

**INTERVIEW WITH MATES BRUNER**

**JULY 9, 1995**

**Transcending Trauma Project  
Council for Relationships  
4025 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19104**

## INTERVIEW WITH MATES BRUNER

**INTERVIEWER:** It is July 9th, 1995. I'm doing an interview with a Holocaust survivor for the Transcending Trauma Project.

Could you identify yourself, name, age, date of birth, where you were born?

**MATES BRUNER:** Mates Bruner. Born in Cracow, Poland, in October 29, 1920. (laughs)

**INT:** How long have you been married, and who are you married to?

**MATES:** Married after the war, and my wife is Fania. And we have four children. They are [three sons and one daughter], and we have six grandchildren.

**INT:** How long have you been married?

**MATES:** Since 1947.

**INT:** You have four adult children?

**MATES:** Yes. Adult children.

**INT:** Can you tell me about your education, your wife's education, and a little bit about your employment?

**MATES:** My wife is five years younger, so she didn't finish grammar school. She went up to the fourth grade. I finished seventh grade, and I started technical school for, to go to the printing business, was a special school, and we had to learn. So I went. Then...war broke out. 1939, I was nineteen years old. And...

**INT:** What kind of work did you do?

**MATES:** Then I was working as a printer, you know, for...we were making art work, like...invitations and so on. Small printing. And this was, when the war broke out, of course, everything suddenly changed, and after two weeks, I saw what they were doing, and I wanted to run away on the Russian side, because I was at an age that I knew it was dangerous for me to stay with the Germans. And my...I left the whole family. My parents told me to go. And I smuggled through, two weeks, three weeks after the war was still, the border you could smuggle easier through, but I had to go through, with my clothes, through the river. And I had to smuggle through on the Russian side.

**INT:** Can I just finish the current information and then we'll go back? So what kind of work did you do when you came to the United States, and your employment currently?

**MATES:** I was, when I came to the United States, I was a watchmaker. I worked as a watchmaker, and...then I worked in a factory, because I saw that watch making here wasn't paid well. I had a background, also a mechanical background. So I worked in a factory as a machine operator, and then I worked as an inspector, a blind inspector in Omaha, Nebraska. I came first to New York. But I didn't like, I didn't know how to bring up children, we had two small children, to live in New York. But from the beginning they told us that we have to go to the Midwest, to Des Moines, Iowa. If you want to go in New York, you have to be on your own. So I tried the two weeks first in New York, and then I said, "Okay, I'll go to Iowa." To Des Moines, Iowa.

**INT:** Oh, Des Moines, Iowa.

**MATES:** And in Des Moines I was, they helped us, the Joint gave us first rental space, apartment, and they paid for the first month, and they gave us some furniture and things, you know. A ice box. (laughs) And baby's furniture and food. And they gave me a job, helped to find a job. So I found a job as a watchmaker. And I worked for a company Zayles (sp?), a big company. They were then 40 stores, you know, it was a chain store. And they tested me out. They need a watchmaker for Omaha, Nebraska. And if I am okay, they will transfer me there. So after thirty days they told me, yes, I can go, we will pay you the expenses, moving expenses, and we'll take the family to Omaha, Nebraska. And from then I didn't need so much any more help. I was on my own earning. And they gave me the job, they told me that after five years, I will accumulate certain, every year a bonus, payable after five years. If I am honest. This is how they kept the group there, people stay with them, you know. But I knew I will not stay five years in a place. So actually, it worked the opposite. I felt that I am losing every month the bonus, that I will never get paid for it. (laughs) So I took a job later in a factory, making hydraulic pumps. Big factory. By...I forgot his name. (pause) I forgot the name. They were making hydraulic pumps, and car parts and so on. They hired me first as a machine operator. Then later they gave me a job as a line inspector. (pause)

After working as a line inspector and so on, I tried again to go for another job as they advertised, after a year I changed jobs as an inspector. To organize the inspection department. They needed somebody who had experience, was making plastic parts and so on. They did a lot of...losses because of bad production, and they wanted someone to organize a department. So I was working there again when they hired me there were, five or six applicants for the job. Because it was a highly paid job. To be chief inspector, you know. And then five days later they called me. They wanted me to take the job. But they promised me, the wages were not too much more different. So I thought that...after thirty days they will see if I'm worth so much, or not. So thirty days later they said, "Okay, we'll pay you." It was then \$110.00 a week. And so I was working there again about a year's time. And then I opened my own place in Omaha.

**INT:** How did you eventually end up in Philadelphia?

**MATES:** Yes. Because of an invention I had. You know. So...I had a, developed a little calendar, you know, on a watch band, it said, for the first time, when the watches came out with a calendar, automatic, what should happen with those millions of watches that don't have one?

So I made a kind of a watchband. I designed it. Actually this one, I designed this in Berlin, still. But I had a patent here in the States, and approved it, and I found a company who wanted to produce it, and to market it in the States. They saw that the samples that I brought in, the man, it was an insurance company, and he liked it. So they said, but in Midwest, there was no fine production, you know, for...precision instruments. They made heavy machinery down there and so on. But not fine. This was everything in the East, or the West Coast. So we found somebody who wanted to produce this in Philadelphia. They paid my expenses to move to Philadelphia back. And here I was working with a company who was making those parts.

**INT:** What year was this approximately?

**MATES:** This was 1957.

**INT:** And you stayed here since.

**MATES:** I was six years in Nebraska, then in '57 I came to Philadelphia. And...[my daughter] Gina was already born.

**INT:** Your children, could you give me the names and the ages of your children?

**MATES:** Yes. Harry is the oldest. He is the pharmacist. He was born in 1947. Joe is a jeweler. He is born 1950. Gina, my daughter, is born in 1952. And then Sam is born 1954.

**INT:** And some of your children are in your business, work with you?

**MATES:** Yes. Sam and Joe was working with me. And then after Gina got married, she was working with me, too. So all three children are working with me. And of course Sam got to college, but I wanted him to, he wanted to be a, like an interviewer, he went to work in a reporter, and he finished college for...(pause)

**INT:** Oh, in journalism?

**MATES:** Journalism, yes. He finished high school, he said, "Dad, I'm tired of school. I'm twelve years in school. I would like to take a year off, and then go to college." I said, "That's a good idea. What are you going to do?" He said, "I will like to travel." I said, "Where you gonna take your money?" "I will go to work, and I will make some money." I said, "All right. You go to work and you bring me a check for the first thousand dollars, I give you the rest." And he went to a bakery, and it was in July, in those hot days. And he worked overtime and so on. He worked to clean up, you know, so he, after three months, he brought me the check, \$1,000. I said, "All right. Now you know how hard it is to work for the money. You gonna watch how you spend it." And I gave him, I said, "Keep the thousand dollars. Buy the tickets. What plans do you have?" He said he wants to go to Europe and to Israel. I said, "It's a good idea. You could visit Europe and go to Israel, and stay in a kibbutz, and see the life there," and so this is what he planned, and but it turned out a little differently. He went and he was in Israel for three months on a kibbutz. He met a friend, he was from Canada. They got together an acquaintance,

he said, "Let's get out of here. Let's see the world." And so he told me he's going to Turkey. So he went first to...Cyprus, and then to Turkey, and I had to send him some money. He started to run out. So then he went, he start his year trip. You know, he went from Turkey to...Iran. This was the Shah then. And from Iran he went to Pakistan. And from Pakistan he went to India. And he went to...the Himalayan Mountains. And then he got...of course, he was always sleeping in those fifty cents hotels. He wasn't...like a tourist in luxury, you know. And they stole the money from him. We had to transfer quickly to the consulate, you know, quickly. You know, he went through after a year, finally, we got him home. He got home. And my wife looked at him, and said, "Look, Sam. Go to the garage, take everything." (laughs) He had long hair. And finally he said to me, "Dad, things that were once important to me are not anymore." This is in a nutshell what he learned. He had a rich experience of how cheap life is in those areas, and so on, what is going on. Because he was travelling where no...tourist goes.

And so he went to college. And he went through college for four years, and he wanted to make a better world, tried to work as a...for a newspaper, a reporter. But slowly I coached him to get back and once he was with me, he opened another store, and I kept a partnership with him, and it's here for my son when he comes to join him, that he can join him together.

**INT:** So these are jewelry stores?

**MATES:** Yes. One in a nearby shopping village. You know, here in Springfield. It's a nice store. But when he came back and I said, "If you want to contribute to, you have to go to some professional knowledge about jewelry." So he went, he took a course, and he's a gemologist now, and he's one of the top appraisers in Philadelphia. He was on TV one time. And the rest, he has a very successful store.

And my daughter went to, with her husband, but they didn't make it. So now they're joining me with the project that I have. So this is my retirement project, and I enjoy very much what I am doing.

So this is about all.

**INT:** Did your wife work in the business at all?

**MATES:** Yes, with me, she was working all the time. And she was a great help. And she learned a lot from surviving how to be a...how to, it was helpful, a lot, to be in the business.

