover. But, I survived it, and the lady, let me tell you something about this lady. Gorgeous lady, matter of fact, I show you a picture of her, I have a picture of her.

Q: Oh, you're talking about Rainia?

A: Rainia, yes. But any bigshot who wanted to sleep with her, she slept with. The consequence was unpleasant for the man, who was [indecipherable] killed, but she -- she slept with anybody -- any big shot who would want to sleep with her. She was really with the high echelon. And with CIC, let me tell you, it's not as exotic as it sounds. I don't know anything. What they tell me to do, I did. I -- my specialty was railroad sabotaging. She was m -- only contact I had, and I don't know anybody who she had. I -- that's the reason that it was -- only I know her by the first name is, because in case the [indecipherable] me, Rainia is -- s -- anybody could be Rainia. So there always was a

sure. I lived in a -- in a Polish home, which was -- he was a watchmaker. They gave me a room there, which I went home. And this where I lived, and they knew I was a German, so they were scared of me, and I was scared of them.

Q: So you -- they had no idea that you were Jewish?

A: No. No, no. The only difficulty I had was -- was urination. We ate there with the Germans, th-the -- the Jews, I didn't know who it was. I wore -- I was what's called an ausdeutscher, a -- a German who came from the -- in Russia, they used to have a big German colony, so I came one of the [indecipherable] office -- one of the ausdeutschers. And Zahn gave me the papers. Before I went to the city, he told me I -- I took a lesson -- a course, what movie played three weeks ago, what -- what gossip happened four weeks ago. So -- so when I came in there, I knew whatever was going on. But, while the -- while the ch -- head of the -- was the head of the f -- bullov, he happened to like me, and so I used to eat lunch with him. I don't know if I told you an incident. I was sitting with him, having lunch one day, and during the conversation, he says to -- I -- he -- whatever he said, he says da -- I said, "Da ista huntbigram," which means, actually tr-translation means, here where the dog is buried. But this doesn't mean a thing. Actually this means you hit it right on the head. That's all what it means. Da ista huntbigram. So he said, "Isn't that funny? The first time I heard -- the only time I heard it before was from a Jew."

Q: How did you respond to that?

A: Scary. Scary, scary, but this was extreme a -- a matter of fact, I tell the --

Q: Did you just laugh, or something?

A: No, no, no, nothing, because he just said it doesn't mean da -- Jews, he said it. Matter of fact, I went back, and I told it to Rainia, I said, "You know [indecipherable] you stay there til we let you know." They never let me know, but finally she -- she's the one who told me that we know that your father's dying.

Q: I wondered if you became involved in working with the -- the underground, the counter-intelligence during the war, because you were seeking it out, or did they come cru -- you become somebody new --

A: I did not seek it out, I was too young to seek it out, and -- and -- and I w -- I did not seek it out, they say -- s -- s -- I -- they looked for me, because I'm bilingual. I spoke German, I spoke Czech, I speak Polish, I speak Hungarian, I sp -- so -- so -- so I've -- wherever they wanted me, I fit in quite well. And I spoke Polish better than a -- a native. I spoke Polish, and the one thing they didn't let me get in touch with -- with -- with the underground, with the -- the partisans, because they would not trust them, because the partisans at that time, had the double -- dual -- dual loyalty. One is to the Russian party, to the Russian facture, and one is -- was to the English facture. So they'd never touch me. They never trusted them, so they -- I tried to stay away from them as much as I can. Plus, we found out if -- if a Jew joined them, they killed him. They killed him. So that's what it was.

Q: How did you come to know all of those languages?

A: Too necessary. I mean, I'm a -- I'm a Czech, I went to college to Hungary, my parents spoke German. So later I went to Poland, and I -- I -- they give me four months, I speak a language well. Three months, I can -- can converse any language. In three months I can speak it, in four months I'm perfect.

Q: It's just a -- a gift.

A: It's not a gift. You notice that after 50 years my ger -- my English didn't improve. My -- maybe my vocabulary, but not my accent.

Q: It sounds good to me.

A: [inaudible]

Q: Your -- we don't know anything about your religious -- whether you had a religious education as a child, or your background in that way?

A: No. I ca -- I -- I -- I -- I did not come from a religious background. I know I was Jewish. I had a grandparents -- my mother's parents finally -- matter of fact, my father did well, he brought over my grandmother and my grandfather, and step -- two stepbrothers, and a stepsister. No, no, not true. He brought over my grandparents, the two boys, and three girls. The two boys worked for my father, and I don't know what the three girls did. All of them were spinsters, none of them got married. I tell you a story about one of them. One of them finally got married, the younger one, and she married a

fellow in Prague who became -- worked for insurance company. My father, by the way, worked for the underground. Did I ever say this?

Q: Yes.

A: He worked for tuppia in -- in Prague [indecipherable] Polacks, well, you know the story, yes. So a b -- I da -- Judaism was -- I mean, we observed profacto Judaism to s -- to appease my grandparents. So it was only the fact that my father went to the high holidays, and I had to stay next to him, which was boring. But I had no -- no Jewish background, and with me, I became an agnostic, a quite comfortable one. And Judaism with me is a religion, but it's a philosophy, and I think it's a very ethical philosophy. And I'm saying that [indecipherable] I was -- feel Jewish only by -- because I was born into it, and I found -- I studied philosophy, and I found that it's extremely ethical. And most of the cultures are based on Juda-Christian ethics.

Q: You mentioned in your last interview that you had an interest in the Lubovitcher movement.

A: Yes, yes. I -- I -- I -- I -- I was -- I -- I took a psychology course, by the way, here, and I studied under Anna Freud, the daughter Anna Freud, very unhappy young lady. And they -- she told me to -- a part of the thing to tell me to start -- she interview -- to try to help some ladies, and they were the Lubovitcher ladies. So I tried to help her, we had some course, with Lubovitcher ladies, but abused ladies. So one lady came back black and blue, I said, "How often are you going to tell me you walked through a glass door? I

mean, underneath your armpit, you don't walk through a glass door. And under your chin, you don't walk glass door." So anyways, I went to the Lubovitcher, I met the Lubovitcher rabbi there, which was very unsuccessful, because eventually he let me understand it was -- you know, they're working very hard, and they have a lot of pressure, and they -- whatever they have to do. I -- maybe they did -- I don't -- he didn't say they deserve it, but it's -- maybe they -- they -- they failed, or something like this. So it was weer unpleasant, very unpleasant. So I didn't do too much with them. I found Anna Freud a very unpleasant la -- not unpleasant, unhappy lady. Lived with a woman with the -- with a lady by the name of Birmingham, who was a heiress of Tiffany. She had a husband and two children, she left them, and they had -- she was a homose -- both of them were lesbians. So they lived together. After she left here, she went to England, and started a ki -- like a girl's school, a kindergarten.

Q: Did you have -- so it was more your -- your interest, and your involvement with the Lubovitcher movement wasn't so much as you were interested in Hassidism --

A: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no Hassidism, only because of those ladies. Th-Th- Those ladies. Those ladies. I finally -- matter of fact, we have here, I just found out by the Lubovotch -- Lubovitch temple, or something, and they tell me this Donald O'Connor, the movie actor who plays "All in the Family," whose son died because of the overdose, something? He gave the money to build this temple. Because, seems like when he was

down, her -- they -- has -- his son, they -- that's the only movement which took him in. I don't know if that's true or not, but that's what they told me. Excuse me.

Q: So, at this point, you don't have a -- a strong sense of -- of faith, or --

A: Religion?

Q: -- religion of some sort?

A: No. I have no -- no faith of religion not -- never had one, answer truthfully. And the only thing is -- is I'm an agnostic, which I'd be -- be -- being in -- not being an atheist, is but a sim -- simple statement in the Bible. The first statement in the Bible, which is in Hebrew called Baraiship, means the beginning. I have a question with the beginning, because void creates void. There's nothing in void, can nothing be created but void. And since something happened, there has to be a creation, a process of creation. If nobody can dispute it, that's -- excuse me, whatever did it, so I find the creation was something there. For whoever it was, there is a creation. I don't dispute this creation. Matter of fact, I -- I just went yesterday, I took a course in the Bible, which I took every Thursday, but it's no -- no -- I'm not only studying the Jewish Bible, I'm studying -- I'm studying the Koran also. Funny thing is, I was talking to a physicist, he's a quite pronon -- and renowned physicist. I said, "If you believe in the Big Bang theory, and the universe in expanding in extremely rapid space, is this still the consequence of -- of Big Bang theory, or this is only in our solar system, and everything else is expanding of his own?" He doesn't know it either. So, I'm not the only one.

Q: Okay. Going back to Munich -- we got a little bit out of that time frame, but you mentioned briefly that you were living with a German woman at the time.

A: I was not -- let me -- I lived with a German family, Tossan. B-Before the war, bay -- before the war, May the fifth -- the war ended May the fifth in Germany. In April, Hossan, and two more boys, I think two boys and a girl, made a push, or made a -- a statement in the u -- in -- in the high school. The boy was arrested, and the other ones, too, and they were executed on meat hooks in the butcher shop,. That's the lady I stayed with.

Q: Do you remember her name?

A: No. If I said at that time, may be it, but I don't remember that now. And that's why I stayed in the city of Borsty. It is outside of Munich.

Q: Do you want to say some more about your work with the CIC after the war?

A: CIC, yes, after the war, I finally w-wind up in -- in Munich again, and I lived with a lady in Borsty, and I got a job to -- to Jewish -- Jewish -- some Jewish organization. And I'm working that Jewish organization, and Rainia, the woman which I left in Poland someplace, which I never knew if she is there. I don't know how she found me, it's still a m-mystery to me. And she says, "We need you." I says, "You don't need me, because I'm finished with it." She says, "No, now we have to look for Nazis." I didn't want to do it, but anyways, I -- I -- I felt I shou -- I owe her something, because I survived it. My sister -- I didn't know about my sister, I was the only one who was left. So, I start to

working for the CIC again. Actually it was under the MI five. This is the military intelligence five, but later I found out that's was -- be -- to transferred to MI six, but still to me it was the CIC.

Q: Is this a part of the British army?

A: Yes, yes, yes. I worked for the British. And I was starting to look for Nazis. So I look for Nazis, and it was ba -- I went. That's the reason I wound up back in Poland, I -- because I looked for some Nazis there, wound up in Germany all over, and this how I found up in -- in the city of Łódź, where they transferred me there, August the -- 1944, and this where I found my food stamps for my mother, my sister, and myself. Anyways, I was unsuccessful of finding the Nazis they wanted to -- me to find. I was looking for a particular Nazi. Seems like he was a important person the Nazi apparatus in -- in the British zone. So they send me to a city of Oofa, and the na -- allegedly the woman knew where he was. So I went to see the lady, and she says she wants 10,000 dollars. Not pounds, she wanted 10,000 dollars. I go right to my colonel, he says, you know she wants -- he said, "Give it to her." I said, "Ha ha, what are you talk about?" He says, "Next time you go, you going to bring her the money." Not knowing -- this what I -- I'm not -- I don't say it's a fact, maybe it's not, they had false, counterfeit dollars, and that's what he wanted to give me. Anyways, I w -- I didn't know it at that time. I'm going with the 10,000 dollar, and I went to the lady, says, "Okay, where is he?" She says, "I'm not going to tell you." Said, "What do you mean you don't got to tell me? I came all the way from

[indecipherable] came all the way to Oofa, and you say you don't want to tell me?" She says, "You people going to leave shortly, and I going to have to stay with them." And she didn't tell me. I traveled all over. I looked for other ones too, but he was the main Nazi. Never found him. Finally I'm coming to America, two re -- two years later. The sergeant, who was a sergeant in the CIC, and a British boy, his parents, during the -- before the war, during the war, they moved to California. So he came to -- to see his parents, so he stopped over there, so -- so -- by them already a bigshot. I lived in New York, I went to a nightclub with him, took him out, everything is fine. The last day I see him, I said to him, "By the way, what happened to this fellow?" He said, "We got him," he said, "isn't that wonderful?" "Where was he?" Said, "He was your cook." He was a cook in a CIC headquarters. We never knew it. How we found him was his girlfriend reported him. Otherwise, we wouldn't ever find him, so you see --

Q: He was right under your noses.

A: He was right there, and we never knew he was the cook in a CIC headquarters. So, after a ba -- well, I [indecipherable] funny thing let -- sorry. When I lived in Munich, I didn't -- na -- before I worked for the CIC actually, I used to change butter for -- for opera tickets. So I -- yeah, I remember I gave a big slab of butter to get a opera ticket, that's the only way I saw the operas in -- in Munich.

Q: You also mentioned, just briefly, that you had -- you were supposed to go to Poland, to see whether the AK, the Armia Kryova --

A: Yeah, Armia Kryova, yeah, yeah.

