

**INTERVIEW WITH YAAKOV BERGER**

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**TRANSCENDING TRAUMA PROJECT**  
**Council for Relationships**  
**4025 Chestnut Street**  
**Philadelphia, PA 19104**

## INTERVIEW WITH YAAKOV BERGER

**INTERVIEWER:** This is an interview with a survivor. It's July 7, 1996. And your name is, sir?

**YAAKOV BERGER:** Yaakov Berger.

**INT:** Yaakov Berger. Where were you born?

**YAAKOV:** I was born in Galicia. This is a part of, when I was born, it was a part of Austria.

**INT:** Of Austria, right. But then it became part of Poland.

**YAAKOV:** Then in 1918, 1917, it became Poland. Until '39. Until '39 it was Poland.

**INT:** Okay. What was the name of your town where you were born?

**YAAKOV:** My town was a small town, Bircza.

**INT:** Do you know how to spell that?

**YAAKOV:** I know in Polish. B-I-r-c-z-a.

**INT:** Okay. Was it a big town? A shtetl?

**YAAKOV:** It was a town with about 400 families.

**INT:** Very small.

**YAAKOV:** Very small.

**INT:** Was it only Jewish people, or non-Jews also?

**YAAKOV:** No, no, no. It was mixed. It was mixed. It was Jewish, it was Polish, it was Ukrainian.

**INT:** Okay. And what year were you born, do you know?

**YAAKOV:** (Laughs) That's a big question. Because all the documents were destroyed after the war. But my father put down that I was born in 1910. So this became the official [date]. They didn't have nothing. There wasn't...until then there wasn't organized to have records with birth certificates. So this was it.

**INT:** Okay. What about brothers and sisters? How many brothers and sisters?

**YAAKOV:** We were five in the family.

**INT:** Okay. Could you tell me their names and their ages? Who was the oldest?

**YAAKOV:** The oldest was my sister Chaya. She...until the war, she left before the war. She left before the war. They left. They were on the way to go to Israel. But it wasn't, England was at that time in Palestine, and they didn't let. So people sneaked out from Poland, and somewhere, in another country where it was a little bit lenient, the restrictions. So she went to Holland.

**INT:** Holland, okay. Was she married when she left?

**YAAKOV:** No, when she left she was single. She left to Holland. And then they took manual jobs, you know. They weren't professional.

**INT:** All right. So there was Chaya. And then who was next after her?

**YAAKOV:** And then after her was next, Rochel. Rochel, somehow she came to Holland too and in Holland she married an Israeli citizen that came from Israel. And this way she came to Israel before the war.

**INT:** Before the war, okay. And who came next?

**YAAKOV:** Next was Naftali. He also was in Holland, he married in Holland. He married in Holland. And...after the war, I didn't know even, I knew that he was married. I knew even the family to whom he was married, but I didn't know no more; what happened to him we didn't know.

**INT:** You never found out.

**YAAKOV:** We found out.

**INT:** Oh, you found out. Okay.

**YAAKOV:** We found out, when I was already in America. So this is a different story completely. (Laughs)

**INT:** Okay. Well, let's continue. Who's after Naftali?

**YAAKOV:** After Naftali was Leibl, Leon. And that was it.

**INT:** And then you. You were the youngest.

**YAAKOV:** No, I was the one before the youngest.

**INT:** Okay. Who was the youngest?

**YAAKOV:** Leon was the youngest.

**INT:** Leon, okay.

**YAAKOV:** And that's it.

**INT:** Okay. So five children in the family. And what did your father do for a living?

**YAAKOV:** He was a merchant, like most of the people.

**INT:** Right. Selling...?

**YAAKOV:** Selling. He had a store, a market.

**INT:** Okay. A grocery store? He was selling food, groceries?

**YAAKOV:** Grocery store.

**INT:** And your mother, what was your mother doing?

**YAAKOV:** My mother was a beautician. Professional.

**INT:** People came to the house, and she worked in the house?

**YAAKOV:** People used to come to the house, and famous people, my mother used to go to them. And it was a small town. How many people they need a beautician? (Laughs) So the rest was...the Jewish people with the sheitels, you know.

**INT:** They didn't really need a beautician.

**YAAKOV:** No, but she made it.

**INT:** Oh, she made the sheitels also?

**YAAKOV:** She made the sheitels. She made the sheitels, and she combed them, too.

**INT:** What were your parents' names?

**YAAKOV:** My father's name was Avrom, my mother's name was Libby. And my brother Naftali, he went to Holland, and he married there. I knew, in Poland I knew that he married. Nobody went to the wedding, it was a big expense. But I knew the family, I knew to whom he married. But after the war, when I came back, I came back from the war to Poland. And I was looking around to find out. I was married, I had a child already. And...I started looking around.

So the people, the rabbi from my town, he was a relative, even. He told me, "You don't have to look. I looked already. Nobody's left. From the whole town." It was a big family. My father-in-law had nine children. And nobody left. So I stopped looking. I stopped looking.

**INT:** Let's go back to before the war, though. Let's talk about before the war a little bit. Could you tell me, how would you describe your parents' economic situation? Were they poor, were they middle class, were they comfortable?

**YAAKOV:** Sometimes. Sometimes. Both from the grocery and from my mother's work. So sometimes it was a little bit comfortable, and sometimes it was very, very, **very** poor.

**INT:** Do you remember it being difficult to get food to eat? Was it that poor sometimes, that you didn't have what to eat?

**YAAKOV:** No, no, no. I don't think so. I don't think so.

**INT:** Okay. It was never that bad.

**YAAKOV:** Maybe with the **First** World War, when we ran out from the Russians. (Laughs)

**INT:** Oh! Oh, boy, you have to tell me about that!

**YAAKOV:** When we ran out from the Russians, so we ran to Hungary. Maybe then on the way it happened that we didn't have what to eat, but...

**INT:** Do you remember that?

**YAAKOV:** I remember. I remember it. How we traveled.

**INT:** Well, tell me what your parents were like. Do you remember your father's personality? What was he like as a person? What kind of man was he?

**YAAKOV:** An ordinary man. An ordinary man. A learned man. A learned man. And not only learned in Ivrit, but he was learned, he was a bookkeeper. When they need him in the city to do some work, they demand his work. And my mother was a Jewish woman. No...schooling we **must** have.

**INT:** You must have. It was important.

**YAAKOV:** No, it was only very, **very** Orthodox people who didn't send their kids to school. But usually people, I went to school until the seventh grade.

**INT:** Okay. What kind of school? Was it a Talmud Torah school?

**YAAKOV:** No, no.

**INT:** Public school?

**YAAKOV:** It was a public school.

**INT:** You went with non-Jewish kids?

**YAAKOV:** With non-Jewish kids, together. Boys, girls. And...

**INT:** Did you study Hebrew, did you have a tutor, a *melamed* who came to the house or anything like that?

**YAAKOV:** No, no. We had after school, we had a *melamed* what we went to him. But then, this was the way. After the seventh grade, there was no more school. And we were attached to the principal, and to the teachers. So they decided on their own, probably they had permission from the higher, that they should put another class.

**INT:** Oh, great. They liked you. They wanted to continue with you.

**YAAKOV:** So we studied another year. But the year went fast.

**INT:** So you had eight years of school.

**YAAKOV:** Eight years of school. Eight years of school, but the eighth year wasn't counted in the records.

**INT:** Right. So what happened after that, after the eighth grade?

**YAAKOV:** After that, well, it was a big problem. What we do, to let them run around? (Laughs) So my father and my mother decided, my mother had a brother in Lvov, the big city in Poland. He was a tailor. How you call it, woman's clothes. So he had a big factory. Not big in the American way, but it was at that time pretty big. He went twice to Paris to pick models. And he brought them back to Lvov. And so he was willing to take me there. There was already a Jewish gymnasium.

**INT:** That's like a high school.

**YAAKOV:** A high school. From then, the university. But...

**INT:** So did you go to live with him?

**YAAKOV:** I went there, but it didn't work out.

**INT:** Why?

**YAAKOV:** It didn't work out, because he was not married at that time. And he was ready to get married, and I (laughs)...

**INT:** You were in the way.

**YAAKOV:** I was in the way. So that didn't work out. Then...a rabbi from the town, he called on my father, and he said to him, "What's going to be with them?" I wasn't the only one in the city.

**INT:** Right. There were other boys.

**YAAKOV:** There were other boys. The other boys, they didn't care too much.

**INT:** Well, what were they going to do? Did they go to work with their parents?

**YAAKOV:** We were concerned about me, because...

**INT:** Okay.

**YAAKOV:** So he said my father should send me far away in a yeshiva.

**INT:** What town?

**YAAKOV:** The town was Bobov. A small town at that time. A big yeshiva in a small town. (Laughs) So he says he's going to send me away.

**INT:** Were you Hasidic? Was your family Hasidic?

**YAAKOV:** No, no.

**INT:** Mitnagdish.

**YAAKOV:** *Nicht* Misnagdim, but not Hasidim. So we packed, my mother, *aleha shalom*, became busy, and they called in a tailor to make me a suit special for the yeshiva. And I came in the yeshiva with a white suit. **Almost** white suit. (Laughs) This was a real Hasidishe yeshiva. A **real** Hasidishe yeshiva. And I came in.

**INT:** And here you come in a white suit.

**YAAKOV:** In a white suit. So then...then they called me in to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe asked me, I handed him the letter. He opened the letter, and he looked in and smiled. He didn't say nothing. But he said...he said in a way like an excuse. There were 600 or 700 boys. Big yeshiva. And they got broke that year. So they sent out all the boys back home. And they opened branches in a lot of towns, and about fifty, sixty boys he left in Bobov. So he said it in a way like an excuse.

**INT:** He can't take you.

**YAAKOV:** "You came in the wrong time. But I'm not going to send you home. I'm going to send you to the famous Auschwitz." There were a yeshiva, a Bobover yeshiva. He gave me a letter and I went there. I was there about two years.

**INT:** Where was this again, I'm sorry?

**YAAKOV:** Auschwitz. Auschwitz. Oswiecim.

**INT:** Oswiecim. Oh, my gosh! The **town** of Oswiecim.

**YAAKOV:** The town of Oswiecim. It was a Jewish town.

**INT:** It **was** a Jewish town?

**YAAKOV:** It was completely a Jewish [town]. In the whole ring in the city you couldn't find a...there was one Gentile store.

**INT:** That's it? In the whole town.

**YAAKOV:** That's it in the whole town.

**INT:** I didn't realize it was a Jewish town.

**YAAKOV:** It was a Jewish town. It was famous rabbis. It was a Bobover yeshiva. It was a Radomske yeshiva also. A Hasidishe yeshiva. So I learned there for two years.