**INT:** How would you describe your economic status? You are currently successful and middle class?

**MATES:** In the beginning it was hard. From earning a living in a job, you could just...you can make it. You could make it. Particularly I tried to give them what they needed and so on. But this is why I went on to my business. I want to give back here, and the invention didn't work out. I went to stores which were very, you know. It was hard, because I opened with \$1500 dollars. This was all I had. And after...after two months, they broke into the store, and they took the little

that I had. And some people came in and offered me help. One man offered me a loan for \$400. And another signed a loan, because a bank will not help in the beginning when you go into business. They will give you a loan when you have a job. But in a business, they will not help you. So the landlord, Irish man, was having this shopping center. He offered me a loan. He said, "I know you're going to make it." And he signed for me for \$2,000 that the bank loaned me. And this is how I started it. We had a hard time the first five years. So I was going on a job back. My wife was in the store, and I was working, in order to sell yourself, you have to talk a lot, and talking a lot, you don't make the job work. But gradually I knew in the end I will...make a lot, people will come to me, and this is how I build up. After seven years, five years start to be profitable, and then slowly we grew. But I was thirty years in the store, you know, and my son was with me...till, for the first, for about five years, and then he went on a job, because I noticed that he was restless, he wanted to build something on his own, so found a solution. But then my daughter, after she got married, she was in the store helping me with her husband.

**INT:** Tell me a little bit about your children?

**MATES:** Yes, when they were an age, I had to bring them to a Jewish upbringing, where the neighborhood here, we were looking for, an affiliation with our synagogue. And we found there was a group of Jewish people who were trying to build a synagogue. They were also GI's who survived the war, and they were having suddenly a greater Jewish identity than before. Because of what happened with Israel and so on, suddenly was a new trend. And they were building synagogues. So first they joined, what was the...a firehouse, yes. They were Legionnaires firehouse.

**MRS. BRUNER:** (Listens in and adds comments)

**MATES:** We were sitting together and we were organizing.

**INT:** This is a Conservative synagogue?

**MATES:** Yes, Conservative. So we were organizing this synagogue, and coming into, was in a firehouse, the meeting, and the prayers and so on, and then they were raising money to build a...and we started to build, and I was a part of the synagogue. And this is how we brought the children to Sunday school there, and so on. It was...here at Beth Tamar. And then later we moved into another section here, so joined with another synagogue in Yeadon, because I didn't want to transport too far, you know.

**INT:** How observant were you, or were you less traditional in terms of Jewish practice?

**MATES:** No, just traditional. We had holidays, and so on. But I didn't go every day to the shul, only Saturdays we went, just to show them the way, and Fridays sent them to, so they participate in a religious school. But we started only when they needed to go to Sunday school, to Hebrew school.

**INT:** Okay. Can you just tell me your children's education, their marital status, how many are married, and have children?

**MATES:** They are now, one is, the oldest [Harry] is born 1947. He was born in Berlin. The next is Joe. He was born in 1950. And in Berlin, too. Those two were born in Berlin.

**MRS. BRUNER:** [Joe] He has two boys.

**INT:** And he's currently divorced?

**MATES:** Yes. He's currently divorced.

**INT:** And your oldest son is single?

**MATES:** Is single. And, but he managed to go through college in a pharmacist.

**MRS. BRUNER:** At Temple. He was accepted to pre-med, and then he changed his mind, and he went to pharmacy for three years.

**MATES:** And now the third is Gina. She's born in 1952. And Sam, two years later.

**INT:** And she has two children.

**MATES:** She has two children?

**MRS. BRUNER:** Two boys. They're beautiful boys.

**MATES:** And Sam has two children, two boys also.

**INT:** So you have six grandchildren.

**MATES:** Six boys. All boys.

**INT:** You need some granddaughters.

**MATES:** (laughs) It's not my business.

**INT:** What about any Holocaust-related activities, involvements with other survivors, and organizations?

**MATES:** No. No. I was somehow, I don't know why, but I felt when I come together with them, they have one subject, you know? And I wanted to change my lifestyle, completely go away from it.

**INT:** What do you mean by that?

**MATES:** I wanted the children also to live in a mixed neighborhood. I didn't want to...

**INT:** Assimilated?

**MATES:** Assimilated, yes. So whatever they pick up, I know it was my fault, they married, they choose another Jewish partner. But I manage one thing.

**MRS. BRUNER:** This is the latest picture of the confirmation. He was confirmed about four weeks ago, Danny. That's Joe's son.

**INT:** You were just saying you see some relationship to your own decision to live in an assimilated area.

**MATES:** Yes, we wanted to be in a Jewish ghetto, together with all the Jews. We wanted to be among the Americans. And whichever, it was here, let's see, 15% Jewish, 85% non-Jewish.

**INT:** And you see a relationship to your children's choice of partners in that?

**MATES:** It is, maybe, but I told her, even if they would be in a Jewish neighborhood, they could marry also a mixture. But I reinforced in them only a Jewish identity in a way, and I thought how I would feel about how...but when it comes to marriage, I said, we have so many problems that a married couple has to go through, you're just adding one big more problem, if you have a mixed marriage.

**INT:** So was this a source of conflict between all of you?

**MATES:** Yes. But with Gina, it was difficult. I remember she went with Paul, and I didn't like it. And I said to her, she was eighteen years old, she wanted to run away. I said to her, "Wait two years. If you are 21 and you feel the same way, I give the blessing." And she waited till she was 21, and I said, "All right. It's your choice. I know that I could be wrong, you know. You know what you're doing, because you're 21. You listened to me, and I know that your decision is mature." And then we, so I was really...we really adopted him just as he would be...But he didn't change right away to Jewish.

**INT:** He converted later by choice.

**MATES:** By choice, yes. So, but I knew she had a strong influence, and she will bring up the children in a Jewish way. And this is what we cared so much, because so many of us died, and I said they want to save another Jewish soul.

**INT:** And your other grandchildren?

**MATES:** Same thing. As much as Joe wasn't religious, he was farther away from religion than Gina. But this was strong to him, and they, thank G-d, bring up the children in a Jewish way. So



I felt in a way that I had brought to the Jewish community another Jewish person. Even if she wasn't Jewish. Okay? It's more important that a Jew...

**INT:** Be included than excluded.

**MATES:** Yes. So we gained in a way, more Jews. And...the same thing with Sam, you know. He married also. But when it comes to, and she was particularly, you know, far away from Jewishness. But they were more Irish and so on. But she converted. And in fact, she denounced her religion, when it was, his...

**MRS. BRUNER:** On his son's bar mitzvah.

**MATES:** Bar mitzvah, yes. It was not necessary, and she did it on her own. Made like a denouncement. In front of her whole family.

**MRS. BRUNER:** Her mother was there, and her father.

**INT:** Do you think as a family you accepted them? You welcomed them?

**MATES:** Oh, yes, this was a very deep, you know, like saying, I belong to you. To us.

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

**MATES:** I was the oldest one from the second one. From the first family he had children.

**INT:** He was a widower? Your father?

**MATES:** Yes. Yes. He was a widower, yes. And...so she was twenty years younger than him. My mother.

**INT:** Oh, your mother. A younger woman.

**MATES:** Yes, because she came from, she was, she lost also her parents, she was together with her brother. So she was an orphan. This is why she had to marry someone which is twenty years older. But he was in...in used furniture business. And they were selling some used merchandise and so on. But then later I, when I started to work and so I helped, and I remember we had a telephone there, and my father, the first I ever remember, I went to the telephone, so he took off his hat, (laughs) had to get used to talk on the telephone.

**INT:** It doesn't sound like you were a poor family. You were a comfortable family?

**MATES:** Before the war, yes. Comfortable. But it was hard living, because in order to live comfortable a little bit, you know, it was hard living. People were making, the worker was

exploited, like here, too. The same, those years, 1939, 1935, '33, and then was also the recession that was here in 1929, you know, it was also in Europe. So...

**INT:** So you were the oldest of how many children?

**MATES:** Yes, I was the oldest, yes. Of five children, yes.

**INT:** And you helped your father in his business?

**MATES:** Yes. And then I worked as a printer. You know. This is why I didn't go to college or to a higher school, because I had to earn a living. And I belonged to a Zionist organization. So we had a good upbringing, because of the influence of the Zionist organizations that we belonged to, and the program. Like scout program, you know, and so on.

**INT:** Your family had a religious affiliation at this time?

**MATES:** Yes, surely.

**INT:** How observant was your family?

**MATES:** Yes. They were observant. They were observant. But...we didn't, we were not Hasidic, but they were observant. And this is 1939 is when the war broke out, and I run away to the other family, they lived in, they were on the Russian side.

**INT:** What were some of the early indications of war, that times were changing? How did you and your family know what was going on?

**MATES:** Of course, we were aware...I was young, maybe I didn't realize so much that the danger is so imminent, you know. But when it happens, it was pretty sudden, because we even were not, I was not aware of the danger. I was on the street when the Germans came in, you know, instead of hiding some place, I was watching them coming in, you know.

**INT:** This is when they started invading Poland?

**MATES:** Poland, yes, and the sixth day they came to Cracow. And there was no opposition. They went in, and they knew where to go. Right away they made organized those...orders what people should do and not do and so on. And...

**INT:** So there were early restrictions?

**MATES:** Oh, right away, there were restrictions, yes.

**INT:** So what happened?

**MATES:** People had to give away the gold and so on.

**INT:** What about your father's business? Was that taken away from him?

**MATES:** Yes, yes. There's nothing to take. We didn't have such a business, but we couldn't be active anymore in business. You see, we had to come to a stop. And maybe he could quickly sell out enough, you know, to...but he had to...And...

**INT:** Did you have brothers and sisters in school? How were times changing?

**MATES:** Yes. My sister was, they couldn't go to school. It was 1939, September, when the schools should start. They didn't go to school yet. And two weeks later, as I said, I left the home, and I went to the Russian side.