Q: -- was -- whether they were -- were --

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's the reason I went to Poland, I -- I didn't remember why I went to Poland. He tells me this day is -- the Jews who came back to the city, ma -- especially the city of Nemuveradim, they were killed. The legend is supposed to be an organization which kills the Jews. He never heard of it, I never heard of it, see what's -- what happen. I couldn't think why I went back to -- to -- to -- to Łódź, I went back to -- to -- to Prague, to -- to -- to -- to Poland. And I found out, sure enough, there's a organization called Arma Kryova, the army of the land. So what happened, if a Jew came back to his little town, or wherever town he came, and he wanted his property back, so some Polack took it over. A-After the Germans left, the Polack took it over, and now the Polack has it, so they want the army, so instead of giving it to them, they killed them. They killed those thing. Matter of fact, I sent some pictures to the holo -- gave some pictures to the Holocaust Museum with those people who perished, after the war, finally coming back after the concentration camp, and they killed them. This why I went to Poland, I couldn't think why I was in Poland, the Arma Kryova.

Q: Did you have any direct dealing with anyone from the Armia Kryova?

A: No, I didn't have any but -- dealing thas he was an Army Kryova, because nobody's admit that he killed somebody. But I dealing with Polish people that took I'm a -- I'm a Polack, too. So they'll -- dealt with him. A matter of fact, I'll tell you a little incident

what happened to me. I'm in the city of Chertzohova, I walk -- I have the open shirt, what I had a big, ebony cross, I used to wear a big, ebony cross. I'm walking up the hill, and there's another fellow, a drunken, walks down the hill, and he points at me, and he says, "Par shiva zhija," smelly Jew. I said, "Oh my God, I must smell even with the cross on my chest." This was my encounter with par shiva zhija. And that's the reason I wound up -- I couldn't think why I was in Poland, that's the reason. Looking for Arma Kryova.

Q: Did you look -- did you have -- did you look Jewish?

A: No, I didn't look -- never looked Jewish.

Q: Because it seems that you were able to --

A: I look Aryan, I look Aryan.

Q: You were able to get --

A: It's a -- matter of fact, when I went in -- when I work in [indecipherable] think the Germans were more scared of me than I was of them, because I spoke a better German than those -- those volkdeutscher who came to him. No, no, never -- never had problem looking Jewish. Matter of fact, there was one incident. I don't like to talk about this one with somebody. I stood next to a Nazi, and he showed me what he did with a child. I don't want to talk about it.

Q: You don't have to talk about it. You did mention it, first interview. Let's see. I'm going to flip the tape.

End of Tape One, Side B

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Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is tape number two, side A, of an interview with Beno Helmer. Do you remember what you were doing -- y-you mentioned you were working for a Jewish organization, maybe JDC. Do you remember what you were doing with that organization?

A: O-Only registering people, nothing more. N-No capacity at all, just registering people, m-manual -- you know, bookkeeping -- not even bookkeeping, just r-registering the names. And f -- f -- and one more thing, I went to look for my sister, wherever I went to I -- I went to -- months later, I went to look -- wherever I went, I went to look for my sister. And I don't know if I mentioned how I met my sister, or that I -- if I met somebody at the crossing of -- a street crossing, where somebody was coming out of Landsberg. So you know that story, how I met my sister.

Q: But I wasn't sure how -- did -- did that person know you?

A: No, no, no, no. No, no, no. No, no, no. We stop at the light. I stop -- I was on the flat truck. We stop at the light, and we just have to cross light. The traffic goes one direction, traffic goes all direction, because the t -- the little traffic light became green. During the crossing, somebody says, "How is Sonya?" Sonya is a very popular name. I don't know who said it, I never saw it, it's just a mob of people going one way, mob of people going the other way. And I say, "She is dead." And the boy said, "I just saw her." Doesn't mean it was towards me, maybe he d-does know me, maybe is -- he meant his cousin Sonya, whatever it is. And on this assumption, I kept on looking for my sister again. I never

thought that she going to be -- survive, I always look for my brother. My parents, I don't know, maybe yes, maybe not. My father was very, very sick. So, the only one I was looking for my brother, because he was a -- hunky -- a ch-chunky guy. No, so this what was.

Q: Yeah, and you told about how you -- how you found your sister, but did you ever find out anything certain about your brother and your parents?

A: I am -- I was, not any more -- I was involved in the national Red Cross. Matter of fact, they just called me maybe two months ago, in Switzerland, but they -- the -- the -- the -- the Red Cross in Boca, here, the Red Cross in -- they got in touch with Polish Red Cross, there's no traces. I put traces on -- on the computer, all the Irving Helmer in United States. By coincident, there's six of them, but none of them are my brother, yeah.

Q: So you never found out for certain?

A: Never, no, no. He's an old man now, the same as I am. I never found him. Never found about Ronyek -- Monyek Ravel, and all you ha -- funny thing is, some years ago, I was thinking I would like to meet Rainia again, I don't even know where she is. She was, I think eight years older than I was.

Q: At that time, did you have any -- did you have any interest in -- you mentioned just a little bit that you were thinking, well, while you were in Teplice, and you had the problem with -- with possibly being drafted into the Russian army, that you were considering Israel, but you had an aunt in the United States. Did you have any sense,

while you're there in Munich, of where you really wanted to be, where you wanted to settle?

A: I want -- I wanted to go to Israel. And I had an uncle, my father's oldest brother, who -- I got -- h-he got in touch with me, or I -- I don't remember. No, I got in touch through -- through the organization, I was working for them. And he wrote me a letter, he says, if I should try, by all means, come to America, because your aunt, Marcia Kramer lives there, try to get in touch with her. And he gave me the address of her. And because poverty, we have poverty in -- in Israel, it's 1947, or 1946, right after the war, it's right before the independence. That's the reason I didn't go to Israel.

Q: Did you have strong Zionist feelings at that point, or --

A: No, no. I did not have -- my father had strong Zionist feeling. I wa -- I was -- you have to realize I -- I was school, and -- and -- and -- and -- and -- and -- and self survi-survival for all those years. So -- so, emotionally, I was surviving -- s-surviving. I'm extremely for Israel now, but at that time, I just want to go somewhere getting out of Europe, which I -- I -- if not the circumstance, I would stay in Teplice, because I love Teplice. But at that time, the Russians took over it, they dealt me an ugly, ugly hand.

Q: Why did you feel more strongly about Israel than the United States, for example?

A: I didn't know anything about the United States. And -- and -- and -- and be-being through -- going to all that last few years, with all the hate against Jews, and everything else, I thought something -- Israel's going to be the place, at least I don't gotta feel this

hate. So I don't -- so -- so that's what it was. But I would like -- I want to go out of Europe, and finally through -- my uncle gave me the address, I was sponsored to go to America. I needed only a sponsor because I was a political escapee, I wasn't as a refugee. So that's the reason I came here.

Q: How did it feel to be in Germany, and -- and presumably dealing with Germans, after what you had been through?

A: As I said before, I don't hate. No problem.

Q: You got along well with the woman who you were staying with?

A: Oh, she was -- listen, she -- she hated Nazis more than I do. She lost her son on -- on the meathook. And she just lost him maybe for -- the week before the end of the war -- a month before end of the war. I mean, she is a bitter, old lady. I mean, I -- I -- I beca -- you know, I became that [indecipherable], I became an orphaned. But it was bewildering. I never cried for my mother, I never cried for my parents. First time I think I cried was when I was free. I mean, because I knew -- I knew, definitely I knew that my fate going to be exactly the same as theirs. So it was only timing. If I don't do it today, going to be the day after tomorrow. I had never -- and when I was in the concentration camp, I never fought fate. Fate became my big thing. If they tell me stay, I stay, sit, sit. Whatever they do, because I said, I never knew what I gonna do. If I go left, and that's supposed to go right, I said, you know, should have, could have, would have. It is one thing I never say, is should have, could have, would have. It doesn't exist. So, how do I know what I'm

doing right, if I -- seems like what I did was right. But one time, I -- I tested fate. I supposed to b -- go to a coal mine, and [indecipherable] me to go to a coal mine, so I roped it off, because I said, coal mine is -- is definitel that. So I tried [indecipherable] became a cook to one of the Nazis in Auschwitz. And that's how I survived.

Q: Did you talk with the -- the German woman that you stayed with about your experiences, or did she ask you about what had happened to you during the war?

A: No, I did not. Simple reason is, because I worked for the CIC. So I did not talk about it. She thought I was a -- joined the ausdeutscher as a German.

Q: So you were still working for the CIC as --

A: [indecipherable] after I get that apartment over there, yes. It's in back of -- yes, yes.

Q: Was that difficult, to not be -- after what you had been through, and having to take on an -- an identity.

A: It's becoming acting. It became acting, I mea -- you became an actor. You acted, and you became a big shot, because I'm looking for those bastards. You know, it's -- it's a bi -- became a more -- little bit more important than anything else, and I was looking for them. So that's what it was, so -- so she didn't know it. Banya knew I was Jewish, and th-the HIAS -- it wasn't HIAS, it was J -- J-Jewish something. I worked for them. So they knew it, and finally the -- Rainia gave me the apartment with this lady, and she moved -- two houses further down, she lived. She ga -- she got it to me, yes. I mean, the story is I came to Teplice -- to Munich smuggling myself out through -- from t -- from Teplice,

through -- through marinepart, and Haganah smuggled me over, and at the border, he says, "Anybody who has the papers, has to s-surrender his papers, all the papers." So I was smart enough not to give him my papers, otherwise I wouldn't even come to America, because I would have no history where I come from. And that's one -- all of a sudden, I'm be -- coming to -- I'm going to the country which hated me, which killed everybody of my family. And here I am, living in b -- among them again. That was rough.

Q: And then -- then you had gotten in touch with your aunt? Is that how -- how you made the decision to come to the United States?

A: That's was only one -- no -- it was only the decish -- decision to come -- the decision was made for me, cause that's was the only papers I got. So I got the papers. By then, I found my sister. When I found my sister, she had papers to go to Canada, as a domestic. So I found her just by coincidence, a domestic, this was -- so by then, I want to be near her. So definitely Israel was out, Palestine was out at that time. America became the more logical thing, and not only this, I know my uncle lived in New York, so she got herself a job in Hamilton, which is right on the Canadian border, as a domestic, working for the doctor. Very attractive young lady. First night, he did sexual advances to her. So she quit, went back to the camp there, and after that she got a job as a domestic for a Dr. Cohen, which now they adopted as a child, and matter of fact, two boys, which are also fi --

physicians. They like sisters and brothers. And that's the reason I stayed in New York, and she should be -- now she lives in Toronto.

Q: You mentioned just a little bit about your journey to the United States, and the -- and the trouble that you went through. Do you want to talk more about that journey?

A: Yes. I left Hamburg, and 21 days later -- I left on a ship by the name of Merle Marlane -- no, no, I left on a ship of Ernie Pyle, and came on a ship of Merle Marlane. We broke down in English Channel, we lost some motor, something like this. They fixed it -- but they couldn't fix it, so we had to be transferred, as I said, from Ernie Pyle, to the Merle Marlane. It was -- the waves were unbelievable high, we had to do it on those rope ladders. Before we were transferred, they locked us -- they -- they locked the women on top, and the men down in the hole. The only thing they had, because after all those days we ran out of food. So the only th -- that they fed us, was Coca-Cola, in bottles. At that time, Coca-Cola came in bottles. So we were drinking Coca-Cola. So when the whole -- when the ship was going from one side to the other, the b -- Coca b-bottles, the glass broke, so we were stepping on glass, so we couldn't -- we were scared to walk, so we were sitting, and -- and -- and we stayed there for quite a few days, til finally we were transferred on -- to the Merle Marlane. The -- the -- usually, a trip takes six days, we did it in 21 days. So the crossing was not very pleasant one. Came here, was a foggy day, as I said, I throw my coat into the river -- Hudson river. And I met my uncle, the fellow who sponsored me. But I couldn't stay with him, I stayed with my -- my aunt, on a fi-five

floor walk-up, in the Bronx. Think she was as poor as I was. Seems like she subsidized her living -- or income, my mother gave her some arts before she came to America, she gave her some paintings. She was selling those painting, and carpeting, and this what she lived on. So -- and by that time, after the war, she was as poor as I was. She had two girls, unhappy. S --

Q: When you were on the ship, did you -- were you thinking much about what kind of life you were heading towards, and what you wanted it to be? And what was the mood among the passengers?

A: The mood of them, the passenger, was quite optimistic, because they're finally going to a new country, they're going to a new country. So, was optimistic in itself this -- be trying something new, and -- and I happen to like challenges. I love challenges. I like to try something new. I try anything which I didn't try before. And -- and scary. What's going to be with me? What going to be with? I don't speak English, I have no job, I have no profession, I have no money. What's going to be? I have a sister in Canada, how do I going to help her? And this was ma -- always predominantly in my mind, is how do I going to help my sister. And that's the reason I took a job -- a we -- we -- job for 60 hours, with eating one salami sandwich.