**INT:** Two years. How old were you?

**YAAKOV:** When I came, I was almost fifteen. And then I came for a Yom Tov, instead of to go home for Pesach, we went to Bobov. So after when we finished the Yom Tovim, I wanted to go back to the yeshiva. The rabbi said, "You stay."

**INT:** And you didn't go home to visit?

**YAAKOV:** I didn't go home almost for ten years. (Laughs)

**INT:** Really. You didn't see your parents for ten years?

**YAAKOV:** They came to see me.

**INT:** Why? Because it was so far away, or why?



**YAAKOV:** It was...I don't know how to...

**INT:** It's just the way things were? That's how you did it.

**YAAKOV:** Yes. And...I got married from the yeshiva. I got married from the yeshiva. And then I stayed in the yeshiva until I was able to learn on my own, and to tutor some younger children.

**INT:** So ten years you were there, about.

**YAAKOV:** About ten years.

**INT:** So you were 25, around 25.

**YAAKOV:** And then I got married.

**INT:** How old were you when you got married?

**YAAKOV:** About 26, 27. And I went to live in the town where I got married.

**INT:** Which was where?

**YAAKOV:** Limanova, was the name. And then, but it didn't work out. I couldn't manage to make a living there. And I tried to go back to my parents. And together with them. But the war broke out. So it finished.

**INT:** Okay. So let's go back now, again, okay? Now I have an idea of your life before the war. But I want to try and fill it in a little bit. If you could talk to me a little bit about your parents and what it was like in your house growing up as a child. What were your parents like? Were they affectionate, were they happy people? Were they not happy people?

**YAAKOV:** Normal people.

**INT:** Just normal.

**YAAKOV:** Normal people. Not too many affection. (Laughs) Not too strong.

**INT:** Did they ever have arguments? Do you remember any arguments between them? Or any difficulties between them?

**YAAKOV:** Difficulties? I don't know. Arguments, there always was arguments.

**INT:** Do you think they had a good marriage, basically?

**YAAKOV:** My parents? Yeah.

**INT:** You think they did. Did they work things out together?

**YAAKOV:** Together.

**INT:** What about your brothers and sisters? Can you describe what they were like?

**YAAKOV:** They were like...normal.

**INT:** Was there a brother you were particularly close to?

**YAAKOV:** Not too close.

**INT:** Not too close with your sisters and brothers?

**YAAKOV:** Not too close.

**INT:** Okay. And they got married. They all went away and got married, or not? They just all went away from your town.

**YAAKOV:** Rochel got married. And Naftali got married. Rochel got married and went to Israel. Naftali got married in Holland.

**INT:** So Rochel survived the war because she was in Israel?

**YAAKOV:** She was in Israel.

**INT:** So she survived.

**YAAKOV:** She survived.

**INT:** But what about Naftali?

**YAAKOV:** Naftali was a different story. Naftali got married. And I knew not personally the wife, the family I knew. And...but after that I didn't know about him nothing after the war.

**INT:** You didn't find out anything.

**YAAKOV:** I was already in America. I got married. I had cousins in Uruguay from before the war. They went there. And they found out about me, and that I was survived. So they sent me a letter, and they let me know that I should know that it's now survivor, Naftali, is a girl, and she is in America.

**INT:** So he had a daughter.

**YAAKOV:** Yes.

**INT:** And she survived.

**YAAKOV:** She survived. How she survived? She survived by a Gentile.

**INT:** Oh. He hid her with Gentile people?

**YAAKOV:** If he hid her, or whatever, this I don't know exactly. But the people who saved her, they used to come here to Israel, to visit. They had about twelve or thirteen children what they saved. So they used to come.

**INT:** They were righteous Gentiles. Good people.

**YAAKOV:** So he let me just know that she is, by whom she is, he says, that's what we're allowed to say.

**INT:** She didn't want to know from the family?

**YAAKOV:** No, no. She was a young child. She was a young child.

**INT:** Did she know she was Jewish?

**YAAKOV:** Yeah. Yeah. She was always.

**INT:** But that you didn't find out till you were in America.

**YAAKOV:** They just let me know by whom they are. But where, how to find these people, they didn't tell me. They didn't know. Finally I found out that he's working in the diamond center. The man who saved her. Not the Gentile. He gave her over to Naftali's brother-in-law.

**INT:** And he was working in the diamond center.

**YAAKOV:** And this is where my brother-in-law was working in the diamond center. And I had from before the war. But they went from the yeshiva to America. And they worked in the diamond center, too. Finally I found out.

**INT:** I see. Did you ever meet her?

**YAAKOV:** Of course. I just saw her last week. (Laughs)

**INT:** She's living here?

**YAAKOV:** She's living here. She's living here. And she's a grandmother already. (Laughs)

**INT:** Oh, boy. Unbelievable. Okay.

**YAAKOV:** So I found out who he is. And I asked him, I knew the family, I didn't know him personally. I knew the father, I knew her brother. So I asked him, "Please, let me **see** her. I'm not going to say nothing, not tell her who I am." So finally he agreed, and I came over. A relative, I came. And I saw her. A nice girl. And she was twelve, thirteen years old. And they were religious people. They sent her to Bais Yaakov. And then a few years it was like that. I used to come. She never came to me because she didn't know that I have a *shaychus*, something to her. I am a relative. Finally, she had two sisters. Not sisters, but...

**INT:** From the family.

**YAAKOV:** From the family. She started asking questions. How come that he left to America with two kids, and he left her behind in Holland? And he gave her...

**INT:** They made up a story?

**YAAKOV:** They make up stories. And then she asked how come there are two sisters have the same name. (Laughs) So then he says, he called me up and he says, "I can't go on like that. We have to tell her." She was already a grown up person. "We have to tell her." So he came over to me with her. We start talking. I told him the best thing is to say straight out. So we...she cried, and...

**INT:** Did you help to tell her? Did you help tell her, also?

**YAAKOV:** Yeah. Yeah. So then she went home. Since then she start to come more often to my house. And we...

**INT:** And she made aliyah eventually?

**YAAKOV:** She made aliyah...no, I think she got married in America.

**INT:** But now she's living here [in Israel].

**YAAKOV:** She's living here.

**INT:** How come? How come she moved here [to Israel]?

**YAAKOV:** He was a real...

**INT:** *Tzioni*?

**YAAKOV:** A real Zionist, the husband. He's a professor in mathematics in Bar Ilan [University].

**INT:** So she wound up here.

**YAAKOV:** Yes. She had five children here.

**INT:** So that's Naftali. That's Naftali's daughter. That's all that survived from Naftali's family.

**YAAKOV:** That's all. And from Rochel there's two daughters. They're in Israel, they're born in Israel, but I'm not in touch with them. They are some estranged. They are estranged. I can't do nothing about it.

**INT:** What about your other brothers?

**YAAKOV:** I had another brother in Israel. He died in Israel.

**INT:** He died in Israel.

**YAAKOV:** He wasn't married.

**INT:** Okay. So can you talk a little bit about World War I? Do you remember anything about fleeing to Hungary and having to run away from your town? Do you remember any of that? You were a little kid.

**YAAKOV:** I was a little kid. Yeah, we bought a wagon with a horse. (Laughs) Packed up everything.

**INT:** Who was coming? The Russians were coming in?

**YAAKOV:** The Russians. That was...the Russians are coming. And then we ran until we reached the Hungarian border, and there there were committees already for the refugees, and they settled us in an apartment. I don't remember how big an apartment, an apartment. We were there until the war ended. And then we went back.

**INT:** Do you remember that time at all?

**YAAKOV:** It's nothing to remember.

**INT:** Do you remember being scared or frightened?

**YAAKOV:** No.

**INT:** Not particularly.

**YAAKOV:** Not particularly. It wasn't katyushas at that time. (Laughs) It was no katyushas.

**INT:** Can you describe yourself, what you were like as a child? What did you like to do? What were your interests?

**YAAKOV:** I was a school boy. I learned.

**INT:** Just a normal kid.

**YAAKOV:** Normal. Normal.

**INT:** What did you like to do? Did you have any...

**YAAKOV:** Any plans? No. Who cared about plans? (Laughs)

**INT:** No? Nobody had plans?

**YAAKOV:** Nobody had plans. (Pause)

**INT:** Did you enjoy the yeshiva?

**YAAKOV:** I enjoyed the yeshiva very much. If not I wouldn't stay.

**INT:** Yeah, ten years.

**YAAKOV:** (Laughs) Ten years.

**INT:** Okay. So now tell me a little about how your life became changed with the war. First of all, in the town, did you ever have any anti-Semitism? Did you ever feel any anti-Semitism in the small town where you grew up? Were the Jews and the non-Jews getting along okay?

**YAAKOV:** Anti-Semitism was always.

**INT:** Always. You remember that.

**YAAKOV:** It was always. Even when I went in school together with them. When we went out from school we were **enemies**. (Laughs)

**INT:** Really. Did you get into fights with them?

**YAAKOV:** Sometimes we got into real fights. But we lived together.

**INT:** How did you deal with that, with the fighting?

**YAAKOV:** We took it, that's normal. (Laughs) We took it as normal, nothing special.

**INT:** What about the teachers? Did they treat the Jewish kids differently?

**YAAKOV:** Some did. Some we knew already which one is an anti-Semite. But...a teacher is a teacher. You can't do... (End tape one, side one)

**INT:** So anti-Semitism was around as far back as you can remember.

**YAAKOV:** It was around. It was around.

**INT:** Okay. And in 1939, is that when the war came to your town? And where were you?

**YAAKOV:** I was in Limanova.

**INT:** Limanova. Which is near where?

**YAAKOV:** This is near Crakow. So from there, we didn't have...the trains stopped right away the first day. They were bombarded by the Germans.

**INT:** Already in September of 1939?

**YAAKOV:** Already in 1939, it was a Friday. It was a Friday. And the whole town packed. We knew already.

**INT:** That they were coming?

**YAAKOV:** The history. We knew another Germany. We knew another Germany, before. It was...

**INT:** From the First World War.

**YAAKOV:** From the First World War and after the war. But the last, from 1936, 1937, we knew, we heard already the speeches from Hitler, *yemach sh'mo*.