**INT:** And how old were you then?

**MATES:** Then I was nineteen years old. I was lucky, because I was already going to the military preparation, because I should be called to the army. And when the war broke out, so I didn't have a chance to be called.

**INT:** This would have been in the Polish army.

**MATES:** Yes, yes. Polish army. In Poland. Then I was on the Russian side, later. And...

**INT:** How did you make that decision, and how much contact did you have with your family? Was that one of the last times you saw your parents, grandparents when you went away? Can you tell me more about how you made that decision and what happened to your family?

**MATES:** You mean, from when I run away when the Germans came in? The decision was made because I was young. They know, my mother knew that I am most in danger, according to my age. They thought the girls are young children, they will not be taken away.

**INT:** So you had four younger sisters?

**MATES:** Yes. One brother and four...three sisters. Three, one brother, and me. They were all together. But later, maybe a few months later, my sister, who was two years younger than I am, she was seventeen, my mother saw that she is in danger, too, and she told her go also on the other side. And she smuggled through, and somehow she got through, and came to Boryslav, the area where part of the family from the first marriage lived. A second brother, how you call...

**INT:** The stepbrothers?

**MATES:** Stepbrothers, yes. And...they helped us in the beginning. And it was not...I was trying the last, before the war broke out with Russia, I went to a big city, to Lwow, you know, it's like...

**INT:** What was the name of the town?

**MATES:** Lwow.

**INT:** How do you spell it?

**MATES:** L-w-o-w. It was the name of like a lion. Lwow. It's a big city, it belongs now to the Ukraine. Ukraina. And my uncle was living there, and I came to prepare a package to send to my parents in Germany, because I was sending packages and many went through.

**INT:** To Germany or Poland? I thought they were in Poland.

**MATES:** Poland, yes, they were in Poland. But the German occupation. They divided Poland, half Poland to Russia, and half Poland to Germany. And the mail went through, I could send packages. So they got some food that I could send, and I prepared a big box, packages, when I got some money from the rest of the family together, and I prepared a big package. And it was on a Sunday. And Monday, yes, on Saturday, and Sunday morning, the war broke out. We didn't have no idea. You know, it was a sudden attack. And the city was so bombarded.

**INT:** Are you talking about Cracow?

**MATES:** No. Lwow.

**INT:** Okay. Where you were. You didn't know what was happening in the rest of Poland?

**MATES:** No. My sister was...still in Poland. Oh, yes. My sister was with me. But...but we could help in sending out the packages. (pause) I am now thinking for a moment, you know, because it's so many years ago. So the package, I couldn't any more return to my town wherever I was from there. When the war...(pause) So the Germans were already organized in such a way that they started right away round up Jews and so on in Lwow. And again, I was arrested, and I thought I will never go out. But somehow I got out, and I said, "I will not stay in Lwow," and I went to a small town, wandered away to a small town, which used to be kohorsz (sp?), it means, kohorsz, it was a farm, a giant farm, you know, which they took away from several farmers, and they made together one big...farm.

**INT:** Like a communal farm?

**MATES:** Communal farm. They called it kohorsz. And I went there and first in a small town, and they needed, in other words, they hired me to go to work for other Jews, you know, because they had to supply fifty Jews to work on the farm. And I went to beg one farmer family for some money. But I saw this life, and when I returned, I had no place to stay, and so on. So I went to the German officer, and I said, "I would like to stay here permanently, because I have no place to sleep, and so on." He said, "Okay. What is your profession?" I said, "I am a schlosser, a mechanic." So he said, "If you want to work in," how you call the place they put for horses.

**INT:** In the stables?

**MATES:** The stables, where they make iron, they blow...fire, you know.

**INT:** Iron works. Furnace, for the shoes on the horses.

**MATES:** Yes. The iron place. So they told me, assigned for me a place to sleep and so on. At least I was...more comfortable.

**INT:** It sounds like you were almost like a foreman. You were in charge?

**MATES:** No, not in charge, but just as a worker in the place where they have, a shop, you know, where they were making...I don't know how they call this shop. Iron shop. And I was there for about, till Christmastime, and I noticed that the man in charge, the German officer, who was special assigned for these jobs to manage those farms and so on, and the factories, and he was going to Cracow, to the town where my parents are. So one day I went to his office, and I said, "My parents live in Cracow," I said, "And I could be helpful on the way, if you, if it's possible to go with you." I know he took a truck, a truck was going with him.

**INT:** So you offered to either translate or give him directions?

**MATES:** No, no, to help on the way, if he needed a helper. And if he didn't throw me out, I knew I could go, and I was waiting. And I jumped on the truck, you know. And I went to Cracow. And on the way, you know, they had still the borderline between the part of Poland and Russia, and the part that belonged to Germany. It was divided. And they asked the officer, "Do you have Jews?" He said, "No." Because he wasn't allowed to do this, what he did.

**INT:** So he was protecting you.

**MATES:** Yes. Protecting me in a way. He said no. And finally we went to Cracow. It was cold, you know, very. And...I didn't help him nothing, but he took me, you know. And when we came to Cracow, he said, "This is it." So I went out to Cracow. And he said, "But don't tell how you got here." All right? And he wished me luck. And I, then I joined the parents. Not in Cracow anymore. They were, they had to leave Cracow, because Cracow was, they made Judenrein.

**INT:** Free of Jews.

**MATES:** Free of Jews.

**INT:** So you had gone to where you were born, to where your family, and how did you learn where they were, or if they had gone?

**MATES:** You mean in Cracow?

**INT:** In Cracow, mm-hm.

**MATES:** This was not where I was born. We moved to Cracow. The other children were born there. And...but they had to move, leave the house where they were living in Cracow, and they had to go to a small town, Smolniki. They had to move. And I found them. I knew that they were in Smolniki, a small town.

**INT:** This is still in Poland, in German-occupied?

**MATES:** In Poland. With the German occupation. And then when I came to that small town where they were living, I knew again I cannot stay there.

**INT:** Because?

**MATES:** Because, my age, and I have to, they would take me to some work, and so they were going to forcible work. Again, I made, voluntarily I went to, they needed people on...of the airport. They had also like a farm on the airport, for self sustain for their people and so on, and the airport was a big place. Because there was a war, and they were preparing planes and so on. It was a busy place.

**INT:** What were the conditions like for your family?

**MATES:** For my family, they were living in a house, one-room house. The houses were separated because everybody was trying to find a place. So in one room they lived the whole family together. One room. And it was an outhouse to go out. You know, but...and... (pause)

**INT:** Were they hungry?

**MATES:** No, they somehow, they was selling out clothes, whatever they had to buy the food. Eventually they start to run out, but still they were selling out, you know. And I saw that I am eating the food that I shouldn't eat, you know. And so I didn't, so I left for the airport, for the airfield, you know, to work there.

But later, my sister joined me there in the airport. She saw that it's a good job there. So she joined. And...eventually...

**INT:** This is your seventeen-year-old sister?

**MATES:** Yes.

**INT:** Other children were still younger, and they were with the parents?

**MATES:** Yes. Yes. So there were three with my father. My brother, he was fourteen years old, and a sister who was...twelve years old, and another sister who was about eight years old, nine years old. And the brother was fourteen years old, he was helping me, smuggling in. Because of him, he could support the family, because he was a child, not grown up, and he went to Cracow, and he exchanged things and so on, and he supported, this was how they supported

themselves, partially. And I just couldn't see that he is supporting me, and so on. So I went to the job, and later my sister went. But the time came, they were liquidating the town.

**INT:** How did you know that? Were you hearing stories?

**MATES:** No, no. We know that things are getting, everything was planned so suddenly that nobody was prepared for anything. (Excuse me for one second.)

So suddenly my younger sister, who was thirteen years old, twelve, thirteen years old, appeared in our airport. She got through, and she got to us, and she said, "Mom sent me out, because they are liquidating the area that we live." And so we somehow had the privilege to go with the truck, the whole group, you know, to visit the area. And we made a visit, so we saw the whole house was completely boarded up. And the neighbors told us, they were taken away, and they were all liquidated, shot.

**INT:** From the town?

**MATES:** All the Jews from this town, small town. They brought them to a place, we didn't know where, and they liquidated them. And my sister would be there if she wouldn't run away. And my mother wouldn't send her to me. So I was with those two sisters together at the airport.

**INT:** So you had no idea?

**MATES:** Suddenly everything was boarded up, and we had to come back and hear the news about it. And...

**INT:** So your father, your brother, and another sister, you think, were killed.

**MATES:** Yes. My mother and father and a brother, and the other sister, yes. And...they were starting to liquidate, it was 1943. And they were starting to liquidate, came an order to liquidate also the airfields where we were working. They had to go, we had to go to Plaszow. They were building the camp Plaszow in 1943.

**INT:** That's a labor camp.

**MATES:** Yes. This is where the ghetto was, you know, Plaszow camp, what they show on the movie.

**INT:** Mm-hm. In "Schindler's List."

**MATES:** Yes. In "Schindler's List." This was the camp. So she was there, my two sisters and I had to go to the camp. And I was assigned to work in a watch making shop. They were making shops of the different professions. Or like they showed on the movie, they were making iron...shamirs, you know, how they call, the hinges, you know, that he wanted to kill one. He was counting how many he did, you know, and he knows that he was lying. How many he's

doing, and he took him out, he wanted to shoot him, and the gun got stuck. And this is how he survived.