Q: Do you remember other first impressions of -- of New York?

A: Yes. The huge, huge building, and I said, "They never have sun here." I was f -- I felt always sorry for the people who live -- he -- down on bottom. He took me to Wall Street,

or something, the second or third day. And I said, "Look at this. This wonderful country, and they have never see sunshine." Always felt so badly this is dark, they're never going to see sunshine. I never knew they go to work from -- from somewhere else, to the Wall Street, but I thought they lived there, and everything is happen there. And okay, the -- that second day, we bought me a new suit in Ripley's, was the thing, and this is my first suit. And three or four days later, I got the j -- I too -- she took me to the ot -- as I said to RKO, and it offered me the job, which I didn't want. So I got a job for S. Klein department stores, 60 hours, and after two weeks, I became a supervisor, not even speaking English, but I had an interpreter with me as a -- as a supervisor. Became supervisor of receiving and shipping, in departments store of Kleins.

Q: How was your relationship with your family here? Did they ask you about what had happened during the war? Did you f -- want to talk about it?

A: They did not want to know too much, and I was not ready to ev -- reveal myself. I -- I didn't feel like exposing myself. You know, the -- the -- the -- the -- that was tredding me -- they were treating me with -- wi-with very -- kindness, they treating me with kindness, thas I, only one survivor, except -- except for my sister there. So they were very kind to me, very kind. B-But you know, they never achieved anything tremendous in their live. One [indecipherable] was a -- was a mailman. The other one was a -- the other brother, which worked for my father, those two boys, was a ped -- a -- a -- a peddler something. And the oldest brother, which was -- by the way, they are not true brothers, they're not --

th-they're step-brothers, all step-brothers, except the aunt which I lived there, and the uncle which sponsored me. She only had one true sister, and one true brother. All the other ones were step-sisters, because my mother's mother died in -- during childbirth with my mother. So, he married couple da -- years later, sister. And since the babies was - - the two girls and a boy was so small, so they never knew this -- they were not telling them about that, they found out after they got married, after my mother got married, she found out. So he -- he only was a dental mechanic. So, none of them was -- is -- is -- they lived in a middle class milieu. Aspirations, so-so. No big aspirations.

Q: What about other friendships, relationships, encounters with people?

A: I -- I -- I -- let me tell you something. I lived there for awhile, and after this, I -- I felt that's -- that's only -- the 15 dollars I had to pay, or something, I said I try to get myself, it's a little better. I befriended a lady who was the cousin of Heddy Lamar. And she says - - also helped me, and she says, "Why don't you get out, because you're going to be stifled there. You're staying there stifled. Fifth floor walk-up, bad, bad." The -- that neighborhood was getting bad. So I got a job -- I -- I got a -- myself a apartment in a brownstone ons -- on River Ave, between Broadway, and West End Avenue, next to the Ansonia Hotel. So I did quite well, I mean that it's -- the money which I st -- fer -- to -- 15 had to pay out, that paid for my rent, and I did quite well. I liked it, and I made friends there, I made friends. And after this I was drafted in the army, after draft in the army, so I had to give up everything else, so I didn't have anything else. And, matter of fact, she

was the only one who wrote -- used to write me almost -- every two, three days, and her fam -- her family did not. Didn't do it.

Q: Were your fr -- were the friends that you were making mostly Jewish, non-Jewish, Holocaust survivors, or --

A: Very little friends, very few friends. I had a problem at that time, which was because of my accent. I had a fellow which I came here together on a ship, which is called something Zimmerman, so I was friendly with him. But he moved down to Coney Island, in New York, Coney Island. I lived on Broadway, so we drifted apart. He had a profession right away, he was a carpenter, so he did quite, quite well, and I didn't have any profession, I was a perpetual student. So, I made friends afterwards, we made friends. But not too many friends. Let's put it this -- we had acquaintances -- I made acquaintances. I had -- didn't make any friends, I made acquaintances. I had acquaintances, but no friends.

Q: I guess if you joined the army, that you must have become a s --

A: I did not join, I was drafted.

Q: You were drafted. You were drafted.

A: It's a difference.

Q: Important difference, important distinction. Were you a citizen of the United States?

A: No, no, I was not a citizen.

Q: They drafted you --

A: I had a tentia -- I -- in -- I -- I applied, because I came as a -- as political escapee, intention to become a citizen. I was drafted. And I was one of the older ones, already, they usually draft 18 -- 19 year old, I was in the 20's already. So the f -- go -- the army was a revelation to me, it was a revelation to th -- but I -- I survived it. I made it. I made it. Especially in my basic training, I had this incident with Dr. Do -- with Dr. Deutsch -- with Deutsch, so it left a -- a bi -- I became more cautious -- I became more cautious, so the only thing to -- to -- to be in my own milieu, I became active in the Jewish temple in - in the army base, with Judaism, so at least I felt a certain amount of kinsmen, who going to feel this -- what I have been through is -- and not to make fun of my language, whatever it was.

Q: Did you have any sympathy for the American cause in the Korean war?

A: At that time I didn't know about the -- the Korean -- the -- the reason of the Korean war. I didn't know it. So -- so I knew the 38th parallel, I knew it -- whatever it was, so I -- I was apolitical. I just came, two years, I was apolitical.

Q: Did you become more politically inclined later on?

A: Since then? Yes, I became more politically inclined. I go for Democratic causes, even I registered independent, because I still have an independent mind, and usually, most of the time, who I vote for doesn't get in. So -- so my -- my re -- election -- my voting record is not one of the best ones. Usually I take the cause which is not too popular, yes.

Q: Was there any particular event that -- that drew you into politics, or was that just a gradual thing, I -- do you remember earlier -- early --

A: You know, I think the politi -- politics i-i-i-i-is the spine of the nation. I mean, the spine of nation. Look what is going on the -- let's take 1999 and 2000. With all the killing what's going on by people with guns, we can't even pass a gun control law. I mean, it's -- it's terrible. So sometime I feel a small, autocratic nation, a small autocratic philosophy, is not the worst thing in the whole world. Democracy is terrific, what it stands for now, to -- quoting Mr. Churchill, he said, "Democracy is only good right now, because we don't know of anything better." But if you take Hellenistic culture, the destroying of Hellenistic culture was democracy, because everybody was right. And now we have atoks the Fifth Amendment. Fifth Amendment is your right to arm, it's not true, doesn't say that, Fifth Amendment doesn't say that. You're allowed to bear arms for the militia. We have a militia, it's called the National Guard. You know the militia thas I going to shoot at him, he's coming through my door today, and I'm allowed to have a gun. We have to be educated. There's nobody more armed in the whole world than it is in Israel. Almost everybody had a rifle every -- but the killing is not there. So it seems like we have to educate not only what the gun stands for, but what the gun can do. But here we just -- yo -- the last two days we got a six year old child -- killed a six year old boy. A six year old boy killed some s-six year old child. This fellow killed yesterday, because he doesn't like the white people, killed three people. And we can't pass a gun control law. We can't even

pass a law to put a -- a governor on a gun. So this reason -- we have to be involved. Being gun control, being equal right, being pregnancy, being whatever it is. I mean, where does it -- where does it -- my philosophy, where does the Senate, the House, or the -- the -- the state has a right to go into my wife's bedroom? Or anybody's bedroom? What you want to do with your body? I going to tell you you can't have an abortion -- you cannot have abortion. The people who have money, they going to get abortion regardless. If they don't get it here, they get it in Canada, they get it in Timbuktu, they get it someplace. Only that -- poor people have to get an abortion through a hanger. So you have to be involved politically.

Q: When did you become a citizen?

A: Five years later, 1952.

Q: By then were you very interested in the American political system, or aware of the --

A: I -- I'm in-interested in any system. I'm interested in any system, I'm interested in Israeli system, I'm interested in the Muslim system. I'm -- matter of fact, I'm studying the Koran for four years already. By the way, so far I didn't understand what it's happening there, b-baffling, completely baffling, because it's contradicting statements, but any -- but -- but anyways, it's -- it's -- it's the base of -- of a tremendous resurgence, and the resurgence is -- is -- is -- is tremendous. In the whole civilized world, Muslims is -- is -- tremendous resurgence.

Q: So, you don't necessarily consider yourself to have an identity as an American, or to -- to have a particular --

A: Oh sure, oh sure, oh sure. 100 percent American, absolutely. Absolutely 100 percent American, and that's the reason -- I tell you why I feel 100 percent am -- because I have the right, and I have the privilege of criticizing. And is a privilege you never have, no -- anyplace else. And that's what I'm an American for, because I can say here what I don't like. And this is a difference where I came from. Not through an -- in Czechoslovakia, now Czech Republic, I could do almost -- almost the same thing. But here I can say it without worrying about it. Can go in a corner and shout what I don't like.

Q: Do you ever do that?

A: I don't shout, but I tell you a little incident that's -- there's a sef -- fellow comes to Krushev, and says, "You know, we have -- you know what democracy is? Because I can go in a corner, and I can say my president stinks." He said, "This is democ -- I have the same thing. I go in my corner, I can s -- I can say the same thing, your president stinks." That's democracy.

Q: So, du -- is voting particularly important to you?

A: Oh yes, yes. There's a privilege which you don't get too often. No other count -- not have it a lot of them. Now, it's a much, much better, but wa -- biv -- ah -- my history, where I come from, no, no, you be careful -- even if you voted, you have to be careful who you voted for. This -- this is -- this is a wonderful, wonderful place, wonderful. And

it's only makes it wonderful because we can criticize it. We don't have to be subservient, we don't have to be -- be -- be whatever they pushed down our throat, we can voice an opinion.

Q: Do you want to say anything else about your experience in the army? Were you disillusioned at that point, with the whole thing, the whole system?

A: No, I was disillusioned for a simple reason is, because I had to be regimented again. Being in concentration camp, whatever you want to call it, you are regimented, because you had to get up, you had to do this, you had to do that. You were under cert -- the regiment, or -- or the supervision. You could not exercise your freedom any way you wanted it. Army did the same thing to me. Actually, nobody going to kill me, nobody going to deprive me of food. Nobody going to take me to shoot, or to gas me. But it was on the regiment, and I am a little rough to be regimented again, and that's was the difference. I mean, I remember always in army, I don't know if I said it, I had to pick up food for my block, and I -- they hit me on my behind. Did I ever say this story? No? I was block number, I think 18, or 17, or 27. I don't know what number block was. So we went to -- there was two of us, we went and brought -- two of us went for the kettle. They gave us a water with -- with -- with turnips or something. And this was the food for the day. They call us, hypothetical let's say, at twenty -- I was block number 27, he says 26 here? Fine. He says 27. I don't say nothing, I didn't get there yet. He says 20 -- or he wants to say 28, I said, "Here." They say, "Pistrits -- I zeeman swansee, gor

actenswansee?" I said, "Zeemen swansee." I was late. It took me -- this fellow took me to a -- not a kapo, the supervisors were also Jews [indecipherable] and put me between his leg, and my head right here, and they gave me 15 with a walking -- not him, with a walking cane, which was taped around with tape or something, it shouldn't split. And he gave me 15 on my behind. The first one, two, three excruciate, after this it's -- it's -- it's - - you did not feel it anyways. I bled rectally. [indecipherable] I'm finish, I can walk -- I had to pick up -- he calls me this, "It was forgot -- you s -- you forgot something." "What the hell did I forget?" He says, "You forgot to say thank you." So I fainted, so they had big squares where they're full of water, so in case of fire, they should use this water to thing -- so they threw me into this lake, because I forgot to say thank you.

Q: I'm sorry, I got a little confused, cause I thought you were -- you did tell that story.

A: I did?

Q: Yeah. But I thought you were going to say something about the army, and the y -- and the U.S. experience, but I understand now --

A: Yes.

Q: -- you were saying the regimentation.

A: It's the regiment -- the regimentation, yes.

Q: Did you have any other anti-Semitic experiences?

A: Asibido -- since Deutsch, I had one of them, it had to do -- in -- in San Antonio, I had one of thing is, one fellow. As I said, it was a integrated company, so they were playing

cards, and they said, "You Jewing me down." Not to me. He said in the camp, this was -- I just -- we just came transferred to there. I said, "Fellows, let me tell you, I happen to be Jewish. I happen to be Jewish." So, they isolated me a little bit, but ventually it was forgotten, was forgotten. [indecipherable] had no problem.

Q: Did you form any friendships during that time?

A: I va -- did form friendship with a fellow by -- Don Dimarino. He a butcher from somewheres, as unhappy as I was, because he was also drafted late. So we only formed a friendship in the army, but nothing afterwards. Afterwards I came here, to make a living, and so after this, we lost each other. Funny thing, I still remember this name.