**INT:** So you could feel it coming. You knew it was coming. But were you preparing at all?

**YAAKOV:** We couldn't prepare. It was nothing to prepare. What can you do?

**INT:** You didn't think about going to Palestine, or going to...?

**YAAKOV:** Before that, it came *pitom*.

**INT:** Suddenly.

**YAAKOV:** Suddenly.

**INT:** But your brothers got out. Your brothers and sisters got out.

**YAAKOV:** Yeah.

**INT:** Because they saw what was happening, or they...?

**YAAKOV:** They know what's happening already. And then they **wanted** to go to Israel. Not everybody...

**INT:** Wanted to go, yeah.

**YAAKOV:** Was ready to go.

**INT:** So you were in Limanova with your wife?

**YAAKOV:** I was with my wife, with a child.

**INT:** What was her name, your wife?

**YAAKOV:** My wife's name was Bernstein.

**INT:** And your child?

**YAAKOV:** And my child was Sprinza. A Jewish name. So she was four and a half months, five months. So we took her on the shoulder with a wagon, with a hand wagon. And we started walking.

**INT:** From Limanova.

**YAAKOV:** From Limanova.

**INT:** Where were you going to go? Crakow?

**YAAKOV:** We didn't know where to go. To Crakow, Crakow was already nearer to the Germans.

**INT:** West. Oh, so you didn't want to go that way.

**YAAKOV:** We didn't want to go that way.

**INT:** So you were going east?

**YAAKOV:** So we were going east. So we went from there, from town to town. Wherever we went, we had a possibility to rest a little bit, we rested. And this way we came, we came to...the first stop was a town Kolbisov. It was far away already.



**INT:** You were doing this on foot? You were walking the whole way?

**YAAKOV:** On foot.

**INT:** Were you going with other people, or just you and your family?

**YAAKOV:** The whole road was full of people.

**INT:** Jewish people, or non-Jews, too were leaving? Were the non-Jewish people also leaving?

**YAAKOV:** No, no.

**INT:** No. Just the Jews.

**YAAKOV:** Just the Jews. And the non-Jews was staying by the doors and laughing.

**INT:** Yeah. Yeah. Taking over the houses, probably.

**YAAKOV:** Yeah. And then we went and we came to Kolbisov. My father-in-law had, a rabbi from the town was his relative. So he gave us a room. We rested there. We were there until almost...almost Erev Rosh Hashana. Then we went to Tarnow.

**INT:** Tarnow.

**YAAKOV:** Tarnow is a bigger town. And we didn't have nobody there. We just stayed there during the Yom Tov. And after Yom Tov we start walking again.

**INT:** How were you getting food, and how were you managing?

**YAAKOV:** There was committees in every town.

**INT:** Oh, okay. Jewish community centers and stuff, yeah.

**YAAKOV:** So this was no problem. It was a problem for everybody.

**INT:** Everybody was in the same situation.

**YAAKOV:** And then we came to Tarnow. We were there until after Sukkos. And in Kolbisov, I had the first night, Friday night, we were there. All of a sudden the Germans ordered everybody, **everybody**, man, woman, out from the houses. And they put us in front of the shul, big shul, and put the shul on fire. And we were staying like that with...

**INT:** With your arms up in the air. This is in Tarnow?

**YAAKOV:** No, no. This was in Kolbisov. The first town where we met these Nazis. So we...we stand there. The shul was burning. Then there came an order, until a half an hour I don't remember exactly, no soul should be in the street. So everybody start running wherever, whoever opened the door and let us in. So we came there. In the morning it was, was nothing happening. In the morning it was quiet. Quiet. And this was in Kolbisov. And then we came to Tarnow. After Sukkos we were in Tarnow. We still managed to have an esrog. One esrog was in the whole of Tarnow. It was the Stachiner Rebbe. It was *mesiras nefesh* from him. Usually people didn't let other people come in. And here, all day long, from the morning until the evening, people used to come *bentsching esrog*. But he did it. And after that, after Tarnow, I heard that it is a way to come across to the Russians. My mother-- my father passed away before -- my mother lived by the Russians. There is a way....

**INT:** How did your mother get over there?

**YAAKOV:** She lived there.

**INT:** After your father died?

**YAAKOV:** She lived in the apartment where my father died.

**INT:** What year did your father die? Do you know when your father died, what year?

**YAAKOV:** In '39.

**INT:** In '39. He died of natural causes?

**YAAKOV:** He fell from a step, and they took him to the hospital, and he died. But then I heard that there's a way to come to (?), so I inquired, and I find out that it cost money. And a lot of money I didn't have. I didn't come out from the house with money. So I start talking to my father-in-law. He was with the whole family, with seven children, who weren't married. And we decided, I told him that I want to take my wife and my child to go over the Sarnok (?) It was the border. And to try to go over to my mother.

**INT:** What town was she in again, I'm sorry?

**YAAKOV:** Bircza. So I came to Sarnok, and in Sarnok was a committee, a Jewish committee, and it cost fifteen dollars. It was a lot of money at that time. And...we had to go through a river. But not by boat.

**INT:** Which river was it? The Bug?

**YAAKOV:** The river San. So the committee took the money, they had an agreement with the Russians and with the Germans. The Germans took the money, and they let us until half the river. And then from there, they said they're not responsible if something happens. We were sixty people. Every group was sixty people.

**INT:** Who was with you in your group, besides your wife and your child? Just anybody you knew?

**YAAKOV:** Wait. Wait. I'll come to that. So I went ...(interruption) But when I decided, I came to my father-in-law and told him that, he says, "No, no. You go yourself. And if everything is going *beseder*, you let us know." There was ways to let know. No mail or nothing, not official. And we came over. So I went through, and started to go home. It was two hours, two and a half hours walking to my mother's house. The Russians took us. We were sure that we came to the Gan Eden. They put up big fires to dry us up, put us on trucks, and send us to Lvov in a prison. And that was the end. I didn't know...my family where I am. I couldn't let them know. My mother...

**INT:** Were you with your wife still?

**YAAKOV:** No!

**INT:** Oh, you were by yourself.

**YAAKOV:** Only by myself. That's what the...

**INT:** That's why he said, "Go ahead and go by yourself and let us know."

**YAAKOV:** And let us know. So then we...

**INT:** So you crossed the river. How did you cross the river? You swam?

**YAAKOV:** No. Sixty people.

**INT:** At a time. On like a boat, or a barge?

**YAAKOV:** The *manhig* who was responsible, he told us. "You hold one another as strong as possible. If you lose, you're not losing only yourself, you're losing everybody." So this way we were, we went through.

**INT:** And when you got to the other side, the Russians captured you and put you back to Lvov.

**YAAKOV:** And brought us to Lvov. Not back. To Lvov.

**INT:** So it's the east part of Poland. Now you're in eastern Poland, and the Russians were in control of eastern Poland then. Okay. So now you're in a prison.

**YAAKOV:** Now I'm a prisoner. Somehow my mother, *aleha shalom*, I don't know if she was in Lvov, how she came to Lvov. She found out. And she started looking ways to get me out. And from there they took me to Russia.

**INT:** And you couldn't get in contact with your family.

**YAAKOV:** No contact. Nothing. Nothing at all. I was broke off **completely** from them.

**INT:** So how did you **deal** with that?

**YAAKOV:** What?

**INT:** How did you handle that?

**YAAKOV:** I was a prisoner. A plain prisoner. Why?

**INT:** Did you think you were going to die? What did you think?

**YAAKOV:** Who thought? We didn't do nothing. We were in prison already. We were real prisoners. They treat us like prisoners. If I ask somebody in the prison, what is this crime, what I did? They didn't know. They **really** didn't **know**. They changed our status according to their policy. Sometimes they called us (Russian word). This means refugees. Sometimes it fit for them better to call us war prisoners, they called us war prisoners. How come they did it? We didn't have nothing to do. Until I was already in prison for eighteen months.

**INT:** Eighteen months?

**YAAKOV:** (Laughs) Eighteen months. They send us to Dnieper-Petrovsk. A big town in the Ukraine. A very big prison. And there were thousands and thousands of our people. But they didn't let us converse one with the other.

**INT:** You couldn't talk to them?

**YAAKOV:** No. Just from far away, when we were on the grounds. They took us out on the grounds.

**INT:** So you were in a prison cell by yourself all the time?

**YAAKOV:** No, no, no. Four, five people.

**INT:** But not Jewish people?

**YAAKOV:** No, not necessarily. Not necessarily. Until once I was called up before a judge. The first time.

**INT:** In the Ukraine?

**YAAKOV:** In the Ukraine. It wasn't an old judge. When he interviewed me, he told me right away that the verdict is coming not from him. It's coming from Moscow. I said to him, before, I said to him, "But tell me the crime what I did. I crossed the border. It was no border. I came **to my own house**. I was in my own house! Why you take me? What I did?" He don't know.

**INT:** It's up to Moscow.

**YAAKOV:** (Russian word), they called it. A blind verdict. So when he wrote down five years heavy work, after that, not, I ask him, "Why only five?" Until then he didn't look in my eyes. He looked on the papers. When I ask him that question, "Why only five?" he opened up, he picked up his head and looked at me. "It's not enough for you?" I knew Russian a little bit. "What I did? How you know what crime I did?" But that's it.

**INT:** So he sentenced you to five more years, over the year and a half you were already there. Where, in Siberia?

**YAAKOV:** No, they were worse than Siberia. They were (Russian) they called it. It was...

**INT:** Could you say that again?

**YAAKOV:** (?) Lagerer.

**INT:** Lager is camp.

**YAAKOV:** Lager is a camp. And there they worked, and the conditions when we came, we didn't have even a **house** to go in. We had to dig the ground. Make a hole in the ground. Every camp we had, were about five or six camps. Every camp was 600 people in that hole.

**INT:** You were living in the hole that you dug.

**YAAKOV:** In the hole what we digged. We digged a hole, took out the ground.

**INT:** Where was this exactly? What town was this? Still in the Ukraine?

**YAAKOV:** It was no town. It was (?) They called it.

**INT:** Was it in the Ukraine, though?

**YAAKOV:** No, no, no. This was the border of Siberia.

**INT:** Okay. Were they all Jewish people with you? It was all Jewish people with you, or mixed?

**YAAKOV:** No, no. Mixed. Mixed. Jewish, Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, even.

**INT:** Did you stay with the Jewish people? Did you make friends with anybody? Or did you talk to anybody?

**YAAKOV:** We talked, but not, we didn't have the time. They took us out in the morning. It was dark, they took us out to work.

**INT:** What did you have to do?

**YAAKOV:** Dig the road. Make a railroad.

**INT:** That's hard work.

**YAAKOV:** Hard work. Very hard work. When we went back from there, then they mention it. That we didn't have to pay for the ticket, because we made the railroad. (Laughs) We were there almost three years.