But I was working in the watch making shop. And I had this encounter, too. This man gave me a watch.

**INT:** Was this one of the soldiers?

**MATES:** Pardon me?

**INT:** One of the soldiers?

**MATES:** No, no. He came in, in the shop. He said, "Here is a watch. You're going to fix it." "(German) If the watch doesn't function, then you will die with a hero's death." So when I fixed the watch, you know, I wanted, because it was a small ladies watch, I wanted to hear the beat of it. By the beat I know whether the watch will hold up or not. So he said, "I don't want to listen to the watch." He was afraid that I will tell it he was listening to it. Nobody wants to...so I gave the watch, and it worked fine. But this is, was the life. They were bringing in, into the camp, people, shooting them on a, they had a little hill in the camp in Plaszow.

**INT:** So you knew this. You were hearing this.

**MATES:** Oh, yeah, you were hearing.

**INT:** What were the conditions like?

**MATES:** We had, those people who were there, had organized conditions. We were...people who worked for shops on different places were beaten or so on. But was a kitchen with our food, we had our barracks to sleep, and so on. Conditions were pretty normal for a camp. Okay? You had, the work, once you had a working place, if you had to work in one, you had some food delivered to you regularly and so on. And the food somehow had something in you could stay alive, and work. So conditions were all right.

But under those, there were some special places where people lived through. I was lucky to work in the watch making shop. Others working in shoemaking shop, and others in clothing, and so on. And...

**INT:** What were your sisters doing?

**MATES:** Sisters, yes, they were working in a clothing, in a sewing shop. And one went to Schindler's factory.

**INT:** This is the older one?



**MATES:** The younger one. Yes. The younger one. But later again, they, because too many people they were bringing in. There was always something going on. It was also a place, it was so built up that it was a transfer place. People came in, several thousand people, only a short time, and they were going some place else. In other words, the camp was divided in two parts. One is a transfer place, and one steady working with barracks and so on. So...there were 25,000 people there. They converted this camp out of the cemetery. They took out all the graves, you know, and they came out with a bulldozer, and even the dead people, were buried, I don't know how long, they were digging out and taking out the gold teeth. From the dead people who were there a long time. They were digging up, taking out the gold teeth.

**INT:** Who did they have doing the work? Digging out, and removing the bodies?

**MATES:** This was the workers, everybody was assigned, you know, to the job. And at the beginning, also, I was working on the building camp. Before the shop was built, I was digging out the holes and working. But when you're young... (pause)

**INT:** So it was run by the Nazis, but were the Poles also working there?

**MATES:** No. No. No. It was only Jews. Nobody else. Only Jews they were bringing in. It was a camp. It was strict. In the morning you had to stand up and stand in the cold. But these conditions were still livable for a camp.

**INT:** Better than the concentration camps?

**MATES:** No, this was a concentration camp.

**INT:** But exterminations occurred?

**MATES:** No, there were not exterminations, except that they had execution spot. But not extermination in ovens. The execution spot was people they were bringing in people, even Germans for, they committed some crime, and they were shot. Right away, they had to, people would have to undress, lay down, and they were killed. Yeah. And everybody...

**INT:** This was happening to Jews, too?

**MATES:** Yes. The Jews from ghettos they were bringing in, you know, and so on. And in this hill, they were killing a lot. We would hear the shots and so on, you know. Sometimes, some people got out from the grave at night. Because they killed some, twenty people or so, some of them were not dead. Got out of the grave, you know, and got into the camp. Somehow they got them somehow a name and so on. And they survived. They were wounded and taken care of, and so on. But those people sometimes lost their mind, because they thought always somebody is after them. They start the memory, and it was a horrible thing to get out from the grave, you know, among living.

And my sister was taken over to a different camp, Skarzysko, they called it. It's Skarzysko, it was in Poland, and they were making an ammunition factory. And she went through a lot. This was Eric's mother, you know.

**INT:** Eric's mother, [Helen].

**MATES:** And she was taken in another camp. And...I guess he told you about, this mother, what she went through. But only I can tell you...

**INT:** Could you just tell me what you know about her experiences?

**MATES:** She was in this camp, she got sick. And somehow she...and it was...and the camp was, this was near the liquidation time. And she thought because she was sick and so on, that they would send her to the death camp. Because they were segregating people to work in another town, and segregated. So she thought she was segregated for the death camp. And the group, she jumped over to the other group. Thought it's going to work. And a German noticed. He picked her up from the group, and he smashed her over the face, and put her back in where she was. And this group was for living.

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

**MATES:** So she went to Leipzig. But this was an episode, you know, that she went to Leipzig. And Leipzig is a big German town, in Germany, you know, where she was working also in a...she was in a camp, and working in the camp.

What happened to me, is when they...the younger sister was in Schindler's list. She was in the camp.

**INT:** Her name is?

**MATES:** Helena. And for me, I was working until the time came that the liquidation of 1944. The Russians came closer, and they start to liquidate those camps. And they start to, they wanted, they had an order to dig out all the dead people, and to burn them on fire, not to leave any signs of what they did.

**INT:** This is what the Germans wanted done.

**MATES:** Yes. Yes. And this was, it was a terrible smell, to dig out, you know, people who are dead already for a year or so. And decomposing bodies, and put them on wood, you know, and then put a fire.

**INT:** And you had seen this.

**MATES:** Yes. I had to be a helper to do this. It was, this job was not to liquidate all the shops, everything. And I was destined to go to Berlin. Sachsenhausen. This was a camp for watchmakers. They needed watchmakers there. We were repairing watches for the pilots, you know. And instruments, and in this camp was also another small camp, which they were printing American money, and English money, and passports for the spies. They were separated completely. They had the best food down there. You know. And they were engravers, artists, you know, who were making those plates, and working. But they were separated from everybody.

**INT:** Conditions were much better?

**MATES:** Yes. This was, Sachsenhausen at this time, 1944, was a Musterlager (sp?). You know what means a Musterlager? A Muster is a sample, when they called, people came from another country to visit, so they showed off this camp.

**INT:** It's like a propaganda.

**MATES:** Yes. We had in this camp we had barracks they were for Jews, watchmakers, they were for Polacks, for Russians, for Scandinavian people, for German people, you know, who were, guys, they were arresting those homosexuals, you know, and so on. And people who committed crimes.

And it was a hospital also in the camp, you know, and...so they had an orchestra, and playing football, or getting cigarettes, three cigarettes a week. And talents, like money, you could buy some extra food. Salads, potato salad. And...

**INT:** So did you feel lucky? This was safer?

**MATES:** Oh, yes. It was the safest place. I mean, you could survive there. And every day I was going to a special place, a shop. We were fixing watches, you know. And the shop was hidden in the forest, you know, camouflaged against airplanes and so on. Those barracks and working places. So I was every day I was going to work.

And one day, the barrack elteste, means a kapo, who was taking care of the barrack. He was a man also who could kill you (laughs) you know, if he wanted to. You had to hear what, keep your bed right, you know, and so on. Get up. He was the barrack commander, okay. But he was a criminal, a German...

**INT:** Officer?

**MATES:** Not officer. A criminal. One of the...assassins. How you call it? Who belong to, he was...convicted. To be there. But they give him a job.

**INT:** So he was a criminal?

**MATES:** Yes. Yes. But...So he gave me a watch. He could do any watch, to fix it. I was not allowed to do this, but I **had** to. And I, to make the story short, I was caught repairing his watch in the shop.

**INT:** Who caught you?

**MATES:** One Polack who was a...supervisor, you know, who was watching what we are doing, because we had assigned so many watches we had to do. And he saw some strange watch that I was working on. He had an eye. And he said, "What kind of watch is that?" I said, from the Blockelteste." So he made a report to the German officer. And once he made the report, he called me out, and he said, "You're not going to work anymore here." And I know something terrible may happen to me. So he gave me to chop wood on the outside after this, and I had to give all the tools back and so on. And...they confiscated the watch.

**INT:** Did anything happen to the other man?

**MATES:** Which one?

**INT:** Who forced you to fix the watch? Did anything happen to him?

**MATES:** No, no, no, no. They couldn't have influence on the other one. But I shouldn't, didn't have the right to take it. But I **had** to take it. So I was chopping the wood, and I saw the German officer coming out, and I went to him, and I said, "You know, I am a Jew. And anybody can step on me. I had to take the watch to repair it for him. If I wouldn't, he would kill me." I said, "I had to do this." And said, "I was counting the time from doing something else, because it wasn't too much of a job." He said, "I cannot help, but I have to make a report, but I will make it as mild as possible." Everybody was doing his job, you know. So he made a report, because there were, number one, slightest thing you did, they put your shoes to wear out for the soldiers. You had to march the whole day with your shoes, every day, eight hours a day. And if your time was a bit higher, they put you on the shoulder sand, you had to carry while you're walking. And they cut your ration. And the third is to, the third was to take you out into a Straff camp. Means, Strafflager, it means a camp for that you have committed something, a punishment camp. And the fourth was hanging.