Q: How long were you in the army, just --

A: 16 months or something like this, I was there. Matter of fact, of -- it sounds almost impossible. They knew I was in the CIC, wanted to put me in the CIC, and I should go to the papers CIC, so that could -- they going to use me in Korea. My face doesn't look Korean at all. So I don't know who ever thought to send me to Korea to do spying. I mean, it's crazy, but you know, something that -- papers got fouled up, and that's what it was. So that's the reason I wound up a surge -- as a surgical technician, to go to Korea, in a hospital.

Q: When you -- you came to the United States in -- around '48, isn't that right?

A: '47.

Q: '47.

A: April first, '47. Fool's day.

Q: Were you following at all the -- the -- the subsequent nur -- Nuremberg Trials were happening near that time, and there was a trial against the Krupp factory.

A: Yes, I worked for Krupp.

Q: Yeah.

A: I worked for Krupp, yes. I followed it, and I didn't follow it. I tell you why, because emotionally I was drained. Emotionally I was drained. So, actually, I -- less I followed -- I f-found I came here for a new life. I mean, the past doesn't going to do nothing for me. Matter of fact, people are getting money from Germany. I didn't get -- I didn't have anything to do with them. I didn't get any money for 50 years. I just started receiving it the last one year. My sister's getting it for 50 years, I never, ever few -- I did nothing to do with it. I just didn't want to live through my past. Matter of fact, I was more interested in the ass-assassination of President Kennedy. And I read the Warren Report, and I was more interested things which happen now, which I am so -- here, where I have something to do about it, where I have something to say about it. In-In-In-In-In the German war, I was a pawn, I was just a pawn, and I'm glad what I did, that sabotage work, which I did, blowing up trains. It gave me a certain satisfaction, but in retrospect, I just made a speech for some newspaper editors, and newspaper artists, and I said to them -- was last year, or two years ago. And I said to them, "You know something? Sometimes I slee -- during the night I get up, and I says, you know, you killed somebody's child." And then one of the

fellows said, "You know, I felt the same way." I don't know if it's compassio -- what about a chi -- ki [indecipherable] was -- I killed somebody's child. Now let me tell you an incident what happened to me two years ago. I go around -- I used to go around -- used to go around, make speeches about the Holocaust, and it's either the -- the -- how it's Hitler came to power, the German push on Munich, push. Landsberg, and -- and vay -- Hitler with "Mein Kampf," and ha -- Rudolf Hess, everything else. So before -- this was in Lakewood Community College in Lakewood, which is part of the FI-Florida University. So before I start the speech, I usually say, "Does anybody know what the Holocaust means?" There are three girls -- three girls, one black, and two white girls raise their hand. I picked one of them who looks -- who looks Jewish, something like this. She looks Jewish. No problem is she going to know what the Holocaust means. I says, "Yes, young lady, what is the Holocaust?" She says, "Ethnic food." You're making a face? That's what she said.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

A: So she said it's ethnic food, and it's extremely disappointed since then. I feel when we take the children to the Holocaust museum, and I -- and I think it's -- since you are working there, I wonder if you ever observed, when they walk out, they make, tch, tch, tch, tch. It's leaves an effect, and after is always feels better, we going to eat now. I mean, I don't know how long emotion stays with them. They should made a study, how long

emotion stays with you, if it doesn't touches you extremely personally, you know, father, mother, cousin, something. When you see a strange mass of people, eight million, s-six million, 25 million. It's only a number. History teaches us it's not the first Holocaust we went through, not in this scope, but we know tha -- wer -- were that -- to sin -- crusifi -- to Crusades, because French Huguenots, there's a Christian killing Christians, almost everybody. The Turks went all the way up to Vienna, they killed mercilessly. We went down to the -- two Crusades, we killed everybody who came in our way. So you see, so -- so this Holocaust is repeated itself, only in bigger scope. And I always wonder, is if you talk about it, it's only eventually going to be a sentence in a new -- in the history books. You know, there was a Holocaust, 35 million people died, 25 million people died, six million Jews is gonna die, and that's all what it is. I'm a very much involved now with the Holocaust survivors here, right here where I live, but you know, now, as a matter of fact, just recently went to a meeting, and somebody said something about the Holocau -- he says, "Oh, we here to have good times." See, even the Holocaust survivors don't want to dwell of what happened. He says, "We ve -- have a life, now let's have -- let's think of good times." So I don't know where to we -- history going to tea -- what history going to think of us. Maybe the museum going to stay for some time, like same thing Museum of National History, says, you know we -- how the Indians lived, and how the Neanderthal man lived, and how the Elsie lived, and the -- maybe we going to be just a little [indecipherable]. I went to Prague, there's a gorgeous, gorgeous synagogue, which called

the Portuguese synagogue, which is gorgeous. Hitler left it intact, because he said, "After all the Jews are destroyed, this going to be a show, the museum how the Jew -- there was a race, by the name of Jews." And he left it. And that's all. And we were eventually going to be the Holocaust, I feel going to be, you know, there was a -- a Holocaust, there was a -- a -- a darkness over Europe, which -- caused by one man, and his organization. It's sad.

Q: Do you feel that -- that it's possible that such a thing could happen again?

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes. We have a little bit now, if you can taste it in Vienna, in Austria. I mean, get rid of the refugees. So today we get rid of the refugees. Just five years ago, we -- Germany invited, in 1948, they invited the Turks as laborer. Now, we putting a wall around them where they live. Now, by -- after 50 years, 50 years is two generations, now we want to get rid of them. And if they're not the Turks, tomorrow going to be the blue eyed people nec -- day after the blondes, or the day after, the Jews. No, I mean the -- the finest -- the finest example, north Vienna. And this whole opero going to die down. Even Israel [indecipherable] ambassador, he eventually going to come back. Cause it's an internal struggle. Same thing we don't make [indecipherable] what's go -- going in Kosovo. We killing Serbians, we -- we killing the Russians, we [indecipherable] the Muslim, we killing wa -- and the sa -- Russian said, "Oh, this an internal struggle." So too Vienna going to say, Austria going to say, "This is internal struggle, don't meddle in." So we have it all over the world. We have approximately 10 to 15 wars going on constantly, wherever in the whole world. Being Pakistan, being Nigeria, being Zambia,

be wherever it is. People are dying. And what do we say? Tch, tch, tch, tch. That's all that we do.

Q: Can you talk about your involvement with survivor organizations? You just mentioned something.

A: Yeah, survivor organizations is -- we -- matter of fact, we just erected a monument here. We -- oh -- we had a monument here to -- to the Ho-Holocaust survivors, they vandalized it. In here, where 99.9 people are Jewish, it's a closed community, you have to have a gate to come in, somebody vandalized it.

Q: Right here in Boca Raton?

A: Right boc -- in Century Village. They broke it apart. I think they were young kids who come here on the Christmas vacation, they have nothing else to do, so they did it. So we just got it -- we -- we just -- matter of fact, the dedication going to be the 26th, of a new memorial. Yes. The -- we -- we -- there's not much to be done, we -- we -- we giving money to -- to Wiesenthal, I -- which I belong to Wiesenthal Center. So that's what I do, I got -- belong to the Wiesenthal Center, try to help financially, nothing else I can do.

Q: Is there a large community of survivors here in this area where you live?

A: As big a -- bigger than I thought, bigger tha-than I thought. I never knew it, because I don't -- I have a lot of friends, which I never seek he has to be a Holocaust survivor. Lately, I just -- thanks to the organization, I made some wonderful, wonderful friends. And they all survivors. I have other friends too, which are Americans, but they're

survivors. And they're wonderful people, they're such optimists, such won -- full of life. I mean, they live each day fo-for life's sake, you know? And they don't dwell whatever happened yesterday. That's yesterday, it's -- forget it. I mean, yesterday's a long story. Only tomorrow or today. So, they wonderful, wonder people. They very positive people. It's nice, very nice.

Q: So when you get together, you don't necessarily talk about it?

A: No, nobody talks -- no, nobody talks about it. Only [indecipherable] talks, my sister. But you know, we don't -- not -- not. You know, everybody has a s -- little bundle of -- he carries his little bundle, which is not pleasant. Everybody lost somebody, e-every day is not -- one of them whose -- who -- who -- who went through the war without a scrape. He being bruised a little bit more, being bruised a little bit less, but everybody s -- is bruised.

Q: When did you -- I know that y-you were married. Wh-When did you meet your wife, and do you want to say something about your children?

A: I don't like to talk about it, I -- because I met her, and I got married, and I was married in 1951, and divorced after 41 years, and I'm extremely happy. I have three wonderful children. It was a little bit rough with my children, the -- vis a vis my divorce, but it's worked out quite, quite well. I have wonderful, now six grandchildren, so I'm quite happy the status quo which I have right now.

Q: Do you want to say something about your children?

A: My children, they're wonderful. By -- the oldest daughter is Debbie. Husband -- her husband is Ira, who is a -- is a partner in Ernst and Young. Has two lovely children, named Stacey, who is in college in Maryland, and Michael, who just broke his arm snowboard skiing. My son David, and Beth, they work for the state -- for the -- the Defense Department, the pentagon. Two lovely, lovely boy is Brian and Scott. They live in Virginia. My youngest daughter Donna, is married to -- is -- is -- she worked for -- for Sprint, but now she just had a baby, February, the 11th, and her husband is Ray Elia Elan, and they have two little girls. One little girl is a big girl, and -- and she has one little girl, Emily, and now Daniel. My youngest -- sixth grandchild. Matter of fact, all my children are named after my mother. My mother's name was Dora. All of them have a D.

Q: Did you make a point of speaking with your children at all about your -- your history?

A: I spoke to my children as little as possible. Matter of fact, I gave the tape, which I made for the Holocaust last time, and I made for Spielberg. My youngest -- my youngest daughter, and my middle son, they saw it. My oldest daughter has it, never saw it. Doesn't want to -- she said she cannot live through it, which I can understand quite readily. Same thing my sister. She never would look at it. Doesn't want to look at it.

Q: But you told -- do you -- do -- you mentioned you do talk with your sister about that history.

A: She talks to me about it. She talks to me. I try to avoid it as paw -- paw -- we talk about -- funny thing is -- to my sister, we get together, and we talk each other every sing - - I call her nine o'clock precisely every single day, so long she's in Florida. After this, I call her every fri -- every Saturday in Toronto. Funny thing, our history starts from birth to concentration camp, never at -- in concentra -- never talk about concentration camp, with -- and after, where we found each other. But we never talk th-this life in between. We always talk the good stuff, like -- li -- like the concentration camp never happened to us. Like, we'll be stopped at -- at -- at 19 f -- '39, to -- our history stopped. So, we try -- I try to be, and she is, or try to be as positive as possible, but she always brings up, you know, what happened. So, she carries the guilt, a lot [indecipherable]

Q: So, did you ever feel the need to find some way to -- to mourn for your parents? Or in -- for your brother, too? You mentioned that you didn't cry during the war, did you cry afterwards?

A: I cried afterwards. I cried afterwards. Es-Especially with my mother. Funny thing is, she was a wonderful, wonderful woman. And my father was -- it's was -- he was always a business, so -- so relation was a limited time r-relation thing, except when I went skiing with him in the wintertime. But I found him, he was a very, very -- more I think of him, more I admire him. More I admire him as a man, as a father, as a -- oh, as a -- a breadwinner, as everything else, which, as a youngster, at that time, did not appreciate it. What -- this what I missed him. But during the camp, I -- I didn't have to, because I knew

that -- I saw the chimneys. They said, "You see you -- this where you gonna wind up." It was the best propaganda, gonna wind up. The only thing you wa -- didn't want to wind up suffering til you get there. So -- so, whatever it is, I -- I knew I going to wind up. So -- so it was only a s -- matter of time. But longer you stay there, all of a sudden you said, "Why should -- I don't want to die. I want to take advantage." I -- I -- I -- I -- I -- I -- I want to -- not take advantage, I -- I want to -- how you say -- I want to -- to take whatever it is, I forgot it. I want to hate him as much as I could. I wanted to take -- and that's what I wanted to do. So, it -- the reason is, when I was for the underground, the CIC, I mean, I became a specialist at railroad thing. So I thought I was a hero, killing those boys. I was killing ruvaba -- blowing up those railroad, and being a -- playing spy. Oh, this was quite challenging, you know. Giving a -- the reports. So -- so -- so that one was -- I got even. That's what I wanted to -- that's what I wa -- sorry. This what I want to say, I wanted to get even with them. Couldn't think of it.

Q: But did you -- do you have any way of -- of -- of -- do you have any special dates that you -- that you memorialize your parents, or do you -- do you do anything --

A: I -- I do not memorialize them. I do not memorialize them, because I called -- I asked a rabbi if I should -- I should do something for them, you know, pray or something, is there some -- or light even a candle for them. And the rabbi says, since you don't have definite date of their demise, you cannot do it, you cannot do it. So -- so -- they got to -- they [indecipherable] in my life, this -- they were cremated, in my wish I going to be

doing the same thing. My sister's very much against it, my family's against it. But I feel I owe them so much, is I want to go the same way. So my mind is made up, though, for now, for quite some time. I want to go the same way. I -- I just want to feel a certain kinship with them.