**INT:** Three years.

**YAAKOV:** Almost three years.

**INT:** What were the food conditions, what were the living conditions there? Did you have what to eat?

**YAAKOV:** They gave us...(?) I had 400 gram bread a day, and a soup.

**INT:** And that's it.

**YAAKOV:** That's it.

**INT:** Did you get sick in the camp?

**YAAKOV:** I got once sick. I had a doctor, a Polish doctor, a neighbor, he was sleeping near me. He always was writing. He was an anti-Semite! All the world was caused by the Jews.

**INT:** That was the doctor taking care of you?

**YAAKOV:** No, no. He wasn't the doctor to take care. He just was a doctor. And he was in the cap just like me. But...then he became the doctor from, somehow the doctor what was there before, he went away. So he became the doctor. And I got sick. **Real** sick.

**INT:** What happened? What was it?

**YAAKOV:** We didn't know. But he says to me, "I see you gave up." The doctor did. "I see you gave up. But I'm not going to let you."

**INT:** He's not going to let you give up.

**YAAKOV:** (Whispers) No.

**INT:** But he's the anti-Semite! How come?

**YAAKOV:** (laughs) He was a friend. Personally he was a friend. So he said, "I'm not going to..." Somehow he got medicines. And he put me on my feet back.

**INT:** Did you give up?

**YAAKOV:** I was **ready** to give up.

**INT:** You were ready to give up.

**YAAKOV:** I was ready to give up. I couldn't take it no more. So then we were separated. Then I went to Siberia.

**INT:** Then they sent you to Siberia?

**YAAKOV:** Then they sent us to Siberia, to work in the woods.

**INT:** What year was this? 1943, '44?

**YAAKOV:** 1943. And from there they let us know they are, that the war is ended. And we can go back home from wherever is it. So I came back to Poland. I came back to Poland. I came back. The first stop was Crakow. And I found friends that were saved from Auschwitz and from the other camps.

**INT:** Did you know what was happening to the Jews while you were in Russia?

**YAAKOV:** We heard something. We didn't know exactly, but we heard. (Pause) So then in Crakow I was there two weeks, three weeks. And I was...I wanted to go back to my hometown. To put up a *matsevah* for my father. So I bought a ticket. And my friend, he was in Auschwitz. He was saved from Auschwitz. He says to me, "Yaakov, show me the ticket. How much it costs?" So he took the ticket and tear it apart, he said, "You're not going anywhere. You're just here two days. You don't know that in the train they're taking out Jews -- the Poles -- after the war, and throwing them out live from the windows." He said, "You're not going no place." I said, "But I can't stay here in Poland. I don't want to stay here."

**INT:** You didn't want to stay.

**YAAKOV:** No. I didn't want to stay. So he decided, so I am going to Czechoslovakia, where it was a little bit more organized.

**INT:** Did you know what happened to your wife and your child?

**YAAKOV:** Never.

**INT:** Did you look for them?

**YAAKOV:** Of course. I came to Paris. On my way to Czechoslovakia, I came to Paris, where I found the rabbi from my town.

**INT:** In Paris.

**YAAKOV:** In Paris. And he says, “Shmuel Yaakov, it’s no use to go. I was there.”

**INT:** He was there and he looked.

**YAAKOV:** “I was there. Nobody, nobody.”

**INT:** Nobody from the whole town.

**YAAKOV:** From his town, from his family, too. I know his family also. Nobody is left. No use to go. It’s dangerous. It’s dangerous.

**INT:** So you went from Poland to Czechoslovakia. You had a group of friends that you were with?

**YAAKOV:** I didn’t go with a group. In every place where I came, I found a group.

**INT:** I see. But this man who was rescued from Auschwitz, who survived from Auschwitz, he didn’t go with you?

**YAAKOV:** No, no. He was staying in Crakow.

**INT:** He wanted to stay?

**YAAKOV:** He didn’t want to stay.

**INT:** He didn’t know what to do.

**YAAKOV:** He didn’t know what to do.

**INT:** But you decided on your own that you wanted to go?

**YAAKOV:** Because I met him in the States, I met him. He remarried and...

**INT:** Came to America.



**YAAKOV:** Came to America.

**INT:** What made you decide to leave Poland?

**YAAKOV:** I didn't want to stay there. I didn't...I hate them. (Laughs) I hate them. I hate them.

**INT:** How did you get into Czechoslovakia?

**YAAKOV:** It wasn't hard.

**INT:** You walked? You took trains?

**YAAKOV:** No, no, by trains. By train.

**INT:** The borders were open?

**YAAKOV:** The borders were open. You needed permission. That's why I came to Prague. And Prague was a committee already to transport people to Israel. And I thought I'm in the right spot. But they told me, "Sorry, from here you can't go." So I have to go back to Poland to the border to take another document. Everything was...was with not fake, but it was...(pause) not formal. So they gave me a document that I was in Dachau, but I never was there. And from Dachau they had a way to put me. So they sent me until Paris. And in Paris I was there for a few months. And there I met an American girl. She came also to look for her family, and we got married. And in this way I came to the States.

**INT:** Could we stop here for today and we can continue another day?

**YAAKOV:** Okay.

**INT:** It's a good place to stop. (End tape one)

**INT:** This is a continuation of an interview with Mr. Berger. It's July 15, 1996. Mr Berger, I remember last time we were talking about, we talked about the war. We got to the end of the war, and how you came back to look for your family. And I had some questions I wanted to ask you about the war, some more questions. And I was wondering if you could tell me, do you remember any stories from when you were in prison, or when you were in the labor camps, how the people acted towards each other, the Jewish people? Did they help each other, did anyone help you, did you help anyone else?

**YAAKOV:** There was nothing to help. You couldn't help too much.

**INT:** Yeah. Did people talk to each other, or become friends at all?

**YAAKOV:** Yeah, yeah. They talked one to another. But we didn't knew **nothing** what's going on outside.

**INT:** Right. You didn't know what would happen to your family.

**YAAKOV:** No, no.

**INT:** You had no news.

**YAAKOV:** During the war we didn't know nothing. We just knew that the Nazis came into Europe, and they destroyed, they're killing people. That's what we knew.

**INT:** You **did** know that.

**YAAKOV:** That's...

**INT:** Because you saw that before you got out of there.

**YAAKOV:** Yeah.

**INT:** Okay. But you didn't know about the concentration camps, or any of the other things that were happening.

**YAAKOV:** No, nothing. Nothing. No papers. No news. Only when they had news when the Russians progressed in the war, then we knew. But when they lost...

**INT:** You didn't hear about the losing part. Okay.

**YAAKOV:** But when they came already to Stalingrad, you know, that....

**INT:** The big battle.

**YAAKOV:** The big battle. There, I was there. I was there.

**INT:** How were you there? What happened?

**YAAKOV:** They sent me out to work there.

**INT:** Really. Tell me about that.

**YAAKOV:** We were ...I don't know how to call it. The second front, let's say. The second front. First was the army, then there came the working force. So I was there. I was on that.

**INT:** What did they want you to do? What did you have to do?

**YAAKOV:** Dig ditches to stop the, if the Germans going to come over the river, there were a big river. And the Germans were on one side. The Russians were on the other side. So our work was to dig ground and make like a wall. You can make a wall. Just...so the tanks couldn't...

**INT:** Get through.

**YAAKOV:** Couldn't get through. It was our work.

**INT:** But this was in the winter, wasn't it? Was it in the wintertime? What time of the year was it when you were doing this?

**YAAKOV:** I don't remember exactly. I don't remember exactly. But this was the work. This was the work. We were like a reserve. Whenever they need something special, they had the camps. They took one, this camp, others from another camp. And this was...

**INT:** Do you remember the place where you were staying most of the time during the war? First it was, I can't pronounce the name. It was in the Ukraine. It was the name of the place where they sent you. The town that they sent you in the Ukraine first.

**YAAKOV:** In the old times it was the name (?) In the Soviet times, they called it Dnieper-Petrovsk.

**INT:** That's where you were.

**YAAKOV:** There were a real prison there. This was maybe 500,000 people are prisoners.

**INT:** That many.

**YAAKOV:** I don't know if they always were filled, but this was, we were there. And I remember...we didn't have cigarettes, tobacco to smoke. We didn't have. And they didn't give it to us. So we used to take, you know, the wooden holder from cigarettes, you know what I mean?

**INT:** Yeah, I know what you mean.

**YAAKOV:** So this was soaked in with the nicotine. (Laughs) So we took, scrubbed a little bit from that in a paper. Paper we didn't have. Whatever paper we found, even from the hats, took out the...And once, an old doctor, a prison doctor, military, they were all military there, came in and he opened the door. He said, "What is going on here?" We were about forty people in the room. "What is going on? It's impossible to breathe." And he started to nudge to tell him what we're doing. He saw it has to do with smoke. But what, he didn't know. So people were afraid. People were plain afraid. I don't know from where I had the chutzpah. You know what chutzpah means. (Laughs) I raised my hand. I should tell him what we're doing. So I told him plain. "We don't have what to smoke. All the people, *kem 'at*, almost, almost all were smoking. So we make from straw, from the mattress, from whatever. And we put in a little bit that nicotine, and everybody takes a puff. Everybody takes a puff." He said, "You're going to **kill** yourself!" he

says. "You're going to kill yourself. The prison doesn't kill you, but you kill yourself." That's what it is. And he went out. We didn't know what, what kind of... And hours, an hour and a half. Knock at the door. There were a *shomer*, a guard inside and a guard outside. So he asked, "Whoever smokes should come up front." Everybody was again afraid. Who knows what they're going to do to us? (Laughs) I told you, I believe, I had a boy, a young boy, fourteen and a half years, also in prison. They took him, too. So I went to stand up, and I asked David, David was his name. "Please, raise your hand." He says to me, "Berger, I am not smoking. Why should I raise my hand? Who knows what they're going to do?" So I said, "What they going to do to you? You are in prison! They're not going to **kill** you. Raise your hand." He didn't want, he didn't want. Finally he says, "If you tell me to raise my hand, I'll raise it." So he also raised his hand. So maybe five or six people from the forty raised their hand. They took us out from the cell, and took us to the corridors, to everything. They came to a **big** place that was full of all kinds of food, with everything, it was the storage for the....

**INT:** The warehouse for the food.

**YAAKOV:** The warehouse [for] the prison. And he asks us what we want. Cigarettes, they didn't have a big choice. They have tobacco and they have cigarettes, and they have matches. If we had money. What kind of money? They took away everything from us. If we have a note from the office, so this I have. So they took the office note, they put on the paper how much they took away from everybody. It was a big amount, but it was an amount. And they make a list, and they gave everybody a big package, we were there already. We asked for white bread. White bread was very...