So my verdict was punishment camp. Because with this I could be hanged, you know, from taking parts and doing something. Just the slightest thing. And so they brought me to punishment camp. But it turned out, you know, so when I went to the punishment, 35 miles away was a camp, they had put up quickly to build other ammunition, in a primitive way they made, all, you know, we had to put iron, you know, to make molds, and fire, steel was sprinkling you know, and make you a hole, burn out, you know, nobody was taking care of you. It was in cold weather, you know. Real punishment work. And the supervisor took me over, "What is your name, what is your profession?" I told him a watchmaker. "Oh, a watchmaker. I need something, could I have it repaired?" (laughs) So I said, "I have no tools." "So what do you need?" I said, "Just a tweezer I can make myself, and give me two pieces of knives and I can make a tweezer, and give me a file. Give me a...nail I can make a screwdriver, you know,

somehow." And eyes, I had good, I didn't need an eye. "And give me a toothbrush, an old toothbrush, and I can clean with gasoline." So he said, "Look, I'm going to give you a lighter job so that, and then you're going to fix my watch, I will give you a place." So this is how I, they put me to work with people who were already burned up, you know, hands and so on. And they were injured people. And we were making sand, filling out for the grenades, and the Russians told me how to make the part a little bit tighter so it doesn't explode. They know how to sabotage, you know. And they were doing it. Okay, very careful, very...

And...again, the conditions were hard, but food, they were giving it, because it was hard work. So as long as you had some food, then you could...And things, the Russians came closer. They had to liquidate this camp, too. And they put us on a wagon.

**INT:** So you were there for a short time?

**MATES:** Yes. I was only maybe six weeks.

**INT:** This is still in 1944?

**MATES:** '45. '45. It was January '45, February, '45. I came in October of '44, and altogether, both camps were already February, they took us on a wagon, it was cold. Took us to Bergen-Belsen. The famous Bergen-Belsen. I didn't know what happened to the other camp. There were too many people, they couldn't take them on a train. They had to march. So it was worse. But it was a blessing in disguise they took me to the punishment camp. Otherwise I would have to march...

**INT:** You might have been marching?

**MATES:** I don't know, yes, marching, what would happen on the march. Because they killed a lot of people during the march. And...so I went by train to Bergen-Belsen. And Bergen-Belsen, terrible. The first three days they didn't give us **nothing** to eat. And I saw that I will not survive there. I planned to commit suicide. But I wanted to separate myself from my Jewish group, so I went to a group of Russians.

**INT:** What were you feeling? What were you feeling when you contemplated suicide?

**MATES:** No, I wanted to kill a German, to take a knife to kill a German with me, so that they quickly kill me, you know. Otherwise, I could be, you know, this way I know, but they would punish me with the rest of the group that I was with, so I joined a group, all the Russians together.

**INT:** So you isolated yourself from other Jews.

**MATES:** Yes. From the Jews, because they were mixed, Russians and so on. Those days were already the last days they were mixing, they were not segregated anymore. And...this is the first time that I suddenly felt a feeling in the fingers, you know, three days not to get, and I didn't

want to pick up nothing from the ground, you know. And I saw people dying, you know, and laying here, and nothing to do, only they give you your cover, you know, like, how you call it, a...

**INT:** Like a blanket?

**MATES:** Blanket, yes. Like a blanket. And you were walking with your blanket, you were sleeping with your blanket on the floor, on a little bit straw, you know. And in the morning you get up, here is a dead next to you and so on, who had been longer there, you know.

**INT:** So there were people who had been there much longer.

**MATES:** Yes. And I went to, oh, yes. The third day, they gave us a bread, for eight people. One bread, and we had to cut it up to share it. So (laughs) how one had to, how the whole ceremony was that, how can you cut so perfectly that one crumb goes, so everybody made a portion, and one was turning around, he said this one to this, like a (?) who gets it first. And I started to eat this. And I couldn't swallow it. It came back. My stomach was already so shrunked that I couldn't swallow anymore. And suddenly it opened, and I swallowed, but I knew it's life, I have to swallow it. And **then** I got the pains of hunger started to come. And because it was for me the first shock. I never was three days without not eating, you know. And...

**INT:** This was primarily a concentration camp, labor, or work camp?

**MATES:** No, this was concentration camp, they were killing people in a different way, just by not giving them food. Not giving them food.

**INT:** Just starving.

**MATES:** Just starving, yeah. Not doing anything. No work, nothing. Just starving them out. So the people lost, you know, so many things, and they were falling apart. And the dirt, you know, and so on. And every day they came with a wagon, who was dead, they loaded up. They didn't have to shoot nobody. Not do anything. Just they were dying.

Suddenly they came, and I talked with a doctor, an inmate. And I said, "How long can I survive with this piece of bread, and one day a soup with water and peels from potatoes from the kitchen, when they had the Germans, they eat all the peels, they made a soup for us. So I saw the soup peels, potatoes, and this was the food once a day, the soup, and once a bread. Like a square, you know. And he looked at me, and he said, "You know, the way you look, you can survive six, seven weeks." I was still, I had some meat on my body. I said, let's postpone what I have to do. I still had the idea to, I postponed it one time when they gave us the bread, and I wanted to see how long I can postpone, how long can I...live.

But what happened, about two weeks later, they called, they need 2,000 people to go to Hamburg.

**INT:** To work?

**MATES:** Hamburg is a big city, town in Germany. It was not far away, maybe fifty miles. Sixty miles north. Hamburg, Bremen...yes, maybe sixty, seventy miles, yes. So I said I will go. And they needed 2,000 people, so 4,000 people put themselves in line to go. So who was not standing, or they were beating, and anyhow, many got injured just by standing in line, because they wanted to get out. So I had the destiny to get out. And when I stepped out, I never believed that I will step out of this place. And they took us in a train, and we went to Hamburg.

**INT:** You felt lucky?

**MATES:** Yes, yes, yes. To get out of there. Because I knew this is a place that if you don't die from starvation, you die from disease, you know. Because it was starting, you get a disease. Tuberculosis, or the other things. And once you eat something, this was it. You know. So I watched myself, and in the morning, I went to the water and I cleaned myself a little bit up, and this was the worst time that I had in the camp. But it was a short duration, otherwise I wouldn't survive. And they took us to Hamburg.

When I saw Hamburg, it was the first time, I said, "Oh, there is justice." There is justice. People, so dazed. They bombarded. Everything is, no house you could see.

**INT:** There was devastation?

**MATES:** Devastation. Terrible.

**INT:** Flattened by bombs?

**MATES:** Yes. Yes. Burned out, you know. All they needed us, to fill the holes where the train goes, so that they can go. Communication can go.

**INT:** The train tracks.

**MATES:** The train tracks. And the holes where the bombs are. To put back the train tracks and go. And they took the people, but they needed eighty people in one area, a different area for eighty people, groups, different towns. And they gave us a house the first night, I remember, in a bombed out building. And wanted to work, start to sleep, we couldn't sleep. Bombs, the English came, they were bombarding at night, and the Americans came to bombard in the daytime. We were bombed day and night. And even if we were not bombarded, they flew over, and there was the alarm, you know, because they didn't know whether they gonna be bombarded or not. Sometimes they went through only. And so people were in a daze. They even took us to work, the German people tried to throw bread at us, you know. They were having sympathy with us, by the suffering they had, you know. They know they are punished for what they are doing to the world.

And the Americans came with forceful bombs. They burned alive. They were in the shelters, they had to come out of the shelters. Because it was like flame, like gathering, burning, you know, coming down every place. Steel was burning, and everything on fire. And who else was caught, how you call the...how you call this plane? When they were...because their men were...you know?

**INT:** So there were a lot of German citizens, women and children, mostly left?

**MATES:** Left, yes. And they were really hard beaten by the Allies. Because the English were particularly not selective. You know, they were very vengeful, because they bombed England, you know, so they were just paying back. And we were there! (laughs)

**INT:** A mixed blessing.

**MATES:** Mixed blessing, yes. Sometimes we really, would like the bomb to fall on us, you know, and we just...So later they took us out from this building, because the buildings were bombarded the area, and we hear the bombs, the whistles of the bomb, and you don't know whether it's going to fall on you, or someplace else. Until it exploded, then we know it's not on us, you know. But it was too close. The whole building was shaking like a boat, you know, when the bomb fall nearby in someplace. And it was so you couldn't work in day, because at night you couldn't sleep. And so on. And this is how people were in a daze, you know.

And...they finally, a little bit later, they gave us a barrack, a military barrack to a group of only fifty men, and assigned a military barrack. Where the others went, I don't know. And in this barrack again, asked me, "What is your profession?" I told him, "Watchmaker." Again, he needed a watch fixed. And, "We have a wing here on the side, there's a hospital for the soldiers, and so on, and people who are injured, you know. And I will put you in a place there, you will fix my watch. So you don't have to go to work tomorrow." So I went. Again, I had to put together tools, and I fixed this stuff, to fix a pocket watch he had.

**INT:** You were very resourceful with your skills.

**MATES:** Yes. The skill was very needed, because they didn't have anybody to fix anything, and so on. Everybody in the military. So somebody among those people could do something, it was important to him. So he gave me the watch, and he said, "You're not going to work. You're going to go to the hospital, you're going to repair it."

Next day he said to me, "You know, today you cannot be here. We have a commission coming, and I don't want you to be here, because I will be in trouble, and here you get a shovel, and you go this morning to work, and you have to dig those, cover the holes and so on." So I went for the first time to work. Or the second, you know. And finally we arrived to the place of work, were digging the holes, and 12:00, they brought us (?) with food, you know, and a (?) is a big bottle, you know, with food for the whole group, and so on, but at the same time, an alarm went on, Americans are coming. And they came like small fish. The airplane was no bigger than (?). In threes they came, very high. So they looked so small. And then the soldiers, the German



soldiers told us to stay ten men to a tree, you know, so that we are not visible to the airplane. But then they came, and they suddenly **dived**, you know, and I thought they were shot down or something, with those dives, but then they throw leaflets.