Q: You mentioned that during the camps you -- you lost your fear of death. In your first interview.

A: Yes.

Q: Di -- is that something that stayed with you, or do you feel that -- not afraid of death?

A: I'm not afraid of death. I -- I -- as I'm getting older, I would love to live longer, because I have a wonderful time. I have -- I have a ball. Every morning I get up, I always say, "You got it made," and I read those three signs which I have in the kitchen. And I said, "Life is worth living. Life is a wonderful, wonder commodity." I don't know if you can call it commodity, but it's -- it's so much to offer, it's so much to do. You only have to grab it, it's right there. I mean, I have a friend of mine, he says he killed another day. I said, "How can you kill another day? For me the day is too short, and you trying to kill a day." I mean, it's f -- that's the reason I tried to postpone it, whatever happen, as long as I can, as long I can, it's -- it's a wonderful, wonderful thing.

Q: What do you love to do? What are your interests, and your --

A: No, I -- I do charity. I do charity. I -- I -- I give charity. I belong to the organizations, I belong to another organization which called Habilitation, which takes care of mentally

challenged people. Matter of fact, we just give -- the -- the -- January, we just give 45,000 dollars. Usually we give 25 and 25, but seems like we had some more money, so we give 45,000 dollars, it's a wonderful organization. These people who are challenged mentally, so they -- they -- they have a big place here, so they do -- like General Electric gives them something to put together, or -- or tell little plants, they plant plants. This [indecipherable] organization. I belong to the Holocaust organization. I go to school five times a week. So, I lecture. So my day is full.

Q: You go to school as a student, or as a teacher?

A: As a -- I go a stu -- as -- as a student, as a -- I go to school as a student, plus as a teacher. I take a -- I take a -- well, let me tell you what I take. I take this current events on Tuesday. I take -- this -- this semester, interesting court cases. Matter of fact, we taking now James Joyce, "Ulysses." You read "Ulysses?" It's interesting. I take i -- from -- from the Inquisition to Century Village. I take a -- a --

Q: From the Inquisition to Century Village, what's that?

A: From the Spanish Inquisition in 1492, to -- to -- you know, to coming to America, so he just gave it the title.

Q: Looking at the history of --

A: Yes.

Q: -- of the Jews?

A: From Jews coming to America, Jews coming to America. A -- I take a current events history, German out of tolsto -- with Nazism -- study Nazism. Took one -- took a course, Portugese Jew, Spanish and Portugese Jews, especially talk about the -- the -- not -- the Sephardic Jews. So this is in a lecture, still a lecture, the Holocaust. I did it in high schools. This ex -- the experience I had in Lakewoods, which was very unpleasant for me, so I'm not very positive about those things. Well, so that's what I do.

Q: The experience in Lake Worth is that the --

A: Is the college which the girl says the 'ethnic food.'

Q: What hap -- what hap -- what did you do or say after she said that?

A: No, I didn't -- we skipped it, I skipped it. Matter of fact, it was -- a good thing out of there was, on the faculty, there's a man from Lithuania, and he was very impressed with my speech, so he came over to me, and says, "I'm not Jewish. My father lee is not Jewish." Matter of fact, I became an ardent -- he became a born again Catholic. He said, "I want to give you something which I never showed to anybody else. My father is out of Lithuania." Some city in Lithuania. "And here is a printer's list of all the Jews which were deported from Riga -- from Riga." July the fourth, or something, and he gave me the printed list, which I submitted. And he says, "Do me a favor, don't tell -- give them m-my father-in-law's name, don't give my name. Give it as you giving it as a" -- so I mailed it to -- I spoke to somebody over there, I mailed them the list, which the Holocaust Museum has it. A couple of weeks later, I'm b-b-back there, so he says, "I --

my -- I spoke to my father, he would like to have his name giv -- as a donor to the Holocaust Museum." So I called them up, and they changed the name, thus he became the donor of those documents, which I have a copy of them right here. Came to -- plus I was involved in s -- with the -- Spielberg. I did the hash -- HaShoah, also with them.

Q: How were you involved with them?

A: With spiel -- I made the -- the -- hash -- HaShoah, the -- the -- I made the videotape, yes.

Q: And when you go, and you do these lectures, do you ever speak about your own experiences, or are you more talking about general experiences?

A: Yeah, most of -- no, I -- I s -- I -- I -- there's according who I speak -- I just did a speech in a temple for young youngsters. I tried to be not -- I tried to be less graphic. You know, I'd -- I leave out the horror stories, I -- I just in general -- general suffering, I mean, cause my worst experience was when I stood next to the Nazi, and he threw this child against the wall. I mean, I don't -- leave those out, I leave out that I was hit on my behind 25 times. All those things I try to -- to leave out, because the children don't have to be exposed to this graphic thing -- they see enough graphic killing in a movie. So -- so I try to [indecipherable] and later I have questionnaires, and they are amazing thing, they very, very intelligent questions. Somebody -- those questions are baffling me, but they're very, very bright children.

Q: Can you think of any of the questions that they ask?

A: I don't know any, but I have letters which they send me. The children send me each letter I -- I answer. You know, if it hurt me being there. How does it feel you lost your parents? How -- how do you describe how you lose your parents? I mean, there's no words to say, that's strictly emotional. Practically, they're not here, boom, they're gone. But the -- how can you describe emotion, what you feel all of a sudden? You -- you have a fa -- a nuclear of a family, and all of a sudden, you're by yourself. Lost a sister, lost a brother. I never knew my sister was alive. So I -- and all of a sudden they say, "You see the chimney, that's where you going to wind up." So that's not very pleasant. And, plus I blame myself, because if I wouldn't be there -- if I wouldn't be there August the third -- second, in -- in -- in the Lo-Lódz ghetto, I would be here -- I would be fighting them. So now you're angry, we could have fought those bastards, I must -- not allowed to say it [indecipherable] fought them, and here I'm -- I'm -- I'm -- I became a prisoner. So it was s -- I lived betwe -- I lived between two worlds. Here -- here, I sabotaged trains, which I can't tell that to nobody. I got even with them -- them a little bit, and here I became a prisoner like anybody else, but I became a cook to the Nazi -- to a Nazi, then -- then -- then -- in a camp, and so I survived better, and I met -- did I tell you I met a -- a -- a husband of my aunt? I'm sitting in Auschwitz, and there's a transfer coming out from Theresienstadt. And every time it came from Theresienstadt, I wanted to know if anybody know the Sternberg. My mother's name is Sternberg, Dora Sternberg. So the man sits next to me, and he's bewildered, completely bewildered. Needs a shave,

extremely skinny. So I said, "Do you know anybody by name of Sternberg?" He says, "Yes, I just married one." I said, "You married a Sternberg?" Long story short, he married my mother old spinster, he married her. I met him, I gave him some potatoes, he disappeared. I met a uncle of mine in -- for two hours. He married my aunt in Theresienstadt.

Q: Did he survive? And your aunt as well?

A: None of them. None of the -- 19 or 20 of them all perished in Theresienstadt. My gr -- my grandfather died before the war. My grandmother -- that's the reason I went back to Teplice, I went back to Theresienstadt, to show my children what happened.

Q: How -- so you visited Theresienstadt?

A: Yes.

Q: What was that -- can you describe that?

A: Theresienstadt, it was extreme emotion. I -- I -- I wanted to be by myself. I didn't walk with all -- I didn't walk with my children, I stood behind them, walked ahead of them, because this was part of the history. I re -- never went back to tep -- to Auschwitz, and na -- no -- not to any other camp. So this was -- I had a physical -- I was in this physical milieu, where -- where I knew somebody of me -- something of me lived through the whole thing. So it was s -- very [indecipherable] unpleasant, very unpleasant, very emotional, very emotional, very emotional.

Q: How did you -- what prompted you to start talking about your experiences in front of schoolchildren, and -- and so forth.

A: No, first I never knew I ma -- I -- I could speak in front of people. First I thought maybe I'm shy, which I -- by nature I'm not shy. And it started actually, with my son. He's -- he got in touch with the Holocaust Museum, and this how the whole thing started, the ball started running. And I always felt this -- you have to -- you have to tell them. History should not wipe it away, that's never happened. Except that this incident, which happened to me in -- in -- in -- in Lakewood put a damp on me, I think. This girl, I mean, quite intelligent, college graduate, or college student, I mean, don't know what the Holocaust is. Th-That's a -- and this funny thing is tha -- a -- a -- a -- it reminds me of a line for Jackie Mason, that he does in one of his monologue. He says they walk out of the theater, the first they said, "Want to eat? What do you want to eat? What do you want to eat?" And I felt the same thing, you know, people come out from the Holocaust Museum, they said, "Tch, tch, tch, tch, where we going to eat?" Because, you know, you -- nobody wants to be surrounded with so much misery, with so much negativism. You know, [indecipherable] nobody wants to be in a cave in the dark all the time, you want to go out the sunshine. And I don't blame it. And the -- the people who in the -- in the Holocaust organization, they said, "We don't want to hear problems, we want to have good times." Because we cannot dwell on it, because more you dwell on it, more miserable you going to get.

Q: And yet, you think if you forget it completely, then you're liable to do it again.

A: No, you cannot forget it. That's a -- it's part of my nature, it's -- becomes part of my nature, it's part of me. It's here. It's -- wakes me up. Everywhere I look, I have it. Made a statues of the -- a matter -- ma -- matter of fact, that's -- my sister [indecipherable]

"That's enough of those paintings."

Q: So you have to kind of find a balance between --

A: It's a -- it's a --

Q: -- remembering it, and not dwelling on it.

A: -- it's a -- how emotional I feel about it. Ab -- fo -- for all those years, for years and years, I was thinking, you know, my mother would be 70 years old, and my father would be 71 years old, and my mother would be 80 years old, and my father would be 81 years old. Now they over a hundred. So, it's all of a sudden I let go of them. Even if they would be alive, they wouldn't be alive now. So I let go of them, finally I let go of them. For all those years, I couldn't let go of them. [inaudible] Now they gone. [indecipherable] alive.

Q: Going back to your early -- early years in the United States -- do you want to take a break?

A: No, I'm fine [indecipherable] Would you like some soda?

Q: When you first came to the United States, and then, in those first years, we talked a little bit about your growing -- how you slowly became interested in political things. I'm wondering about your awareness of -- of some of the major political event -- and social

events that were happening, say in the 1950's, and 1960's. Were you aware o-of, or did you take a particular interest in -- in anything such as McCarthyism, or the Civil Rights Movement, or anything?

A: I -- I -- I found that McCarthyism was a bad -- a dark st -- dark page of American history. A matter of fact, I was a lover of -- still is a lover of Harry Truman. Now everybody's fashionable to think him as a great president. But I thought of Harry Truman a great president before h-he became fashionable to be -- be-became popular. I think the McCarthy area, if they wouldn't have television, if this wouldn't be exposed, it wouldn't be so prominent in the public eye. I think we gave him an exposure which he did not deserve. And matter of fact, the one whom I'm mostly angry against, was President Eisenhower, because they ask him to r-raise an opinion about John McCarthy, he says he wouldn't honor him to mention his name, which I think was terrible, til we have a -- an attorney by the name of Welch -- think his name was Welch, where he finally said on television, "Senator, don't you have any shame?" And there was finally, after this statement, there was a senator, I think McGovern, but Mc-something, he finally opened his mouth. Til then, he was quiet. Rory Cohn was the s -- the -- the king of the century at that time. Him and Mr. Shy, who were the underling of mister -- Mr. McCarthy. And matter of fact, I was -- I just finished his biography just -- not -- just finished it. [indecipherable] He says in thas he had a int -- homosexual encounter with general -- with -- with Edgar Hoover, and Cardinal Spellman. So if you're [indecipherable] you

think of Hoover, him being in a girdle, and long stockings, it's [indecipherable] looks quite [indecipherable]. So, and th-they were the one who was -- governed our country. And I feel if not television exposure, McCarthyism would not get these ugly colors in American history.

Q: What did you like about Truman?

A: A no nonsense Truman. He was a no nonsense Truman. Through the [indecipherable] he took out the -- the rail -- was it -- I think it was a railroad strike, he took out the unions. I think it was a railroad strike. He was a no nonsense ru -- he shot from the hip. He was protective of his daughter, who allegedly had the bi -- she was a singer, which somebody criticized -- criticized her for bad voice, and he has a pres -- not as a president, he said -- he said it as a father, I -- I -- I think it was -- wa -- an honest man. He was honest man. Through this, his wife was anti-Semitic. Because he had a partner, a Jew by the name of Jacobs, who was in the haberdashery store, they went Chapter 11, or they went bankrupt, which they paid back aw -- everything. And Bess Truman never allowed a Jew to walk into her house. But this how it was, so everybody knew where Bess Truman stood, but he was still a wonderful president, I think one of the honest one. Unfortunately, he was pushed into the job overnight, and I think if he would have a little bit more experience, the Potsdam treaty would not be so advantageous to the Russians, as it was disadvantageous to the -- to the Americans, because when they came to Prague -- before

Prague, and even my city of Teplice, they wouldn't move further til the Russians occupied even Berlin. Otherwise we would have been in Berlin before them.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is tape number three, side A, of an interview with Beno Helmer. What happened after your -- your job with S. Klein department stores? How long did you stay with them?