**INT:** Unbelievable, right.

**YAAKOV:** And they gave us, and we came back to the camp. We came to everybody with the package. It...

**INT:** They couldn't believe it.

**YAAKOV:** No, the people start screaming, "We're all smoking!" "Why you didn't pick up your hand?"

**INT:** How did you know that that would happen?

**YAAKOV:** I didn't...I was a risker always. (Laughs)

**INT:** You had a little chutzpah, there.

**YAAKOV:** I have a little chutzpah.

**INT:** Because they could have taken you out and killed you, also.

**YAAKOV:** Yeah. They could do **anything** they want. And that...work, that young boy, he didn't smoke. So he traded.

**INT:** He took a chance, too.

**YAAKOV:** He traded. For a cigarette they gave him some food. So but this...Without risk, nothing. Nothing. We couldn't go on without risk.

**INT:** So that's how you needed to survive, to take some chances sometimes.

**YAAKOV:** That's what. To take your chances. I told that boy. I looked for him after the war, I couldn't find him.

**INT:** Did you befriend that boy and you kind of took care of him a little bit? It sounds like you did. That you were watching out for him.

**YAAKOV:** I knew him from the yeshiva.

**INT:** Oh, okay.

**YAAKOV:** He was a young boy, and I was already a man. So I knew him by name, and I knew him by the family name.

**INT:** What was his name? Do you remember?

**YAAKOV:** David...either Ackerman, or Herman. It's hard to...

**INT:** So you knew him.

**YAAKOV:** I knew him. In the prison, nobody had close connections, that knew about family. But it happened. It happened.

**INT:** And this was all Jewish people in the camp?

**YAAKOV:** No.

**INT:** No. There were many other people, right?

**YAAKOV:** All kinds. Maybe...I was once in a brigade, you know what a brigade means. I was in a brigade. It was about sixty people in the brigade. 49 nations.

**INT:** Really.

**YAAKOV:** 49 nations. Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Germans. Not Germans from the war. But Germans who...

**INT:** Who had settled in Russia?

**YAAKOV:** Who settled in Russia for years and years.

**INT:** And how did everybody deal with each other? The Jews and the non-Jews in the camp? You told me about a doctor last time who was an anti-Semite.

**YAAKOV:** Yeah. (Laughs)

**INT:** Right. He was the worst, right?

**YAAKOV:** He was something. A young doctor.

**INT:** And everything was the Jews' fault, he was telling you.

**YAAKOV:** Everything was the fault of the Jews.

**INT:** But at the same time, he helped to save you.

**YAAKOV:** And I asked him always, he used to come, we worked till a certain time. And then we came back to the, they called it Zemlanke (?). Zemlanke means "made from earth."

**INT:** It was made from earth, really?

**YAAKOV:** Just digged a big hole in the ground, covered it with a few boards, and again ground on the top.

**INT:** Like a bunker or something. Like a bunker. It wasn't even made of wood. It was just...

**YAAKOV:** Just covered with the top was covered with wood, because it should have some cover on the top. But after work, he used always to come to me.

**INT:** The doctor.

**YAAKOV:** The doctor. And sitting down and talking. So I asked him...

**INT:** Why did he come to you and talk to you?

**YAAKOV:** (Laughs) I asked him once.

**INT:** He hates the Jews.

**YAAKOV:** "What is with you? We were 600 people! Why you have to come to me and argue all the time?" He said, "I have nothing to talk with these people."

**INT:** Because they weren't smart people.

**YAAKOV:** No, they were ordinary people. Just he had nothing in common with them.

**INT:** It's interesting. So even though he hated you because you were a Jew, he would talk to you all the time.

**YAAKOV:** I was a Jew, but he were a friend. And then when I got sick, he told me, "I see you gave up." I told you that.

**INT:** Yeah. He could tell.

**YAAKOV:** He could tell. "But I'm not going to let you."

**INT:** Can you talk about that a little bit? About why you decided to give up at that point?

**YAAKOV:** Because I couldn't take no more.

**INT:** You'd reached the end of your limit.

**YAAKOV:** I couldn't take it. I was sick. I had temperature. And even more than that wasn't enough.

**INT:** Did you think you'd ever see your family again? Did you give up hope of seeing your family at that point?

**YAAKOV:** At that point.

**INT:** How about before that point? Did you still have hope in the camp?

**YAAKOV:** Sometimes yes and sometimes no. Sometimes. It wasn't always. It wasn't always dark. Sometimes we had some feeling that it changed. We could see the...When, after Stalingrad.

**INT:** Right. And they lost.

**YAAKOV:** They **lost** that. And the prisoners, the German prisoners in the thousands. **They** were working.

**INT:** So then you thought there was some hope after that?

**YAAKOV:** Then we thought it's some hope. It was a break in the war.

**INT:** Yeah. It was a major defeat.

**YAAKOV:** It was a big break. But it wasn't the end of the war. It wasn't the end of the war. After Stalingrad we thought, Stalingrad was Ukraine. So we thought maybe, maybe they're going to let us start to go back. But they didn't. They sent us after that to Siberia. Siberia was already the last station, the last stop, my stop. And from there, there we worked, plain work.

**INT:** What was it like there? What were the conditions like there?

**YAAKOV:** It wasn't a camp. It was just a *yishuv* (settlement) like Matityahu. Small town.

**INT:** Small houses?

**YAAKOV:** Small town. And houses, it was only whoever lived there before the war. They had their own house. But when we came, they chopped wood. It was a...

**INT:** There were big forests around?

**YAAKOV:** Only forests. Only forests.

**INT:** Where did you live? Did you have a barrack or someplace?

**YAAKOV:** First they had a barrack, and then they built wooden houses, wooden houses, but houses. And in the summer was okay. Winter was terrible. Winter was terrible. We had fires. But not in the house. Outside.

**INT:** So how did you keep warm?

**YAAKOV:** That's what we kept warm. They had such an oven in the middle of the barrack, and when we came back from work, and wet completely. Winter. So we took off the clothes. Near the oven. We dried them up and put them back on.

**INT:** What about food?

**YAAKOV:** Food, rations. You know what rations means?

**INT:** But were you starving in Siberia, or did you have enough food?

**YAAKOV:** We could buy it. Where you have money? Everybody who was sent there was given a job. Even we didn't know the work. So he learned on the spot, he learned the work. I learned not what I wanted, but it was the most ration of bread, what they gave on that work.

**INT:** And what was that?

**YAAKOV:** Making woolen boots. You know what this is?



**INT:** Yeah. So you were knitting.

**YAAKOV:** This is not knitting.

**INT:** No? What is it?

**YAAKOV:** Not knitting. Just with your hand, with your hand you fold the wool, and then in certain ways, and then you work on it, with an iron rod, I don't know how to call it.

**INT:** But you could work inside also, probably.

**YAAKOV:** This is inside. And we had...we had a ration, a norm. I don't know. One and a half pair a day. This we had to make for the government. For this we didn't get paid, only the bread, or the soup what they gave us. After that, we started another one. Bought wool on the market, and made, we couldn't afford the fancy wools. All kinds of sorts. But we bought wool, and we made cheap, cheap boots, and we went down in the market, and sold it.

**INT:** So how did you get this job? You go the job that you could get a lot of bread, more bread than the other people. It paid more, this job, than the other jobs.

**YAAKOV:** It was organized. It was carpentering. It was...I don't remember.

**INT:** Yeah. All different. But also, you could be outside cutting wood all day, you could also have been doing that.

**YAAKOV:** Yeah.

**INT:** Did they just give out the jobs?

**YAAKOV:** This was inside. This was inside. Summer was very hot. Inside to work. But we were...once the *nachalnik*, you know what the *nachalnik* is?

**INT:** Like the big guy.

**YAAKOV:** The *menahel*. The *menahel*. From the whole camp. From the whole camp. He came in after work, and he saw me working. He asked, "What's that?" So the *menahel*, the inside *menahel* told him, "After they're finished their work of the government, now they're doing it for themselves, and they're selling it." "What?" he says. "Who gave you the permission to let them do that?" First of all, they're using all the ...

**INT:** The tools and materials.

**YAAKOV:** The tools and the... "No!"

**INT:** So he said you can't do that anymore.

**YAAKOV:** No. So we were in trouble. We were in trouble. So we belonged to the (?) They were...

**INT:** They were what? I'm sorry.

**YAAKOV:** They were (?)

**INT:** I've heard the name, but I don't know what it is exactly.

**YAAKOV:** The National Commissar (?). This is the inner ministry. (?) Is government, and (?) Is civil. I don't know how to explain. So we went over to complain to them. We went and complained to them. He says, "What's the problem?" We told him. "You know the condition what they gave us. We're working for the government, but after work we're buying our own wool. We're just using the tables with the oven. All the stuff what we needed. And they stopped us. We're not allowed." He says, "Why? You're using up the government." He says, "Wait." He called up the civil, he is military, from the inner ministry. But it was a civil administration also. So he went over to that head of the administration. They talked it over, they both came down, and the manager from this place, he says, "I can't do nothing. They stopped me." He says, "Let them work. That's an order from our office that they're allowed to work." So we worked.

**INT:** And then you could trade on the black market or something?

**YAAKOV:** On black market. Only on the black market.

**INT:** For what? For food?

**YAAKOV:** For everything. For everything.

**INT:** So you'd go into town?

**YAAKOV:** We were like in town and out of town. It was a new city. I don't know how to call it. (Laughs)

**INT:** Okay.

**YAAKOV:** So they let us work. We worked in that. And then when we came home after work, we were...(laughs). Always, I remember, I was an expert already in selecting the wool. From practice, from practice. So I saved up a little bit from here, a little bit from here. To buy three kilo of wool.

**INT:** That's a lot of wool.

**YAAKOV:** That's a lot of wool. For myself, to make a pair of boots. If I'm allowed to, so I'm allowed to.

**INT:** So that was good.

**YAAKOV:** That was good, and I made a good job. I made a **very** good job. The head from the (?), this is another, this is the government, like the secret service. He came in once in the place, and he saw the pair, they had to dry. They had to dry a few weeks, until they're getting ready. So he saw that. He said, "Whose are these boots?" So they told him, "That's Berger's." He came over to me. He said, "Is this your boots?" I said, "Yeah. I made them for myself." He said, "They're not yours. They're mine." Plain talk. "They're mine." He liked them. He said, "You're not going to be sorry. You're not going to be sorry. I'll give you leather for a pair of leather boots. Complete, everything." You just look for a sandler. How you call it?