**INT:** Oh, leaflets.

**MATES:** Leaflets. **Millions** of leaflets, suddenly. And I was afraid to pick up, you know. I managed to get one, and I saw on the leaflet a map, where the Americans are, where the English are, where the Russians are. And in four languages, they called to the soldiers to surrender. And I saw this, and my heart was (?), you know. But then they came also with another wave of airplanes, and they were throwing little bombs, incendiary bombs, small bombs, because where we were, were petroleum storage.

**INT:** Oh. Petroleum storage.

**MATES:** Yes, and they were covered with green camouflage, you know, not to be seen. But the Americans knew they had there, and they were throwing those little bombs, in case where to bombard, because the storages are spread out. Next to each other, not far away. And one of the little bombs fell, an incendiary bomb, and the whole place was burning, not far away from us. And the soldiers saw this happening, and said, "Go and eat." The planes did their job. This is where I found a leaflet, and I put in my pocket. And...the soldier was discussing, see what he is doing. We are not going to do too much if everything is burning, you know. And so you go and eat, and after you eat, go back to the camp.

So we went slowly back to the camp. There was no camp anymore. The place where I was supposed to work, a bomb fell directly, and killed all the people in the hospital.

**INT:** Where you had the little space.

**MATES:** He just told me, took me, and put me. This is, if...you had to go through **ten miracles** to survive. One wasn't enough.

**INT:** Eric said the same about his mother.

**MATES:** You had to have ten miracles to survive. And his mother survived also. She was when they liquidated the camp. And she was on the death march. This is what we called the march. People were dying like flies. Whoever couldn't walk is shot. And there were soldiers till the last minute they fulfilled what the orders. They just, it was the culture they had. Just the order. And she fell in the last, she was not going to make it. She saw so many people are killed. And they started already walking, so she went through a little time, and they with a girlfriend, they turned around, and mixed with the people, and nobody knows.

(END TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO)

**INT:** And Helena? Did you know where she was?

**MATES:** No, I didn't know where she was. I know that she was supposed to be in Schindler's camp, but where she was, I had no idea.

**INT:** So what happened when they took you back and there was no camp?

**MATES:** There was no camp. So they told us, "Look. We're going to take you to a, we're going to go to a special place with the best, the safest place in Hamburg, against bombers." They had, like I forgot, I don't know how you call it, like garages, where they were fixing, repairing the (German), you know, the boats, the water boats.

**INT:** Submarines?

**MATES:** Submarines. Submarine repair station. They were like an amphitheater, you know, and steps inside the center, and on top they had six feet of concrete and rubber and concrete. No bomb could do anything, because the most precious thing for them were the submarines. To get them fixed, to get them back into action. They were, and this was the safest place to be (laughs), okay?

**INT:** And how many were left?

**MATES:** This was the group, it was 150 or so, from this group.

**INT:** All Jews.

**MATES:** Yes, all Jews. I think they were mixed. No, they were not all Jews. This was a mixed group from Bergen-Belsen, they took to Hamburg, whoever was on, physically fit. And we had to repair, (?) but they saw that the thing comes to an end. They found the flyers, too (laughs), and I quickly organized myself to have a plier, to have a combination plier, that cuts, you know, and wire, and for screws, you know, and I took a string, I cut my shoes in such a way, they didn't take away my shoes when we go away in the train back. And nothing else I could do. But they told us, now, you get a bread, and something else, you know, and you're going to go on a train, you're going back to Bergen-Belsen. We cannot do anything anymore. And I didn't want to go to Bergen-Belsen. I told myself I will not. And I planned to jump out from the train if it's possible.

And this was from Hamburg, and we got to Bucholtz, this is 40 miles south of Hamburg. And the food was out already, everybody ate quickly, because one would steal from another, you know. Overnight, you want to sleep, you're asleep, and somebody will take away your food. So the best place was to put it in your stomach, you know. So...

**INT:** So there's about 150. Mostly men?

**MATES:** Men, all men. But they, when they transported back to, then they brought other men from other groups, too. Not just us. There was 2,000. All the 2,000 back. Suddenly we saw all other groups from all different places. And I was put in a wagon with all different kinds, we were in the same group that they was. They just, we were all 2,000 in one group, and they were, loaded so many wagons. And put us into a wagon, you know, with the little windows, you know, for horse wagons. And they were with wires. And on the way, we started to talk to each other, how to jump out from the trains. But I talked with some Jewish guys, and they said, "No, I lost the sanity to save myself." He felt sick, he was coughing and so on. Then I talked to two Russian boys, who were cousins together, brothers. And I told them, "What do you think about," just for the (?), I wanted to know.

**INT:** So you were on the wagons, but you weren't on the trains yet?

**MATES:** No, we were on the train. Wagon.

**INT:** Oh, it transported you into the camp?

**MATES:** We were on the way to Bergen-Belsen.

**INT:** Okay. So you're on the train.

**MATES:** On the train. Back from Hamburg, we were on the way to Bergen-Belsen. And on the way, we reached only as far as Bucholz, it was a town forty miles south from Hamburg. And it was already night, because there was so much discussions. The train didn't go fast enough. They had to repair over something on the way. Or other groups they were repairing. So they wanted the train to move, because usually the bombers were aiming at trains, mostly.

**INT:** Not realizing that there were prisoners.

**MATES:** No, they didn't realize who was in it, no. Because they didn't even trust the Germans who had the Red Cross on top. They were indiscriminately bombing, you know.

And we got to the station, it was an alarm. The bombers are coming. They stopped, and the Germans run away some place. They didn't want to be near the wagons, because this was the worst place to be, in the wagon. And they left us in the wagon together, you know, to be exposed to the bombing. And, but we didn't know what's going around us. We had no information. So I looked. I had told you the two Russian guys who told me that when you jump out, you can steal easy from the Germans. They have the doors open, they're not closed up, and you can survive. I had no plans. I wanted to get out. And I said, "All right, I have pliers, we're going to cut the wires." We cut it off, we make free the window.

**INT:** There were wires around the window.

**MATES:** Around the window.

**INT:** Like barbed wire.

**MATES:** Yes. Like barbed wires. You put the wires on, you cut the wires and open the window. And now I told him, "Who knows where they are? Maybe they're staying, somebody stays there. Or some other guard is staying. So let me," I took out my shoes, "Let me throw the shoes out." I risked my shoes. (phone interruption)

**INT:** So you were cutting.

**MATES:** And I was cutting those wires. And I threw out the shoes, and nobody, it made a noise, and nobody came. I was so determined, that I knew that I will die anyhow, there it was better than whatever may happen here. And I told him, "Now you have to push me up to get through the window," and I went with my legs first, and then down, and there is no way back anymore. (laughs) And I jumped down.

And the station, it was a big station, and I went under another train, to wait for him to jump out. And I put on my shoes, you know.

**INT:** And others started to follow?

**MATES:** And others, the other two Russians, nobody else from this train. But some other trains did the same thing, also. Others had some ideas, and I don't know. As far as I knew, maybe eight or ten people jumped out, from the 2,000. And the two Russians jumped out. But they start to run. And I didn't want to holler at him, and I was left all by myself. And it was better that I was by myself. But I didn't know what to face. So I...got slowly, you know, in the direction to the town. To the station. But to enter the station was...how you call it? (pause) A fence, yes. Was a fence. Not a high fence, about this high. And I went to the fence, and there was an opening, that means an alarm was out. There was a siren that it was not a bombardment. And I saw suddenly right behind the fence was a sidewalk. It was the end of the station, a railroad station. And was a sidewalk. People started to walk, and I saw a sign there, "guest workers." Polish, Russian people who were free, and they were going back to the station. You know. So then I was waiting till the last, I saw a woman with a child. And I jumped out and I said to her, "Can you help me? I jumped out from a train, and I would like to...somebody to help me, because I needed another jacket." My jacket was with a cross, you know, painted. And so a piece of bread or something. So she said, "Look. This is a camp, on the station is a camp. You have to go where I go. And then you'll meet men down there, and tell them, they will help you."

So I went after her, and I got into the camp. It was a long barracks, you know, like a military barrack. And I went in, and then I saw the people talking, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian. And I said to one, "I jumped out from the train." A Polack, and they said, "Go and hide, sleep in this corner." He told me where. "And in the morning, when it start to dawn, come in this room, and we will have a jacket for you, we have a cut," because my hair was still, you know, they cut across the hair, so it didn't grow up completely, it was still visible. Somebody could recognize.

**INT:** That you were a prisoner.

**MATES:** That I was a prisoner. So he gave me, he prepared for me a cap, and a jacket, and prepared a bread. And in the morning, 4:00 was prepared everything. And they say, "Go with G-d," you know. Go out of the village, see what you will find. Maybe some work and so on. So I went out to this village, from the camp. Not realizing even that in the camp they had a police guard. The Bahnpolizei, they call it. You know what means a Bahnpolizei? Railroad police. Special police, other uniforms, but they were police. But they had to guard the camp, and it was not a camp that they were guarded, just for order, these police. And they had one room, small room, guarding room. And because in the morning, I went to the washroom and washed myself up. And I went into the village, small town.