A: S. Klein department store, I -- I started in the receiving department, after this I became manager of the concession -- of the shoe department. And, I thought, well, good job, I had a good job, I finally made almost a hundred dollars a week, which was almost a hundred dollars a week. Moved to New Jersey, and was married at that time, and by then I had the opportunity to buy a liquor store. A uncle of my wife passed on, and I bought the liquor store, through complications with the families. Anyways, I bought the liquor store, and I had the liquor store for quite number of years, til I was stabbed, and I was held up, and that was after 20 some odd years in the liquor store. So I finally sold it, and retired at age 53.

Q: Say more about that incident. What happened?

A: Somebody came into the store, and just by coincident, was a lunch time. I had two people, clerks. One of them went to -- getting our sandwiches, other one was a delivery. A young man walks in, and he wants -- which I knew, you -- a yo -- a young man which I knew from the neighborhood. Matter of fact, his father was a deacon in the church, and he was a choirboy in the church. And he wanted to buy a -- something for his girlfriend. And he asked me to giftwrap the bottle for his girlfriend. He was 20 -- 22 years old. So after I wrapped it, he pulled out the long knife, and he says, "It's hold-up." I said to him,

“If I go, you go with me.” And I wrestled him. No, first he stabbed me, and then I wrestled him. And I grabbed the knife by the blade, and I cut my tendon in this finger, this rees -- my pinkie. From the middle joint up is stiff, because they had to sew it together. And we caught him. He was out of the jail before I got out of the hospital. And the judge calls me, and tells me, “You know the father is a deacon in the church, and he’s in -- a choirboy, what do you think is a,” -- secretary of the -- of the judge, “what do you think is a fair sentence?” I was perplexed, absolutely perplexed. So I said the most stupidest thing, I said, “What the good judge feels in his heart should be a fair sentence.” So anyways, he got out.

Q: What -- did that make you bitter at all?

A: No. Scared. After this I became scared. Not long after this, it was a Friday night, and the -- the -- that -- and this was before closing time. I [indecipherable] two clerks, one of them goes on delivery, other one stays there, and I was held up. Pushed in the back door - - back cabinet, and a woman and two men held me up with a gun. And he -- m-my co-worker l-l-l Larfim, had a ring, and he said, “Give me the ring.” And he says no, so she slapped him. I says, “Goddammit, give them the ring, I mean life is more important.” Anyways, we caught her. She spoke a pretty good English. After this, we took her to the court, she didn’t speak English, she only spoke Spanish. I don’t know what happened with the case. Happened with the case, nothing.

Q: You have clearly had more than -- than one could even imagine, of negative experience.

A: My share -- my share of excitement. No, it's not negative, a share of excitement. I had enough in this lifetime, share of excitement, for no -- for 10 lifetimes. Yeah, nothing went placid, nothing went easy. Now it finally -- it's finally -- you know, it's pretty good now, now it's placid, now it's wonderful.

Q: But you still have -- so you have an opti --

A: I'm laughing about it. Yes, yes, be positive about it. I mean, if you dwell on it, you -- if -- if -- if I start [indecipherable] amount of negativism, I don't get out of bed in the morning. Going to cover myself over the head, because the world is black. But the world isn't black. Look at this, it's gorgeous, it's terrific, I have something to live for. I have wonderful children, I have a wonderful friend, wonderful grandchildren, to -- what else can you ask for? Life is gorgeous. That's the reason I think my interview is a positive interview, nothing negative about it. Nothing negative.

Q: What happened after -- after that incident, and you -- you got out of the business?

A: Finally -- finally, I s -- I -- I went to the -- went out of business, because my son said, "Dad, you don't want they should carry you out feet first." So I went out of business, and you know, it's -- hanging around wasn't too good an idea, playing golf, whatever it was. So -- so I got myself a job, and became a salesman for a -- for a wholesaler of champagne and liquor out of -- matter of fact, he asked me if I want to get the salary, I said, "No,

give me a commission.” So I did very, very well. Matter of fact, if I got the big, big account, he took it away from me. I got the first m -- they -- the company first million dollar account, I got it, he took it away. He says, “You don’t like it, you can quit.”

Anyways, after two years, we decided we coming down to Florida. We already had the place in Florida, but used to rent it. So, I was 62 years old, so I said, “That’s enough, let’s pack it in.” So we came down here, and after this I got divorce.

Q: I was curious, if you would say a little bit more about your -- the class that you took with Anna Freud, and what you were doing?

A: Anna Freud? We di -- ch -- Anna Freud was a negative personality I’ve heard. She had the homosexual tendencies, was madly in love with her father, had re-occurring dreams about being spanked by him. And I’ll tell you, I don’t know if this [indecipherable] because his-historic-wise, we don’t know homosexual [indecipherable] lesbianism, where it’s come from. We have no proof. This manifests itself somehow, because we -- we take a test of twins, identical twins, growing up in a family, the same milieu, one of them become homosexual, and the other one doesn’t. So we don’t know if that has anything to do with jeans, with nothing. Anyway, she was. And I took classes with it, and I tried to do a little bit for the -- as I said, with the abused women, in the ho -- in the Lubovitcher. And -- but I had to make a living, and the liquor store was the best opportunity to make a living, which I did quite well, bought a house. First house was, I

think 130 dollars was the insurance, and -- and mortgage, and everything else, and I didn't g -- sleep nights, didn't know if I gonna make it.

Q: So she was -- was she teaching the class that you took?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: What -- what was the course?

A: Psychology. [indecipherable]

Q: So you -- it sou -- I mean, you -- you were mentioning a little earlier, and maybe we should get this on -- oh, w-we did get this on tape, all the different classes that you're taking now.

A: Yes.

Q: And it sounds as if you have a really broad range of interests.

A: I don't know anything, but I know a little bit of everything, somehow, seem like.

Because it -- I -- I go -- I'm interested in a class in which I take, I'm interested in it, and I don't go just as an observer. I -- I -- I make a point to know what they are talking about.

And if they talk some which I don't know, I make a point of looking it up. So I don't just

go in and they said, you know this talk x, y, z, and I go out, the next week going be there

is something else. I make a point to know what they are talking about. So that's the

reason I enjoyed it, it's -- it's -- at least it's a little research I do at the same time. And

I'm an ardent reader. I don't read novels, I think the last novel I read was I don't know

what. I read history and biographies. So, a matter of fact, now I'm reading -- I read two

books at the same time, by the way, because I've got -- because it's -- most of them are dry books, so I -- I read -- one of them has to do -- I'm reading now the Leaman family. No, no, I read the Warburg family, and the other one is "The Atomic Secret of Israel." Interesting books.

Q: Do you ever read about the Holocaust?

A: I have books on 'em, but I don't read them. Because my Holocaust was my Holocaust alone. It was my Holocaust, and other people's Holocaust is their Holocaust. It was not an universal Holocaust, it was universal plus individual Holocaust. What I went through, nobody went through. What they went through, I didn't go through. So my Holocaust was being -- seeing this child destroyed, throwing -- ripping up a train, or -- or sighing -- saying to this German there is a huntbigrum, or this fellow says, Par shiva zhija, and going finally after -- after the war, when millions are destroyed, going to Poland, and see they destroying those poor remnants o-o-o-of a -- miniscule remnants of Judaism, and they killing us. Matter of fact, I am against that, too, the March for the Living. I'm all for it. March for the living. But I'm against it to go to Poland. Matter of fact, I give to holocaust -- I belong here, and I quite an active member, in a -- in the Holocaust thing, and I give charity, but I always excluding -- excluding, repeat it, excluding to giving for the March of the Living, if it goes to Poland. I don't go there, cause I found out that they behaved during the war, and after the war, worse than the Germans, worse than the

Germans. They did it for sheer -- sheer hate, without reason what it was. And they didn't do it because they followed orders, that was emotionally on their own part.

Q: In your videotaped interview, you mentioned some work that you were doing, I don't know if you're doing it any more, with geriatrics, with elderly people.

A: I u -- I u -- yes, I did geriatrics with elder people, except, since I had my triple bypass, some of the wheelchair people there, they were stubborn, they used to drag their feet. So it was a very hard thing for me to do, so the doctor advised me not to do so. I did -- I -- I volunteered in a canc -- cancer ward in hospital, which -- it's quite, quite depressing. And after I went through all this operations, I don't want to -- I stay away from it. So I don't do any volunteer for this. Nei -- nei -- nor the hospital, nor the geriatrics.

Q: Tell me more about your work with -- now you work with mentally disturbed --

A: No, no, no, the mentally challenged, it's a difference, mentally challenged. It -- organization which is called Habilitation, which is a charitable organization, make a card parties, trips, cruises, what -- everything else. So we give money to the -- to there. So my -- my involvement's only as becau -- it's -- it's -- it's -- it's strictly financially. Strictly financially, that's all that I am doing. Because they -- the organization, the supervision of state, or whatever it is, so they have supervision there, so it's very little you can do for them, the only thing you can do it collect money, or try to raise money. So I became a lifetime member.

Q: Was charity work -- was giving to charity always important?

A: Char -- was -- oh yes, was -- let me tell you something about my father, about charity. I don't remember eating with -- in Europe, the main meal is lunchtime. Maybe have it a little reversed, the main meal is lunchtime, our lunchtime is our suppertime. So the main meal is -- is lunchtime. I don't remember that I had dinner with my parents alone. This means, my brother, my sister and I, and my parents. We always had two people -- two students, who couldn't afford it, eat dinner with us -- or lunch which -- with us. Never remember them eat -- we ate by ourselves. Yes, the evening meal, but not lunchtime meal. Always have people. My father always emphasized charity. I don't know if I told you in the tape this -- my mother gave hundred thousand, or 10 thousand, lot of money to the Hungarian government when she tried to free my father, and Minister Beck. I told the story, so you know it, yeah.

Q: So it's because of that background, you think, that you became -- you became --

A: You have to give, you have to give, you have to give. My father said, "Comes a time you have to pay back," and I'm paying back. I'm paying back, I drive the people -- I drive -- we have here people are -- just supplementing income, whatever it is, so they drive people to the airports, or drive them to doctors. They're being compensated for it. My friends, I drive for free. E-Exception, if they had somebody who drove them for money, I don't drive them. I tell the other -- let them use the other fellow, who has to make a living. So I don't want to take his livelihood away, so whoever you had, let him take you. But if they had nobody, I drive them for -- you know, I do it gratis, I don't

mind. But I wouldn't take it -- anybody to the airport, or shopping if he gets -- if they had someb -- let's say they have George, or whatever they had, and they pay George, so I don't want to take his job away, or whatever he makes.

Q: But in a way, what's striking to me is that it seems like you could have just said what -
- well, my father was talking about paying back, and those were different times, and I've seen how -- I don't -- I've suffered so much, what do I have to pay back for? But you haven't taken that attitude.

A: I tell you, th-there's a hardest word in the English language is no. There's the hardest word of English language, and I cannot say it. I cannot say it. It's [indecipherable]
unfortunate I have two dinner appointment, because I couldn't say no to one. Thanks to you I gotta cancel one. I cannot say no. Get it? Matter of fact, I'm doing something new now. I -- in -- I'm installing telephones in all my friends bathrooms. A matter of fact, the phone is not normal height, it's quite low, because I lost my best friend, I lost in the bathroom. If he would had have a telephone, he maybe would have been alive yet. And so I'm installing telephones low, so in case you're on the floor, you can reach the phone. And since we getting on in age, you never know if we'd need it. So this became -- I'm -- I'm a telephone installer, too.

Q: Let me ask you something, going back a little bit, I -- I wanted to touch on you -- you told a funny story in your video interview about watching amer -- people in the U.S. army playing baseball.

A: Oh, baseball, yes.