**INT:** Cobbler or something, whatever. Shoemaker.

**YAAKOV:** Shoemaker. There was, in that place was a Jewish shoemaker. How he came there, don't ask me. He came. When we came he was already there. A family, two children. How he came there, I have no idea. I asked him. It's a big story. He never wanted. They ran away from the house, *noch* before the war. They ran away to Russia.

**INT:** He was with his family, though.

**YAAKOV:** He was with his wife and two children, I believe. So I went to him, with the leather. And he made me. He figured out. The military, they had everything. So he told me what to bring him, and I brought him the leather, and he made, instead of one pair of boots, he made two pairs. (Laughs)

**INT:** Oh. There was enough material.

**YAAKOV:** It was enough material. So I sold one, and the other one I used.

**INT:** I see. So it was a better deal than having the woolen ones anyway.

**YAAKOV:** A better deal. The wool you can only use inside and in the summer. But leather you could use. So that was the life there.

**INT:** Let me ask you: When you were put in prison in Lvov in the beginning, how did you feel? I mean, how did you...did you think that it would be many years till you saw everyone again? Or what did you think? Do you remember? (End tape two, side one)

**YAAKOV:** [My mother knew] about me.

**INT:** How did you know that? Did you hear?

**YAAKOV:** Not that I hear.

**INT:** You figured she would.

**YAAKOV:** Because she knew that we're coming near to her town. And when I didn't arrive in her town, she knew that something is happening. She found out that all the people who crossed the river, they took them to Lvov. In Lvov she had a brother. So she came to Lvov, to find out if it's a possibility to take me out. But she couldn't do nothing. She couldn't do nothing. And I had others from the yeshiva people. And they also tried to get [me out]. It was...the *goral* [fate], you know. (Laughs) If I would be in Lvov, I would come back to the Nazis. The Nazis took over. So maybe this was the...my luck, that I was there. And they sent me away from there.

**INT:** Because after that they broke their pact with Russia, right? And they took over the rest of Poland, the Germans. Could you tell me a little bit about your wife and how you met her, and who she was, and how you decided to marry her, and what kind of person she was? Could you talk about that?

**YAAKOV:** When? The last?

**INT:** Your first wife.

**YAAKOV:** My first wife? I didn't see her. (Laughs) From the yeshiva...

**INT:** Oh, they just fixed you up with her?

**YAAKOV:** They just fixed me up, and my mother came from her town to the town where the girl lived, and she, she was the *maven*. She...

**INT:** She picked this girl out for you.

**YAAKOV:** She picked this girl out.

**INT:** Your mother did.

**YAAKOV:** My mother. And then we got married, and that's it.

**INT:** What kind of person was she?

**YAAKOV:** An ordinary girl. She was working in a *makolet* (small grocery store), she was working. Education, not...public school. You know, *wie heiss* this, how do you call public school?

**INT:** Public school. With Jews and non-Jews, like **you** went to.

**YAAKOV:** Yeah, same thing. Same thing.

**INT:** Was she from the same kind of background as you?

**YAAKOV:** Yes.

**INT:** Was she very religious, not religious?

**YAAKOV:** She was more religious than my family. (Laughs)

**INT:** I see. Okay. So was she more religious than you, would you say?

**YAAKOV:** No, no, I wouldn't say that. But she was a religious girl. She was from a background, her father was a rabbi. And this is the way we met.

**INT:** And how many years until you had the baby? You had a little girl.

**YAAKOV:** The baby was here. Nine months was my daughter when the war broke out.

**INT:** She was nine months old? Okay.

**YAAKOV:** That's the last time, I told you, when I saw her.

**INT:** So could you try to explain, if you can, how you had the *koach* to go on through all that time during the war? What gave you the strength to go on when things were so bad?

**YAAKOV:** Don't ask me. Don't ask me. (Laughs) I can't say.

**INT:** When you think back on your life, do you have any answers?

**YAAKOV:** No. I don't have an answer. I don't have an answer.

**INT:** What about faith in G-d, or not faith in G-d, or the will to live, or...

**YAAKOV:** The will to live? It depends. It depends. It was times what I said, why them? They killed so many Jews, why I'm left here? It **was** times like that. But...if somebody's going to tell you that his mind told him to do that, and this is the way...

**INT:** That's not how it worked.

**YAAKOV:** (Whispers) That's not how it worked.

**INT:** It wasn't going on in your head. You were just doing things? You weren't thinking about it, you were just doing it?

**YAAKOV:** We were just, we were living from day to day. From day to day, we didn't think what is going to be, what is...it was no use to **think**. You didn't **know**. You didn't **know**.

**INT:** Were you an optimistic person, or a pessimistic person? Did you have a lot of hope all the time? Just your nature, your character. Or were you pessimistic?

**YAAKOV:** Optimistic.

**INT:** You were optimistic?

**YAAKOV:** Yeah, I was optimistic.

**INT:** So you had hope all the time that things would get better?

**YAAKOV:** I had only one wish, hope: the war should end. If the war should end, I knew that, I didn't know how it's going to go further, but the first thing...

**INT:** The war has to stop.

**YAAKOV:** The war has to stop.

**INT:** So what gave you hope, do you think? You told me when Stalingrad, when the Germans lost Stalingrad, you had some hope. But were there any other times that you felt particularly hopeful?

**YAAKOV:** No, no, no, nothing especially.

**INT:** What about depression? Did you feel any particular times very, very bad, and that you didn't think it would ever end?

**YAAKOV:** The main thinking was food. That was the main thinking. And this was maybe the **good** part. You was occupied at least with **something**. Because if you don't have nothing on your mind (laughs) you're going to get...But it was...it was times what was very bad, and it was times what...we survived.

**INT:** You described yourself a little bit earlier as having *chutzpah* sometimes, you know, to do things and to take risks, when other people didn't have that. So was that part of your personality from always, from when you were a child?

**YAAKOV:** From always. From always.

**INT:** Yeah. You always had a little bit of that.

**YAAKOV:** From always. I told you with the judge, what they sentenced me. It was...he himself picked up, he said, to look on who is that *chutzpanik*? Who's that *chutzpanik* who can ask that? And sometimes it helped, and (laughs) sometimes it put me in trouble, too.

**INT:** Really? Could you give me an example of that, when it put you in trouble, being *chutzpadik*?

**YAAKOV:** I don't remember exactly, to tell you what. But during the, in the camp, in the lagers, they put me in, they called it *kartzer* (?) They called it *kartzer*. *Kartzer* was *sanok*. You know what's *sanok* in *Ivrit*?

**INT:** No, I don't know what that is.

**YAAKOV:** In prison they have like a...small, like a cell, a small cell, just to stay.

**INT:** Oh, by yourself. You had to stay by yourself. Solitary confinement.

**YAAKOV:** Solitary confinement. I was a few times. I was a few times. But it didn't, it didn't break me.

**INT:** It didn't. How come?

**YAAKOV:** I don't know. (Laughs) I don't know. I don't know.

**INT:** Could you talk a little bit about your belief in G-d? Did that help you at all? Did you daven, or did you...

**YAAKOV:** I davened. Sometimes I did. The first day when the Germans caught me, I had only the tallis and tefillin with me. That's all what I had. And somehow what was pushing, it fell down. So I wanted to pick it up. So a German soldier with his gun, with the...

**INT:** Bayonet?

**YAAKOV:** Not with the bayonet, with the, how you call that? In Polish they called it *kolba*. The wooden part. The gave me a knock over the head and a knock over the mouth.

**INT:** Teeth? Oh.

**YAAKOV:** So my teeth were gone.

**INT:** You lost all your teeth.

**YAAKOV:** They still were shaking. But...So then they had, this was still Poland. It was in Kolbisov, I believe. So since then I didn't have tallis and tefillin at all. No books, no tallis.

**INT:** But just praying to Hashem. Did you daven sometimes?

**YAAKOV:** Just daven, yes. Even in Siberia. (Laughs) I told you that we were getting together sometimes by that Jewish family, one Jewish family in the whole town. So we used to, he got some calendars, so we find out when Rosh Hashana was. So we got together there a few Jews.

**INT:** Was that against the law to do that? Were you allowed to do that?

**YAAKOV:** We didn't ask. We didn't ask.

**INT:** Well, you didn't ask, but...

**YAAKOV:** We didn't ask, but we got together there after work. We got together and we said a prayer. That's all.

**INT:** Did that help you at all? Your faith? Did your faith help you?

**YAAKOV:** Of course it helped. Of course it helped.

**INT:** Did you ever lose your faith in G-d? Did you ever lose it?

**YAAKOV:** No. It wasn't strong, but...we hoped. We hoped. We hoped.

**INT:** Can we stop for today?

**YAAKOV:** Okay.

**INT:** This is a good place to stop.

(Pause -- noise from fan in the background)

**INT:** This is a continuation of an interview with Mr. Berger. It is July 31st, 1996.

Mr. Berger, I thought today we would talk about your life after the war. And if we could start with liberation. What you remember about liberation, and what happened.

**YAAKOV:** Liberation, I was in Russia still. I still was in Russia. We left Russia a few months after the liberation. Not right away. They didn't decide (laughs) what to do with us. Poland didn't want us. They plain said they can't afford. It was like a big crowd of refugees out there.

**INT:** They said they didn't want you to come back?

**YAAKOV:** They didn't want us to come back. And nobody else was willing to accept us. Only, the only one what **slightly**, not with great pleasure, was Czechoslovakia. They let us, on the condition it's only transitional. It's not...



**INT:** You're not going to stay there.

**YAAKOV:** It's not permanent. So we went to Poland. We **tried** to stay in Poland, but it wasn't possible. I told you before. I wanted to go to look for, to put up a stone on my father's grave, and they didn't let me, because they were afraid. They were throwing out the Jews from the running train. The Poles.

**INT:** After the war they were killing Jews. I know.

**YAAKOV:** It was months after the war.

**INT:** And you knew about this, what was happening? You knew that they were killing Jews after the war, too?

**YAAKOV:** We knew, but we didn't know the danger, how far it goes. But when I came to Poland, I saw it. Every night they put up, they came from the army and they gave us guns to protect ourselves. So we saw what's going on. And then I decided I'm not going to stay. I'm going to Czechoslovakia. I had a friend from before the war. I didn't know if they were alive or not, but I know the place where they were. Somebody, maybe somebody's left. So I went to Czechoslovakia. There wasn't, dangerous it wasn't. But they didn't look on us with friendly faces. And it was nothing to do there. It was nothing to do, no work. Money I didn't have, to start a business.

**INT:** So you were with your friend now? Who was this friend that you were with after the war? You didn't go with a friend?