**INT:** So you were...free.

**MATES:** I was free. And I go and I see a police station here, I go away on another side. (laughs)

**INT:** Were you aware of what you were feeling, what that was like?

**MATES:** Oh, it was wild. It was wild. I didn't know what to do. How to plan, what I will meet. I know that I am in enemy's territory. Okay? I can have a trap any moment. But I made myself a story that I belong to this camp, that there is not work to do, nothing to do, that I am looking for work. This I made up. So I went to the village to a farmer. And an old man came out, and said, "What are you looking for?" I said, "I'm looking for work. There's nothing to do. I'm in the camp, and we have nothing there. I'd like to." He said, "We have no electricity. Here is a shop, but the only thing you can do is to chop wood if you want." I said, "Okay. I will chop wood." And he gave me a pile of wood, and I started chopping the wood by his place. I took my wife after the war to the place where I chopped the wood. (laughs) Same place. I have a photograph from this chopping wood after the war. So I was chopping the wood.

And 12:00 he calls me in. "We going to eat now." He gives me mashed potatoes mixed in with speck, you know what is speck. Fat from...pork. Pork fat. And he gives it to me and a cup coffee. I just couldn't believe. (laughs)

**INT:** Your luck.

**MATES:** Yes. That I was eating it. And so, you know, after, this is like dinner time, 1:00, 12:00, 1:00, and I was, it was good that I eat normal. That I couldn't ask or I was hungry. It was the best food I ever tasted in my life. And the coffee I drink, and I went chopping, and I was chopping the wood. And there was another worker, Ukrainian, and he noticed that I was a little suspicious.

**INT:** He thought you were what?

**MATES:** He noticed that I looked suspicious to him. Ukrainian, you know.

**INT:** You were being careful.

**MATES:** Sure. I did, I got then in the, I ate another sandwich in the evening, and he gave me, he said, "You can take with you a sandwich." I took with me a piece of bread, a slice of bread with something inside. And I went back to the camp. I thought, this is my place where I live. (laughs)

**INT:** Back to the labor camp.

**MATES:** Labor camp, yes, in the station. Back to the station. And I found a place, it was hard for me to find the place. Because I forgot how I came. So when I came it was already dark. But I found the place, and I slipped in.

The next day I got up early. I have a job. Clean myself up, and went back to the farmer, to chop the wood. The day went through nicely, and he gave me the sandwich in the evening, and I go back. And I know already how to find the place, it was still daytime when I came. And so I couldn't, I wanted to hide myself. The barracks, the center hall is wide, and it has swinging two large doors. You know, they have a door like this, so it was against the wall this far from here. This door was so big, so I got between the door and the wall. And I was sitting there, and still munching my food, sitting. I didn't want to be seen by anybody. And suddenly somebody comes with a flashlight. A German officer. And he sees me there. "Was machst du hier! Papieren!" (shouting) My knees...I pretend I don't understand a word what he's saying. And I was answering in Polish to him, you know. And...they knew that I am among those that jumped out from the train that they were looking for. Because others were stealing from the Germans, and they were reporting people who jumped out on the loose, and they are stealing things.

So they called a policeman, and the officer called the guards, and a railroad guard, to bring me to the police station. In town. They took me to the police station. And he told him, if I make any attempt, you know, to run, they should shoot me immediately. So at the police station, the police there was already late, 9:00, 9:30. He said to him, "Keep him overnight. I'd like to find out from him some more." I knew I will be interrogated, but I knew this is the end, you know. For jumping out from train, you know. So. The train, by the way, never made it.

**INT:** It was bombed?

**MATES:** Yes. They killed most of the people and so on. Because it was bombed. And...they never made it. So. I had even some photographs later that they found, people nearby. And...because it was March, oh yes, it was April.

**INT:** Really close to the end of the war.

**MATES:** Yes. This was April. This was April 13 that they caught me. Yes. April 13. (pause) April 11 I jumped out. April 13 I was caught again. They put me in a room, the police chief in the town told him to keep me overnight, he want to interrogate me in the morning to find out. So it was a small room like this kitchen. The door was in the same place, and here was a couch, and a window, and here after the couch was a small table, and then a chair. And the chair was close

to the wall, because the couch was here and the table. And I was in the corner, and I put my shoes down under my head, and I was laying there.

And they supposed to change the guard every two hours. And I, maybe a couple hours later, you know, I got up. I said, "(German) -- I would like to go out." And then he took out his gun, and he said, "But don't try anything." He kept his gun, and I did my business, and then I went back. And I lay down again. And I had the pictures, you know, I was so sad, that just by the **end** of the war, you know, that I could, I wanted to see what's going to happen, you know, in the end. And just as he caught me, that nobody will know where my grave is and so on. This is the pictures, you know, that went through your mind. But it was a night, you know, and the roof leaks, and outside, you know, raining. And we all fell asleep.

**INT:** The guard and who?

**MATES:** The guard who was supposed to sleep, and the guard who was supposed to watch me had the gun in his hand for safety. Put his hand on here and snore. And I fell asleep. And I woke up suddenly, maybe it was still dark. Maybe it was 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning. And it was slight dawn. And I got up and I said to him, "(German -- I have to go out)" and he didn't answer me. One thing I stuck in my mind. When we went back the first time, he left the key in the door. He closed up. And he left the key hanging.

**INT:** To unlock the door?

**MATES:** The first time, when I went out, he locked the door, and he left the key hanging, okay? And it didn't occur to me nothing, but it just flashed over the key. And I tried to get out to ask him "(German -- I have to go out)" and he didn't answer me, and he was, and so I got the shoes in my hand, and I started to walk. I was this much, you know, I just got to, very, very slowly walking. But he doesn't hear a thing. And I got to the keys. And I opened very, very slowly like that, all the time in the world, you know, and I took out the keys, and I went on the other side, and I closed the door, and I put in the keys, and I locked the door, and I wanted to take the keys with me, but they made a noise, and suddenly I woke up what I'm doing! And I started to run like...a rabbit. Without shoes!

**INT:** You're carrying them.

**MATES:** Carrying them. Didn't have time to put them on. And I was running, you know, and I couldn't run too far. Maybe a half a mile, a mile, the most, I could run, till I saw the tree, I could sit down. And I put on the shoes, and I start to think what should I say if somebody asks me what I'm doing. And I went away farther from this place, didn't want to go to the same place anymore. And later, you know, because I was shaking. I after I got calmed down, and I started to walk, and I was walking to another village slower, with maybe another mile lower from the other guy, and started to ask for the same thing. So an older man, he said...

**INT:** You saw another farmer.

**MATES:** Farmer, yes. And I got again a job chopping wood. And I told him, your camp is overflowing with people. I would sleep in the place, which is where the hay is, what do you call it?

**INT:** The barn?

**MATES:** The barn, yes. So he said, "Okay." And I slept in the barn. And a day passed. And another day passed. (pause) It was the 19th came the English. And I got one scare. A policeman noticed me. He went by. One of the town policemen went by, and he went to the farmer, and he asked him how I go here, and I told him, they told him that I am chopping wood, and I lived on the camp, that's what they told him. They repeated. But I didn't know what he told him, or what he was asking. And I got scared. And after he left, I went and I said, "What did he want? Because I notice he went to your barn where I was sleeping." And he told me, "He want you to, after you finish the work here to go to him."

**INT:** Hm.

**MATES:** So whether it was true or not, but anyhow, it took another two days, and then the English came.

**INT:** Oh!

**MATES:** So I saw that English slowly, I came to the town, and I couldn't show it even, how happy I am on the face. (laughs) The English tanks. Because this was not a big place. They didn't occupy the place. They went, and they went away. But I knew the Germans were not there anymore. It was already, it was a place coming along, no bombarding, but just watching. And then another day I saw the English come to the village, you know, and they left. And then they tell the war is over, in other words, for this area. April 21st, 22nd, they said. They said, this area has been overrun by Englishmen. So I said to the German, to...

**INT:** You said to who?

**MATES:** To the people, the farmer, I told him the whole truth. He looked at me. I told him I was in concentration camp. I said my parents were killed. And he said, "We didn't know."

**INT:** He said, "We didn't know"?

**MATES:** "We didn't know. And even if we would know, we couldn't do a thing." He said, but they kept from us, when we have heard lately, terrible things. And then I go out, I meet the Ukrainians, who are working for the farmers, and I told them I'm a Jew. What? They started to joke.

(END TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE)



**MATES:** In the area were no Jews. I took it for a moment, you know, that maybe he knows more, you know, because after all, who knows what is going on? I didn't want to believe that there are no Jews anymore. But it hit me so that he could say this, that he must have seen a lot, and he knows more. He was under freedom, and I didn't know. I had no communication whatsoever. And I didn't know what was going on, and so on. And...I was shocked. But I didn't see any Jews, and I didn't know where the Jews are. And what I did was a stupid thing. Yes, I went to the Burgermeister. I have the paper today, so I thought, he'll write me out, he'll give me a bike. He gave me a bike. I would like a suit.

**INT:** Some other clothes?

**MATES:** Some clothes. "Give me a bike, and give me a paper that I'm looking for my sister," and am wondering here, because I knew she was in Czechoslovakia, and this was 700 miles. There was no transportation.