Q: And -- and I just wondered, you know, whether you found American culture in general to be a little bit similar to that, to just a lot of things that seem silly, or trivial, or -
-

A: Oh well, since then I understand bells -- baseball, and I still found it extremely -- no logic to me. First time I saw them is I walked out from eating, the -- I refused to eat the ki-kitchen -- the French kitchen thing. So I went to a camp, I -- a-at that time I -- I told you, I took somebody's shoes. So there was a cook cooking -- did I s -- about throwing the food to the dog? Anyway, the first time I see people playing gloves with a ball, with a stick, and I found it extremely funny. I mean, look at these adults, if you -- I grew up in a culture of soccer. You play it for 90 minutes of play, at least there's a sportsman. Coming to America, I found the same thing. The fellow gets millions of dollars paid, he has a -- a pinch hitter. He's allowed three balls, or four balls, three mistakes, and they getting millions of dollars. And after millions of dollars, they going on strike for -- for trillions. And we calling it sports. I mean, when do we gonna wake up and say, you know it's not a sport at all, it's a business. And we are paying for this big -- and big business getting millions of dollars. And some of them behave off the field deplorably. So I -- I don't watch baseball. Maybe sometime I just take a sneak if it's the playoffs, but otherwise I don't watch it [indecipherable]. So, I don't want to be part of this big business conglomerate. And I still find it silly. The fellow is the sport -- he's a pinch hitter, he's a

pinch thrower. He gets four balls, I mean, not even the first one he throws, he is allowed to make three mistakes. And hockey, I used to watch hockey, but it makes me violent. So the only one that sometime I sneak is at least it's one on one is -- is -- doesn't appr -- doesn't approve my philosophy, i-is boxing, once in awhile. And this is not much kinder sports than it is. But all rough, rough. I've never been s-sports. I've n-never been a sports follower. I belong to the Maccabi, to the Zionist organization in Teplice, and I was a -- quite a good athlete there. Matter of fact, I was a good runner, and -- and -- and a climber, too. By the way, I was a mountain climber in college. Did I ever tell the story about that? I was a mountain climber, and I choose it. I was quite, quite good mountain climbing. On a Sunday we going mountain climbing, the three of us, we go climbing, we did quite steep a cliff. I don't know what happened, I panicked. I absolutely panicked, and I was pass -- plat -- placed against the wall, and I hollered, "Mama, Mama." You laughing? They were laughing. They all thought this was a big joke. Who do you call, you call your mother. So I called, couldn't call anything else. I called mama. They thought it was a joke, and they let me staying there, til, to this day, if I is -- my sister is on the 28th floor. I cannot go on the balcony. My feet shake. If I see a movie, cli -- mountain climbing, my feet shake. Only because of this thing, because I hollered mama. And that's true, I hollered mama. And this happened to me.

Q: I wanted to ask you another kind of general question about -- in recent years in -- in the United States, there's been more and more awareness in the public sphere about the

Holocaust, and more and more films made, and books written, and -- and do you feel that that -- that -- how do you feel about that, in general?

A: I am angry, and much against it. This became commercialized. The Italian film, the Holocaust, I would re-refuse to see it --

Q: "Life is Beautiful?"

A: -- because -- "Life is Beautiful." For simple reason. I only saw the preview. He marched with his leg raised behind the German army. This would never happen. I mean, this is a very, very serious subject. Don't trivialize it. He travel -- trivializing it. Same thing, the liar, whatever his name is, there's another picture, this picture they made about the liar. I don't -- the Holocaust is a serious subject. There's six million serious people died. So I'm -- I'm against it, don't trivialize it. It's -- and let's keep it seriously, and let's give it the homage it's deserves. But don't make fun of it.

Q: Do you respect any of the -- of the productions that have been made that treat the Holocaust in a fictional way?

A: No, I -- I found Schindler's List, which I found very moving, I found it very moving. And I do -- other picture I didn't see -- I didn't see them. I don't see the Holocaust -- I -- I don't -- I mer -- I don't want to be hit over the head with it again. It's enough, it's enough. Life has to go on. Yesterday was yesterday. Don't forget it, preach it, talk about it, which I don't know, I'm not very optimistic about it, but don't -- don't -- don't -- don't

-- I don't want to see it. I don't want to see it. It's fi -- you're talking about 50 years. Two generations. Two generations.

Q: I was wondering if you have any sense of an -- around when it was that you were deported from Łódź to Auschwitz.

A: Yes. August -- August the third, 1944. I went b-back to ausch -- to -- to the Łódź ghetto in August the first or the second, because Rainia told me thas my father was very sick. She knew wi -- she had the contact. I'm sure that I was not the only one who left from the Łódź ghetto. So I went back to see my father, and he looked lousy, he looked very, very bad, and -- and matter of fact, my mother said, "He looks better than you think," because she put rouge on his cheek. And I brought back vials of glucose, because I [indecipherable] and I brought some bread, or two breads with me. Because, as a German, at least I had breads. And I think it was the day before, and after this they rounded up the s -- the whole street there. It was Fronchy skunsky ooleetsa, 28, and I was one of them shi-shipped to -- to Auschwitz. And we got to see -- had the honor to see Mr. Mengele.

Q: You've told us --

A: After two days -- not -- on a train, whatever it was.

Q: Another question, from the time that you were in -- in Auschwitz, you told us -- told us about the German commander -- commandant, who was a-at your barrack in Auschwitz, and how he made you his cook.

A: Yes, knocked my tooth out. Did I tell you?

Q: And he knocked your tooth out, yeah.

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah, di-did you know -- remember his name?

A: No. He had a Polish sounding -- funny thing, he had a Polish sounding name, and the fellow I was looked in as a Nazi in -- in the British zone, he had a Polish sounding name. No, but his -- I don't know if I said it, his biggest accomplishment in his life was that he raped a 80 somewhat year old woman against the tree. He was in love with the Gypsies. I got there August the fourth, or the fifth. In July of the same year, they -- they deported and killed all the Gypsies. He was in love with a Gypsy lady, so he used to sleep with her dress on -- on, or next to him, he slept with her. The fellow who was helping me cook, I don't know -- I don't know anything about cooking, and I don't know -- less about it now. But he liked it sour, so when I made him soup, that's the only thing we had, potatoes and water, whatever, vegetable soup, I used to put a spoonful of vinegar in it. And this vinegar, he thought this was the best soup I ever made, and the only thing is, because I put vinegar in it. Funny thing, I just spoke about it to somebody. The assistant was an -- a Jewish doctor from America, American doctor -- dermatologist. He [indecipherable] was he left Germany, whatever it was, and went to America, came to visit somebody, boom, they caught him, he went to Theresienstadt, from Theresienstadt he was in Auschwitz. His speciality was warts. People he cured were -- people with warts, so -- I don't know how

true it is, but what he told me is, when people used to come with it's warts, he felt it was eradicated psychologically. So he used to give them a pill. He says, "If you take this pill, and if you urinate blue, the wart is helping." So he gave them a placebo which didn't do - - no, the urine never turned to blue. So after one time, after second time, he came, no. Third time he gave them some kind of pill where the -- the urine turns blue. He says, "Oh, it's helping." After few treatments, the warts went away. So he was my assistant, that wasn't much older than I was. And, as I said -- so this why -- I went to look, I had a girlfriend that time, and I was looking for anybody. I knew it wasn't my brother, because he was a man. So I was looking for my sister. So I volunteered between my cooking, and getting bi -- hit on my he -- on my behind, I joined -- people used to take out the feces from -- from the -- from the toilets. You know, barracks they [indecipherable] but they had no sewer system, just went to the big pit, and later you had to take it out with spoons, and put it in a big thing, and later dump it, and they used it for fertilizing the vegetables. So I joined one of those things, so I went into the women's camp, to look for my sister, and my -- which I didn't -- never expected, excuse me -- never expected to see, and the -- and the same thing my ex-girlfriend. Never found anybody.

Q: Were you ever given a number at Auschwitz?

A: No, it -- by that time this was overwhelmingly a lot of people came in. I know my number, 64641, but that's -- that's all what I knew.

Q: 64641?

A: Yeah. And that's all what I knew. And finally this semd -- I went to Ravensbrück, I went to -- to Buchenwald. Buchenwald I met Mrs. Rothchild. Did I tell you this story?

Q: Yeah, that -- you mentioned her.

A: And I met -- met the prime minister of Austria -- ex-prime minister of Austria, I met him there. And this was the first time I got a bath, actually, I took a bath. By then I befriended Monyek Ravel, and we took a water fountain, we took a first bath there.

Q: Did you ever visit Israel?

A: Sure, yes. Never went to Yad Vashem. I went to the -- I walked down to the Avenue of the Righteous, do everything, but I cannot walk into Yad Vashem. Can't make it.

Q: Do you have a strong feeling about the importance of there being a Jewish state?

A: Yes. Except that being destroyed within self. They're destroyed within self. I think the problem is this, the parliamentary system doesn't work as well as a Republican system what we have here. Because coming of -- with getting a coalition, and -- and you don't vote for a man, you vote for a party. The party puts out candidate x,y,z, and if this party wins, x,y,z gets into the office. So the party is the one who picks the office, regardless what qualicatio -- what qualification you think he has, is inconsequential, because the party feels, so long it's -- does a good for the party. Where we here, we have a parliamentary s -- a -- a Republican system, we p -- we pick the man. S -- Ben-Gurion was actually -- the Ben-Gurion wanted this system, except Chaim Weissman was a Anglophile, he love angla -- England. So we have this system. Same thing, otherwise he

would -- Ben-Gurion wanted the -- we sh -- bi -- they should speak Hebrew, Weissman wanted they should speak English.

Q: Were the event -- the seminal events in Israeli history important to you? The -- did you -- when the six day war was happening, were you --

A: Oh, I study -- I studied history, so I still do -- I still do now. I still study Israel history [indecipherable] everybody's different view. I just fitting -- aba -- yo -- I just finished Chaim -- Chaim be -- gur -- Ben-Gurion's history of the Jews, and I just finished Eba Evens, which is more culturally, more intellectually, and more in detailed written the history of the Jews. I mean, the suffering is -- is through milleniums. It's amazing they survived so long. It's amazing. It's the only thing, in my philosophy it's because they did not let them assimilate. Now -- now is the destruction of Judaism. Why? Because they let us assimilate. They going [indecipherable] let -- we can approach any culture we want to, and we have the finest example, 51 percent of our Jewish marriages are intermarriages. 51 percent. And a big percentage is, if the boy marries a Christian girl, the family stays Christian. If the j-jew -- the girl is Jewish, there's a par -- bigger possibility that the family stays Jewish. So it's only because through assimilation. Years ago, the -- we had to stay Jewish, because they put us in ghettos, they put us in towns, and they didn't let us assimilate. We have famous, famous people to change their religion because they thought they going to assimilate, but it's not true.

Q: Does it -- are you thin --

A: [indecipherable] Marler, one of the famous, fine musician, became a Christian because he -- it didn't help, by the way. He became the [indecipherable] of -- of New York filomec, but they still call him the Jew. Karl Marx. We have a lot of famous Jews. [indecipherable] Heinich Hiner. He said -- Heinich Hiner said he doesn't want a ca -- he doesn't want to be a Jew because he carried the world's pain in his soul. So there's the reason he didn't want to be.

Q: Does it upset you, that assimilation?

A: Not at all. Not at all. It's only a -- a -- upset me in one point, it's this -- it's the nuclear of this -- little nuclear of Judaism going to disappear. And as I said, Judaism is -- is the soul of the people, I mean, as I said. But hen -- Heini Hiner said, he says, "Judaism carry the soul." And that's what it is. And now we have interfight, we have fight. I mean, minute we got out of the ghetto, you have also -- look how many different rel -- Judaism we have, five of them, I think. Conservative, Orthodox, and [indecipherable] Orthodox, 700 different million -- different groups. And the same thing is -- i-it's -- the va -- Judaism is not exclusive. Martin Luther King kri -- killed Christianity. Look how many different Christian denomination, before we had only one. So, we spreading it, and in -- in generations, going to disappear. Maybe not in hundred years, 200 years, but it eventually has to.

Q: Did you mean Martin Luther, or Martin Luther King?

A: Martin Luther. I said Martin Luther King?

Q: Yeah.

A: No, Martin Luther.

Q: Okay.

A: No, Martin Luther, Martin Luther. That's who I meant, yes.

Q: Let's see. Did you -- do you remember the -- I -- just a couple of minor things. Does y
-- do you remember the name of the camp where you went after you were in Lud-

Ludwig's --

A: I was [indecipherable] Ludwig's loost.

Q: Loost.

A: I got freed. This was a camp -- I was on a transport to go to Sweden, I don't know if I
said it, did I [indecipherable]

Q: Yeah.

A: Seemed like it's fell through with this, I think it had to do something for Eichmann,
because it had to do an exchange of trucks, and a p -- and a -- a Swiss passport for -- for
him, or for whatever it is. So this was a camp, they practiced cannibalism. This was a
camp -- I mean, laying -- we laid on -- on wet sand.

Q: This is -- I'm sorry, go ahead.