**YAAKOV:** No, no.

**INT:** Oh, okay. You were by yourself pretty much.

**YAAKOV:** I went by myself, and I went to Czechoslovakia. And in Czechoslovakia I heard that in Paris there is an organization what the main reason for it was to try to get -- at that time it still was Palestine. And I had a brother and a sister here (in Israel) from before the war.

**INT:** Here in Israel. Right.

**YAAKOV:** So I went to Paris. And in Paris, the organization took me on the list. They took me on the list, and I was there a few months. Meanwhile I got to know an American girl.

**INT:** In Paris?

**YAAKOV:** In Paris. But she came from America to look also for relatives, if somebody's left from **her** family.

**INT:** So was she born in Europe, or was she born in America?

**YAAKOV:** She was born in Europe, and the whole family was in America.

**INT:** When did they leave for America?

**YAAKOV:** They leave for America I believe in '35, maybe.

**INT:** Before Hitler.

**YAAKOV:** Before Hitler. So they came back to look for relatives. And the rabbi from their town, he was a friend of mine. And he knew the people from home, and he knew **me** from before the war. So he started, you know what is a *shadchan*, what *shadchan* means? So he matched us up.

**INT:** But how did you meet her? Oh, he introduced you to her. I see.

**YAAKOV:** He introduced her to me, and from then I was on my own.

**INT:** And at that point you knew that your wife and your child had been killed.

**YAAKOV:** The rabbi from the town where my in-laws were with my wife, he told me I don't have to look. He looked already. He looked already for me, too, from the whole town.

**INT:** And this *shadchan* rabbi was a different rabbi, or the same rabbi?

**YAAKOV:** A different one.

**INT:** A different one, okay. So who was this girl, what was her name, your wife?

**YAAKOV:** Her family name was Pinchus. Devorah Pinchus. And so she was with her sister. The sister was matched up also, not through the same person, but it didn't work out. And I got married in Paris.

**INT:** Was she a lot younger than you? How old was she when you met her?

**YAAKOV:** She was almost the same age.

**INT:** She was almost the same age as you.

**YAAKOV:** She was an older girl.

**INT:** And how old were you at that point, after the war in '45?

**YAAKOV:** After the war, when the war started, I was...

**INT:** 25, or...

**YAAKOV:** I was born in 1910.

**INT:** Oh, okay. So you were 35.

**YAAKOV:** So we got married in Paris. In order to go to America, I have to get to the embassy to get a permission.

**INT:** But was she an American citizen, your wife?

**YAAKOV:** Yeah. I became right away an American citizen.

**INT:** Right. Because you married her.

**YAAKOV:** Because I married her. And so we...they couldn't stay longer, so they went home, the two sisters. And I was staying still in Paris to get all the papers and everything. And meanwhile, it got start a rumor that in Paris, in France, they're preparing another, not a revolution, but a...

**INT:** A pogrom?

**YAAKOV:** Not a pogrom. Not a pogrom, but against the government.

**INT:** Oh, okay. A coup or something.

**YAAKOV:** Yeah. So I said I don't want to be here. It's enough for me. I had enough. And they told me, "Where are you going, you have no plane." I said, "I'll go to the agency. Whatever mean is there to get out from Paris, and not to be here." So finally they gave me a cargo ship. A cargo ship. And usually they took a day and a half to come to America. We took over six weeks I was on the water. (Laughs) Over six weeks. A cargo ship, and I couldn't complain. Finally. Finally.

**INT:** How long were you in Paris when your wife went [to America]? You got married to your wife, and then she went back to America.

**YAAKOV:** Yeah.

**INT:** How long were you in Paris?

**YAAKOV:** Four weeks, five weeks.

**INT:** Oh. So not a long time.

**YAAKOV:** Not a long time. Not a long time.

**INT:** And where did she live in America?

**YAAKOV:** In New York. In Brooklyn.

**INT:** So what was that like for you? I know this is a personal question, but what was it like for you to realize that your wife had been killed, and your child, and now you're getting married again? How was that transition for you?

**YAAKOV:** It's a normal transition. Normal. I wasn't the only one.

**INT:** No, I know.

**YAAKOV:** Everybody looked for some way to get together with a companion.

**INT:** Right. You wanted to get married again.

**YAAKOV:** Of course. I didn't want to stay. If I would have a reason to go to Israel straight, but I saw it's not going so easy.

**INT:** Now how did you feel about that? Going to America now instead of going to Israel with your brother and sister?

**YAAKOV:** They couldn't tell me what to do.

**INT:** I know, but...

**YAAKOV:** They couldn't tell me what to do. And I came to America. I looked for a job. I worked first in a store. In an appetizing store.

**INT:** In Brooklyn?

**YAAKOV:** In the Bronx, it was. I lived in Brooklyn, but this was in the Bronx.

**INT:** What neighborhood in Brooklyn?

**YAAKOV:** Williamsburg.

**INT:** Tell me about your wife's background. What kind of background she came from. Was she a Hasidishe background?

**YAAKOV:** It's a Hasidishe background, but a little bit more...not "modern," but a little bit more modern.

**INT:** And what was she like? What was it about her that made you want to marry her?

**YAAKOV:** Nothing special. Only to get a partner, and to have some hope to come to something.

**INT:** Right. Did you fall in love or anything? Or this wasn't anything like that.

**YAAKOV:** No love. No love. She wasn't a beauty. A normal person. A working girl.

**INT:** Hard-working person?

**YAAKOV:** She was working in a factory. When she came back, she went back to her place where she was working.

**INT:** Is there anything you can tell me about her personality, what kind of person she was?

**YAAKOV:** She wasn't too much educated. This I can tell you.

**INT:** Not too much educated?

**YAAKOV:** No. Public school from the house, and then when I came to America, I started private in school.

**INT:** Oh, did you?

**YAAKOV:** Private. In the afternoon, they had for the newcomers.

**INT:** Right. To learn English?

**YAAKOV:** To learn English. And I took right away an apartment. And teaching, he told me, he says, "Don't give up. I'll put you in the university **in a year**. In a year I'm going to put you in the university. But don't stop." I said, "So don't stop? You're going to support my [family]? I had a child already. So how I'm going to do that?" I have to work, and I have to go in school.

**INT:** So who was born? What child did you have then?

**YAAKOV:** Libby.

**INT:** Libby? She was your first child?

**YAAKOV:** Two children.

**INT:** You have two children.

**YAAKOV:** And that's why I stopped. I went from time to time, I just jumped in to take an extra lesson.

**INT:** For English.

**YAAKOV:** For English.

**INT:** Would you have wanted to go to university if it was possible?

**YAAKOV:** Yeah, if it was possible.

**INT:** What would you have liked to learn?

**YAAKOV:** I didn't make up my mind at that time. I just...it was a false hope.

**INT:** Impossibility.

**YAAKOV:** Impossibility.

**INT:** So you worked in a store.

**YAAKOV:** I worked in a store. Until, and after that I worked by a sewing machine in a factory.

**INT:** You were a tailor?

**YAAKOV:** It wasn't a tailor. It wasn't tailoring. It was in the house. In the house where I lived. When I came back from the store, I went down. The factory was still running. The owner from the factory was my brother-in-law, so he gave me a chance to get to use the machine. And then I started working for him. It was...not an article. But it's known. He taught somebody. It was coffee urn packs. You know what this is?

**INT:** What is it?

**YAAKOV:** This is bags like in the big restaurants. They're putting in the bag coffee, and they put the bag with the coffee in the urn, a big urn in the big restaurants, and then they throw it out. And they're making bags for the pastries in the bakeries also.

**INT:** Right. To squeeze out the...right.

**YAAKOV:** To squeeze out. So that's what.

**INT:** So that's what you were doing.

**YAAKOV:** It wasn't a professional thing. (Laughs) It was only...

**INT:** It was a job.

**YAAKOV:** A job to get money. And that's it.

**INT:** How long were you there, working there?

**YAAKOV:** I was working there a long time. Of course it was in the house, even I took another job, in the daytime. In the night I grabbed a few hours. It was in the house. Just to go up the steps in my apartment.

**INT:** So did you make friends in America? Did you have friends, other survivors? Who did you talk to?

**YAAKOV:** Not too much. Not too much. I had survivors, but they weren't together with me. They were in Auschwitz. They were in Auschwitz, they were in Bergen-Belsen. But I knew them from before the war. But for me in Russia, nobody.

**INT:** But in America, did you make friends in America, in Williamsburg?

**YAAKOV:** Yeah, of course.

**INT:** Who were the people you made friends with? Were they other survivors, too?

**YAAKOV:** Between them were survivors, too, but not too much.

**INT:** Did you have American friends also? Jews from America who were born in America? Anybody who was born here?

**YAAKOV:** Yeah.

**INT:** And what about learning the language? Was that difficult for you, to learn English?

**YAAKOV:** No, I learned it. I learned it from the job. I worked together with an Italian girl.

**INT:** And she only spoke English.

**YAAKOV:** She only spoke English.

**INT:** She didn't speak Yiddish, probably. (Laughs)

**YAAKOV:** (Laughs) No. And so I learned from her.

**INT:** So your daughter was born in 1947?

**YAAKOV:** 1949.

**INT:** 1949. And then you had another child?

**YAAKOV:** My son. He lives in Israel.

**INT:** He lives in Israel. And what year was he born, do you remember?

**YAAKOV:** 1950.

**INT:** And what does he do now for a living, your son?

**YAAKOV:** Now really he's not doing nothing. He complains he's sick. I don't see him, only occasionally. Friday is the time he calls. Only once in a week.

**INT:** Is he married?

**YAAKOV:** He's married.

**INT:** Does he have children?

**YAAKOV:** No.

**INT:** No children?

**YAAKOV:** No children.

**INT:** So he's in his forties, also.

**YAAKOV:** Yeah, yeah.

**INT:** Okay. So tell me a little bit about what your life has been like, was like in America. How did you feel about your job, and how did you feel about your family? And did you get involved in raising the children at all, or did your wife do all of that? The raising of the children, did you help with that at all?

**YAAKOV:** I helped. I helped a lot. I helped a lot.

**INT:** Did you have a close relationship with your kids?

**YAAKOV:** What?

**INT:** How did you relate with your children?

**YAAKOV:** I took them for walks, I took them in parks. This was my job.



**INT:** Did you tell them any stories?

**YAAKOV:** Stories I didn't tell them so much. But this was...I helped a lot with raising them. I took them to school. Whenever they needed, they didn't have a bus. It wasn't like here, that every school sends out buses. I had to go with them sometimes on the public transportation.

**INT:** What kind of schools did you send them to? Religious schools or public schools?

**YAAKOV:** Religious schools. In kindergarten they went in public. But then by the first grade, I sent them to Bais Yaakov.

**INT:** So you raised them in an Orthodox way? You and your wife were both religious, and you raised them that way?

**YAAKOV:** Yeah.

**INT:** Okay. (Pause) What year did you move to America, I mean, Israel, excuse me. When did you decide to make aliyah?

**YAAKOV:** After my daughter made aliyah.

**INT:** After your daughter made aliyah. Did your son make aliyah after her or before her?

**YAAKOV:** No, he made after her, but...it wasn't the same. She came because...

(End tape two)

**YAAKOV:** There joined a group in Brooklyn.

**INT:** They joined the same group as my sister-in-law.

**YAAKOV:** That they're in now.

**INT:** Right. Matityahu.

**YAAKOV:** Matityahu. There were thirteen or fourteen families, that's all.

**INT:** Right. A very small group of families.

**YAAKOV:** A very small group.

**INT:** Where do you think she got this Zionist feeling from? Did you give it to her? Where did she get it from?

**YAAKOV:** I have no idea. (Laughs)

**INT:** Did you talk to her about Israel?

**YAAKOV:** What?

**INT:** Did you talk to her about Israel when she was growing up?

**YAAKOV:** She went for a trip. My brother who was here, he send her a ticket to come to Israel.

**INT:** And that did it for her? She decided...

**YAAKOV:** From there, my sister was a Zionist in a different meaning. Not in the philosophy from Zionism, but to go to Israel.

**INT:** Right. So you had a brother and sister living here.

**YAAKOV:** My sister don't live no more.

**INT:** Right. What was her name, the one who lived here?

**YAAKOV:** Her name was Rochel Sofer.

**INT:** Okay. And she married, and she had children in Israel?

**YAAKOV:** She had two children.

**INT:** Okay. And then your brother, his name was...

**YAAKOV:** My brother, his name is Berger.

**INT:** No, his first name.

**YAAKOV:** Abraham.

**INT:** Abraham. So he lives also in Israel.

**YAAKOV:** He lives in Israel in Katamon, in Yerushalayim.

**INT:** And he's still alive. So your daughter got Zionist feelings. So she moved here, to this small moshav.

**YAAKOV:** And then she wanted me to come. My wife passed away. And my son was still with me. But it wasn't...it wasn't a...combination.

**INT:** This is in America. Your wife died in America?

**YAAKOV:** Yeah.

**INT:** How did she die? What happened?

**YAAKOV:** She was sick a long time.

**INT:** And so your son was still living with you.

**YAAKOV:** The son was living with me. Then he found a girl. After that I found out that he knew that girl still in America. She was from America. They knew each other from America. And then she came to Israel, and he came to Israel, and they got together again, and they got married.

**INT:** I see. So what year did you move to Israel? Do you remember the year that you came to Israel?

**YAAKOV:** I don't remember exactly.

**INT:** You've been here about ten years?

**YAAKOV:** About. About.

**INT:** So what was it like coming to Israel? Was that hard for you to adjust?

**YAAKOV:** No. No. It wasn't hard. I came and I rented an apartment. I didn't go to my daughter to live with them. I rented an apartment, and after a few months, I had to move out. They decided they wanted to sell the apartment, and I wasn't ready to buy it. So I moved to another. So I moved to another place, about three, four times.

**INT:** Oh, no.

**YAAKOV:** Three, four times until I decided that's enough. And I said, they asked me to go to an agency. I said, "I'm not going to an agency." My son-in-law was just in my house. I asked him, "You're going to shul?" He says yes. "Please take a look at the notices on the wall." So he came home and he says half a block away from where I live. I saw something, but I think it's going to be...for you. Two and a half rooms. On the second floor, not on the third floor. And the price was a high price for me, but I says, I don't want to move again. If I move, I want to move in my own apartment. So I bought the place.

**INT:** You bought it.

**YAAKOV:** I bought it. At that time I still had a little bit money.

**INT:** This was in Yerushalayim?

**YAAKOV:** Yerushalayim, in Kiryat Moshe. So I told the lawyer, he wanted me to put up the mortgage. The mortgage is not paying interest, and I'm going to have to pay interest. So which interest is bigger, let's see, so I'm going to make some profit. I says, it doesn't pay. For a few pennies. I paid off the whole apartment. And still, this is my property now.

**INT:** That's wonderful.

**YAAKOV:** This is my property.

**INT:** You still have it, and you're renting it out?

**YAAKOV:** Now I'm renting it out. When I moved in here, five months ago.

**INT:** Only five months ago you moved here?

**YAAKOV:** Only five months ago.

**INT:** Oh. So what was the decision to move here? Why did you decide to move?

**YAAKOV:** I couldn't manage no more.

**INT:** It was getting more hard. Difficult.

**YAAKOV:** I can't walk. Before I used to go to shop myself, to buy everything. To do myself. And then I start to be sick in my feet, couldn't walk. So they had to come every Friday to pick me up. Somebody. Not always my daughter.

**INT:** Somebody from the moshav would come to get you?

**YAAKOV:** Somebody from the moshav. And my son lives on the fourth floor, no elevator.

**INT:** So you can't go visit them.

**YAAKOV:** I can't visit him. So that's why I bought an apartment, and Shabbas I went over here.

**INT:** I see.

**YAAKOV:** Until this was too difficult. I used to cook myself everything. Even when they used to come for Shabbas, I used to cook for them.

**INT:** Really. Wow.

**YAAKOV:** Everything. The fish, with the chicken, with everything.

**INT:** Where did you learn how to do that?

**YAAKOV:** I learned. (Laughs) And...but it became hard and harder, and we decide I wanted to move out. Really. To a home. It's very expensive to go in. But...and I saw my daughter is not so thrilled. After all, I have to give a big deposit there, so I have to sell the apartment. And she didn't tell me, she told the rabbi here, you know the rabbi?

**INT:** Rabbi Leff? Yeah.

**YAAKOV:** Rabbi Leff. And he came over and talked to me. I said to him, "Where you got the idea?" "Not to go to a home." "So Libby put you up to that?" He said, "Yeah. Why you have to? Do you have to spend so much money?" She needed. The room, when they make bigger the buildings, I put the room on myself.

**INT:** You built the extra room on for yourself. So you have like a little apartment back there?

**YAAKOV:** A little room and a bathroom.

**INT:** That's great. So how was that adjustment, moving here?

**YAAKOV:** So they called Libby. I said to the rabbi, "After all, he makes the decision. Without the Baleboste..." And he's not the...you know Mr. Goldberg? (His son-in-law)

**INT:** No, I don't know him.

**YAAKOV:** He is, he tell me you have to talk to him, what he says. He's the Balabuste in the house. If I'm coming in a room to sleep over Shabbas it's something else. And to be steady here is another difference. He says, "Leave it to me."

**INT:** The rabbi did.

**YAAKOV:** Yeah. "Leave him to me. I know what..."

**INT:** He knows how to talk to him.

**YAAKOV:** "I know how to talk to him, and I know what you mean." So I never asked him if he talked to him or not, but we did it.

**INT:** But here you are.

**YAAKOV:** Here I am. I'm not going to say that I'm always thrilled.

**INT:** You liked being by yourself.

**YAAKOV:** I would like better to be by myself, but if I can't, I can't.

**INT:** Right. It's just too hard now.

**YAAKOV:** It's just too hard.

**INT:** So let me just ask you: When you look back over your life, why would you say that the Holocaust happened? Why do you think it happened?

**YAAKOV:** (Whispers) I don't want to think. I don't **want** to think, I have **no** explanation. No explanation. The **hate** to the Jews, I'm used to it from before Hitler. It was always. IT was always. But for such a thing, nobody could imagine before that it **could** happen. That such a thing could happen, and the whole world would stand around and looking, and **nobody**, even the big America...

**INT:** Helped.

**YAAKOV:** No, didn't say **nothing**. Nobody picked up his voice and says, "What is going on? Why?" Nobody asked why. It was a...

**INT:** How do you deal with that in yourself, that the world stood by?

**YAAKOV:** It's hard. It's hard to **understand**. It's hard to understand. **Where were they?** After all, it wasn't Jews. I told you my niece, my niece was saved by a Gentile. Not only her, but twelve or thirteen girls they saved.

**INT:** Why weren't there more people like that?

**YAAKOV:** They couldn't do it open, do it secretly.

**INT:** You don't have an explanation.

**YAAKOV:** No. No explanation.

**INT:** Why do you think the non-Jews hate the Jews so much? Why do you think that is? Why do you think there's so much anti-Semitism?

**YAAKOV:** (Laughs)

**INT:** Do you have a reason for that? You don't know?

**YAAKOV:** It's a silly [question]. The hate is born in them.

**INT:** It's born in them.

**YAAKOV:** It's born in them.

**INT:** In the Polish people, or in all the people, you think?

**YAAKOV:** Everybody. Everybody.

**INT:** Did you ever have a non-Jewish friend in America? Anybody who wasn't [Jewish]?

**YAAKOV:** Not only in America. In school, the school children, I had a lot of non-Jewish friends.

**INT:** So how do you feel about non-Jewish people in general? Today. How do you feel about them? Do you trust them?

**YAAKOV:** Trust? (Laughs) **Never** trust. I just hope to get by and not to go through again such a terrible time.

**INT:** Right. Right. And what about Israel? How do you feel about the situation in Israel with the Arabs? What do you think's going to be here?

**YAAKOV:** It's going to be the same thing what's going on. The hatred is not going away. They claim it's theirs. We claim that it's ours. And no solution. **No** solution. Peace *a hin*, peace *a her*, it's nothing. Let's hope just it's not going to be a war. Through a war I don't have no more strength. (Laughs)

**INT:** No, you've been through enough wars.

**YAAKOV:** Through enough.

**INT:** Let me just ask you one last question, which is: How would you say -- I know I asked you this before; I want to ask you again though -- how would you say that you coped with all the difficulties in your life? How did you get through the war? What gave you the strength? And after the war, when you had difficult times to go through, how do you think you got through it? What got you through?

**YAAKOV:** What got me through? The will to live.

**INT:** It was very strong?

**YAAKOV:** The will to go on and live. That's all. I didn't have some expectations, big ones. Just to go on and live.

**INT:** And that's what did it?

**YAAKOV:** And that's what it is.

**INT:** Is there anything else you'd like to add to the interview? Anything you'd like to say?

**YAAKOV:** No. No. Thank you.

**INT:** I want to thank you very much. (END OF INTERVIEW)