A: This was on wet sand we laid. A camp before this, we s -- as I said, we had to go --
board a transport to go to Sweden. So since I spoke German, and -- so I became the
fellow who gave out Red Cross packages. Except if we -- it were, I think two or 300

people. Before we gave them the packages, I had to go into the German barracks, and open every package and take out the chocolate for the Germans, and give out the package without it. So I fi -- I've give them the chus -- chus -- so I had some chocolates also in my pocket, and so Monyek Ravel and I, we shared the chocolates. So had some in the pockets, but [indecipherable] ran out, so when we traveled from the last camp to Ludwig's loost, we had no water, we -- o-open cattle cars. So it's --was ho -- very, very dry, no water.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

A: -- and literally cannibals, they were eating whatever flesh was there the [indecipherable] because there was no food, was no food. The war was going to end, and we were starving, for starving. So the other side of the camp, there was a -- a fence, and a -- a -- metal f -- not a metal fence, a wit -- barbed wires fence, and the other side was a sugar mill. Not from -- sugar mill made out of beets, not of sugar cane, beets. Now, let me emphasize, the German didn't know what was going on, so if the fa -- if the factory worker worked in the sugar mill, he saw the camp is being built, and they saw wh-what was going on. Anyways, I -- I tied up my pants on the bottom, both my -- my legs, by my ankle, and I smuggled myself out. Did I tell you this story? And I beat -- I -- I robbed a [indecipherable] of -- of it's sugar beets. Which was, by the way, a disservice. I saved their life, or dis -- didn't save their life, because they were eating the sugar beet -- not

only they, Bernard, too, and Monyek Ravel. Whatever, the group was eating it too. Except some of them, the expansion of the stomach of the sugar beets, killed them. The intentions were good, the patient died. I don't know how many, or whatever this, but it was terrible, terrible cramps. Terrible, terrible cramps. Diarrhea, it was just running up, and we had to lay in it, and we had to sleep in it. And we [indecipherable] the wet sand, because we had no -- no roof, no roof, nothing.

Q: Did you have anything else to eat while you were there?

A: I'm here, so I must had something eat, but seemed like it didn't leave ana -- much impression, because I -- we ate at the shka -- I -- I -- I -- I -- I risked my life. Wasn't as much as a risk for anybody else, but no altruistic, it was as -- as selfish as it could been also, because I wanted to eat, too. But I saw the heaps of -- of beets there. So that's what I stole.

Q: Okay.

A: And the beating was the worst beating was the day I was liberated. Day was -- o -- this was it, but it's most biggest prob-problem was the fellow with the shu -- with the water pill. Couldn't forget it. And right after the war, I mean, going back, allegedly to Poland, is a -- the -- the -- the transport, because I found out from Poland it's going to be easier to go to Teplice. I s -- those -- hearing those women being raped, I shall never forget it. And this left me immediately a terrible feeling vis à vis the Russians. Terrible feeling with the -- with the Russians. Cause I feel, if -- if -- if they're being raped, and it's happening,

where was at least one decent soul? Those women, I mean, they were not -- not Holocaust survivors, they were forced laborers. I mean, they were not concentration ca -- not Jewish girls, they Polish forced laborers. What a -- what -- regardless what they was, it -- the husband staying outside, and they hear this cries, and this thing, they [indecipherable]. Where was one -- one upriding Russian citizen, or something, that's -- you know, it's, "What the hell are you doing here?" Nothing. So when the Russian gave me the [indecipherable] maybe this was psychological, I always felt that might as well leave. Anyway, I went back to Teplice now in March, you can see -- you can see the remnants of Ru-Russians culture there's a -- you know, they didn't let m -- develop. Finally, now, they -- they developing independence, and they don't know how to handle it yet.

Q: Is there anything else that you want to say, that I have overlooked asking you?

A: I can't think of anything else. I can't think it was -- you were very kind to me. That's - - you didn't make me suffer too mu -- too much. But I feel I exposed my soul, which I'm usually a private person, I don't do it too well, and I don't like to do it. So, it was a little rough.

Q: I think you did a -- I think you did a very, very good job, and I --

A: Thank you very much.

Q: -- I thank you very much. Okay, we're -- we're going to look at some of the art that -- that Mr. Helmer has created.

A: This is a kaleidoscope. If you notice this, the frame is in, and there's an eye looking out, and you have hundreds and hundreds of different colors in a kaleidoscope. Second picture is, "Chaos." This is called "Chaos," because there is no rhyme or reason, but there's a lot of colors in it. The next --

Q: It looks like a Jackson Pollack painting.

A: It just looks like Jackson Pollack is right, and I did it through dripping method. Next one is called, "The Red Moon."

Q: "Red Moon," that's -- that's --

A: Molieriani. [indecipherable] from Molieriani. This one here is -- is a collage, it's called, "Lost," it's a map. So I -- my childre -- "Lost," is a stop sign, and speed sign, and my children's name on it, and it's towns where they come from, and the town where I came from.

Q: An-And how do you -- what -- do you sit down and come up with the i -- these ideas, or do they just come to you, or how do you --

A: No, no, no, I -- I -- It's -- I've -- I've -- if I have no idea, I don't do it. I start to do something, I have a canvas, and -- blank canvas, I started to do ch -- to do with a pencil marking, but I put it away, it's just -- I did it mechanically. It wasn't emotion, I did it mechanical, so I gave it up. I don't know what I gonna do. Next is a pin -- a painting, a big one, by Mo-Morris Katz -- Manny Katz -- Morris Katz -- Morris Katz. It's a scene of a -- of a ti -- some kind of pastoral shi -- scene. Next one, the corner, is Ross. Ross is the

painter if you -- on television as an artist, he p -- just passed on ri -- recently. Has a big, bushy hair, his name is Ross, who teaches you how to paint. That's him. That's Ross.

This next painting is here, it's called, "The Black Hole."

Q: And this is one of your paintings?

A: My painting. This called, "The Black Hole."

Q: D-Do they -- when you -- so you come up with the idea of doing this painting, "The Black Hole."

A: Sure, yes.

Q: D -- i -- it -- does it symbolize something for you, or is it just --

A: I-It symbol -- "The Black Hole," symbolizes how small we are. How s -- ab-absolute small we are in -- in -- in -- according what be tr -- do now, we know, whatever this whole universe, whatever we here, can be suppressed, or depressed so small, that it can fit on a tablespoon. One little tablespoon, and this fits into the Black Hole.

Q: Okay, so maybe just to describe what's around it.

A: It -- it -- no, I'm not di -- whatever I feel about it is because i -- I'm a [indecipherable] with a certain creations. So there had to be a -- even an agnostic. Thank God I'm not agnostic. Sounds so ludicrous, which this how it is. But I feel there was a beginning, and if there was a be-beginning, what created it? And that's what I'm not sure with that. This one here is -- I usually write what it is [indecipherable] called "The Big Bang." Here's

“The Big Bang.” This I [indecipherable] is a creation, the universe c -- was created in one split, multi-second. And this is a big bang.

Q: Now, I’m just going to describe it so we --

A: Yes, yes.

Q: -- get some idea of what it looks like.

A: Yes.

Q: It’s just m -- a lot of different colors, maybe 20 or 30, and -- and dripped, and --

A: Emanates from the center.

Q: -- yeah, em-emanating from the center. Kind of -- we -- and the -- and “The Black Hole,” one is, the black hole is kind of surrounded by -- by a big explosion of colors, as well. I-Is color important to you?

A: Yes, yes, I love colors.

Q: I mean, walking into your house --

A: I love colors. I love colors, I -- colors is life. Color is life. I love colors, and I love music. I never walk in this house without what I’ve called noise. I always have to have music, classical, I’m strictly classical. I don’t walk in, I don’t get up in the morning without noise, I don’t go to sleep without noise. I mean, if you shut off the tape, there’s -- always have the noise, I have speakers all over the house. And I love noise.

Q: Okay, moving on to --

A: There's a -- a statue which I -- this is one which I did myself. It's called a -- "The Tower of Babel," which is wood and papier maché.

Q: And -- and the -- the little colored balls that are surrounding the tower --

A: Is different languages.

Q: -- represent different languages.

A: That's wa -- different languages. The table here, the -- I designed it.

Q: Oh.

A: I design furniture too, by the way. Yes, as a hobby I enjoy. And [inaudible] thing is -- this is by -- I got it from the Vincent Price collection, there's an Italian painter. It's a scene, children playing against the wall.

Q: That looks kind of surreal, almost.

A: Yes, yes, this looks surreal.

Q: Children in -- in this big, gray space, with graffiti against the wall.

A: Next one is by a man by the name of Calhoun, who paints -- who teaches prisoners how to paint, and he does prison scenes. This is quite a big painting of a black man sitting on a chair.

Q: And you mentioned a little earlier that you -- you go to thrift stores to buy a lot of these.

A: I go -- some of them -- some of them, not lot of them. Not lot of -- you can't find them. This is a painting by Fromault. I don't like water scenes, so this is a little bit of

water. This is Fromault. His wife is a much more pronoun -- much more recognized painter. This I got [inaudible] yes, yes.

Q: The scene with a -- a vase, and a view out behind it. That's a nice one.

A: Yeah. This is more -- Morris Katz, two more for Morris Katz, which is written up in the "Guinness Book of ret -- Record," as a most prolific painter. He did, I think -- every three minutes, he makes a painting. [inaudible]

Q: You don't have to -- I mean, if you want to sho -- talk about every painting in the house, that's fine, but -- but we could just focus on your paint -- your paintings, if you --

A: Oh [indecipherable] my paintings [inaudible]. In my bedroom, there's a -- there's a painting, my painting, is a -- a scene of window being opened towards the ocean, with a vase on the windowsill, and the petals are falling off. There's the one which I did here.

Q: And does this one have a symbolism for you?

A: No, nothing at all, nothing. Just to prove myself I can do [indecipherable] paintings, too. That's what it is. Now here, is nothing. Let's go over here to the den, there's a painting. I did four paintings symbolizing the Holocaust. One of them is a blackboard, which markings of 28 lines, five, five, five, five and three. It's a crooked painting, hanging on an old piece of wood, with a h -- with a nail hook, which is dripping with blood.

Q: And -- and why is the painting crooked?

A: It crooked because I feel psychologically the preciseness of Germany was not always precise. Sometime it has been crooked. And this one time, they were crooked. Next painting is a Holocaust scene of twenty -- with a big 28 in it, which is 28 members which I lost. On -- on the bottom you can see the shower, with the gas. You can see the fence, you can see the chimney, which is spewing ashes, and blood. The 28 members, 28 faces, 27 mouths, because my mother and father spoke with one mouth, and the picture of my brother, the eyes are blank, because he didn't see the world yet. Underneath him is a sculpture which I call, "The last Kaddish," the last prayer for the death, which consists of stone sculpture, and two tears, with a -- with a Star of David, a gold star of David inside, with six different candles, which each represent a different denomination. One is blue, it's a Jewess, one is pink for the homosexual, one is red for the Communist, one is for the Gypsies, and so on. And in the middle of it there is a -- a -- a candle -- a candle glass, which is broken, which the wick is lit out -- is -- is -- is runned down to the end. And the stones are full of smoke. Next to him have a painting, it's still the 28, which is crossed out, which has 28 different colors. Each member of my family had one color. Above it, there is finally a little more optimistic painting, which is called, "Sunrise." It's an abstract, with a yellow sun, and black lines over it. I think this finishes my paintings.

Q: Thank you. What about this -- this --

A: This is a collage -- collage of -- of photographs, which I took some, and some of them I acquired, and plus with my food stamp, which has come from the Łódź ghetto, and plus

I've got -- pictures of the Jews which came back after the war, and were killed, which -- which I gave to the Holocaust Museum.

Q: How did you find those pictures?

A: Some of them I took, some of them I -- I tried to -- whoever gave me the pictures, I tried to get them. I think the most disturbing picture is that one -- is this one here, with me. This fellow here, this most disturbing picture for me, because see, if you -- if you can look at it, he's being executed, and notice -- look at his face, he says why me? Isn't it -- this is most -- terrible picture.

Q: It's a -- a line-up of six men standing against a building, and -- and the caption says, "Execution, Warsaw ghetto, 1942." And the man who Mr. Helmer is pointing out is -- is he -- pointing to -- has his hands over his chest, and -- and looks as if he's crying out.

A: Why me? Here's -- here [indecipherable] try to escape -- see this, finally escape through the underground, so they shoot him. Polish underground shoot him. Finally they escaped.

So that's what it was, so -- so when I was in the CIC, we did not trust the Polish underground, because it seems like they knew what was going on there.

Q: And -- and right below all of these -- all of these pictures, there are pictures of your grandchildren.

A: Of my grandchildren [inaudible]. It is a -- which I told you about it, the -- the lists -- what is this here? This is a list which I told you, they gave it for the Riga ghetto in -- in

November the 20th, 1941. This all the people who were sent to the gas chamber in the Riga -- Riga ghetto.

Q: There anything else you could --

A: No, I think it was -- that's it. I'm very happy. That's right. Finally I made it. I finally found peace and happiness, which is absolutely wonderful. Yes.

Q: That is wonderful. Thank you.

A: Thank you.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Conclusion of Interview