**INT:** And who was this? Which sister?

**MATES:** Helena sister. Because I didn't know about Helen. Because I didn't know, because I know she was in Germany. But I know Tonia went to...Schindler's factory. It was a list, basically, for...those women, she was lucky, who had husbands, and they were paid, they want to have, women were picked, you know, as...but who happened to work there. She was from the beginning, because she was left, you know, in the group. And I knew that she was in Czechoslovakia, but I wanted a bike, and I wanted a letter on the way that I get help, because I had no money, nothing, and no money was worth anything, and I wanted people when I got to another Burgermeister to help me. A Burgermeister could always help, whoever was in charge of the town. And this document helped me a lot.

But it put, I made a little Jewish flag, a triangle, blue and white, you know, on the bike. And an American soldier stopped me, Jewish soldiers, and I didn't know. And I told them, I was just arrived, you know. And I'm looking for my sister, and I showed him the paper. And they helped me on the way. Yes. Brought me some chocolate, food, some other things. And I was wondering, and then I saw the first little towns, and I met Jews.

**INT:** Other survivors?

**MATES:** Yes, they were survivors groups. Small towns.

**INT:** This is still in Germany?

**MATES:** That was in Germany. All over Germany. And then I got to Buchenwald. And there I saw a lot of Jews. And I took a list of all the Jews who were there. I say, I'm leaving. I was there a couple nights. They told me what happened, they showed me, and they were roaming around, living in barracks, you know, and they were beginning their first days. Oh yes, and I stopped in Bergen-Belsen. Before. And I got a list. Not a complete list, but whoever I saw.

**INT:** There were survivors there.

**MATES:** Survivors. Living in the German officers' camps. Okay? And they were roaming around to the Germans, and getting things, you know? Organizing themselves. They were like from a wild thing, they came out, you know, and...and some kids, they were at school, and suddenly they faced the world who was so hostile to them, you know. And they were somehow amazing that those people were normal, you know? And particularly the younger ones, because they had no school, nothing. And they were taken there to act as survivors right away, you know.

But they were driven you know, to, and most of those people who survived, they were...driven to accomplish something with their lives, you know. To make up for the lost time, to do things, you know. And...we were going through another camp. It took me three weeks to wander through, you know. So I went to, then I had a complete list. And another camp. The one I said just a moment ago. What was the name of this?

**INT:** You said Buchenwald?

**MATES:** Buchenwald, yes.

**INT:** You decided to do this, how come?

**MATES:** Because I was just traveling, I wanted to go to Czechoslovakia. So on my way, I was finding, and I said, "If I meet those people, let me take the list with me." And I took the lists and I went farther, and I met again groups, and I took a list. On the way, I said, "I'm going to Cracow." Because I forgot to tell you this. My sister was still in Plaszow. They took her from Schindler's list, and they put them back into the Plaszow camp. They were supposed to go later to Auschwitz. But I went earlier to Berlin, to Sachsenhausen, and with the last good-bye I said to my sister, "Helena, if you survive the war, you're going to wait for me in Cracow in this and this address." They were looking at me like I am, you know, lost my mind. To think that this is going to make an appointment about after the war. Okay? "You have to wait for me there. And if I come early, I will wait for you. One of us has to leave the message. If you are not there, leave," the message was, every house had this, how you call it, takes care of the house, of the building. Superintendent like here, right? "So leave a message with him, where we used to live, in Cracow." The building where we used to live. So this is why I went there. Before I wanted to go to Cracow on the Russian side back, I wanted to go on the whole American and English side, you know, through. This is why on the way I was at the same time gathering information. I had my bike, and I'm traveling from town to town, and sleeping in different places, you know. But at least I had some support.

Until I reached Czechoslovakia, they told me, some people told me they saw my sister, and she went to Cracow. And so then I took quickly, I didn't want to travel anymore on my bike. Took the bike on the train, and I went from Czechoslovakia to Cracow, and she was waiting for me.

**INT:** What was it like? Do you feel what was it like emotionally?

**MATES:** She will tell you. Yes, yes.

**INT:** Very hopeful for you?

**MATES:** Yes, yes. Suddenly tried to go back, you know. It was important, right after the war to find anyone, who has a father, cousin, or brother or so on, just to have a support, and a mental support that we have somebody close, you know. And...this is...

**INT:** So the two of you decided to do what then?

**MATES:** In Cracow? She found a girlfriend, she was with her, too. Because she was waiting together with her on me. She was (?). And she had already rented a room, and I moved in. Okay, in separate bed. And then later, maybe a month later...we met...Bertha, her sister who was from the first marriage. Bertha. And her husband we met.

**INT:** This was your half-sister?

**MATES:** Yes. My half-sister. And first I met her husband. Her husband was in a uniform, Polish uniform. He was on the Russian front, and he was driving into Berlin, you know, under the Russians. And he was in a hospital in Cracow, because he was burnt from a tank, you know. He got a hit near Berlin. And he was all right. He was lucky. And he was asking me if I heard anything about my sister. Half-sister. And he said he knows that she is living, but she is with another man. Who saved her.

**INT:** This was his wife.

**MATES:** Mm-hm. And because he went to the army, and she was left, and he offered her, it was a friend of hers, and he offered her to take her in the forest, to make a bunker and to survive in the bunker. And she survived with him in the bunker until they were discovered, and they had to sleep in the forest, and all times like this, when you both have to sleep in the rain in forest, he covers her up, that she is warm, and so the bond grew very close, and she didn't want to leave him. And he said to me, "What shall I do?" He said, "I will not allow anybody. She is my wife, and legally, yes." I said, "I cannot, whatever she wants to do. It's her life. I cannot interfere with it." But one day she appeared. She knew that somehow that I was there, because she left the eastern part of the country, she left, because they could after the war go back. And they both went back to Silesia in one town, you know.

**INT:** This is near to Cracow.

**MATES:** No, it may be...a couple hundred miles away south. More to the German side. Because the town was in Germany. In Silesia. And they had a place there, and they lived there. And she left him, and she visited me. And she didn't know what a dilemma she is, and she didn't know what to do. So she said, and what happened, was she was in my place. My brother-in-law came also. And they suddenly met. Suddenly met, and she forgot herself and she embraced him. She said his name, the other guy's name. And it was like a knife. (laughs) And suddenly he came

to, said to him, "Look, I know I am your wife, and I will leave him. Let me go and take my things, and I will come back." And he didn't want to trust her, and he said, "Helena, go with her." Anyhow, she came back, and so on, but she knew it's not enough forgive her. Even if he forgives her, the other guy survived, he helped survive her and so on, for some reason, it was hard for him to forgive. And he was a character, everyone wears his own makeup, you know, and we cannot criticize. We cannot say, these are some things, you know which are really deep, and we cannot make a stand on anything.

Anyhow, they survived, they came back and they were together until she died just two years ago.

**INT:** So she went back to her marriage.

**MATES:** He's alive, yes. He put a big stone in his name and her name. And they were, had bad luck. You know, they didn't have children. And they adopted a child, and the child is retarded. So they never had dreams, and they couldn't conceive, and they were living in Israel.

**INT:** Whatever happened to the other man, do you know?

**MATES:** The other man, he never got married. He was living just with a woman, and so on. And he died young, you know. And, oh, he was a **nice guy**. Much taller than he was, and a businessman and so on. But she knew that she cannot, that she was legally bound, and he wouldn't let her go. And he was crazy, too. He would kill the other guy if she would leave him, you know. And those things were natural. He was fighting in the war, and he was dreaming to come back to her, you know, it was...it was... (pause)

**INT:** A very difficult situation.

**MATES:** Yes.

**INT:** So you were reunited with some of your family.

**MATES:** Yes. Then slowly we built in Cracow together, we went to Silesia, back away from Cracow. We left Cracow, we went to the town, the Polish government took over the German territory, and let the Germans, treated the Germans like the Jews. Take everything and they had to leave all the houses and everything after the war and move. You know? Thousands and thousands. And the Poles took over their homes and possessions and everything. And because he was in the army, they gave him a room in a house. Furnitures.

**INT:** Your brother-in-law.

**MATES:** My brother-in-law. So we lived with him for a while. And then I opened the business, and I saw that there's no future, and I met my wife, and so we got married.

**INT:** How did you meet your wife?

**MATES:** It was interesting. I met her in the Zionist organization. I joined them.

**INT:** This is when you're waiting in Germany and living there for a while?

**MATES:** No, no, this was in Poland.

**INT:** This is still the Polish part.

**MATES:** Polish part. And in (?). This was Silesian, you know, coal mines and so on. This is a small town. And I found a place, I opened a place, I was buying gold and so on, and we started to make money, selling and buying things. But then at night, I had an episode that I hardly got out alive. You know, somebody sold me something which was not kosher, and it was...it was a frame-up from the police. You know, to have an excuse to look for me, to get in and find it and to arrest me. But I...hide it so that they didn't find it. I bought marks, German marks. It was forbidden to buy other currency, okay? So they offered me what I could buy, so I bought it, but they had a law in Poland you shouldn't buy, another currency. Another currency was a big crime. So I said, "No, that's it." And I am selling the place, and I, we're going to move out, and I didn't want to make a business. I sold the place, and then I met my wife, I met my wife, she was eighteen. And she was very much **alive**, you know, living, and I was serious.

**INT:** And you were how old?

**MATES:** I was 27.

**INT:** Older.

**MATES:** Yes. But she was actually five years younger, but some reason she told me she was about eight years younger. Later I found out, because she didn't have papers, and so on. Her mother registered her younger to get food stamps or something like this. Because it was three years. And this was in Russia. At a certain age you could get some more for the children. So she had on official papers, that she is...And I met her and I knew her only four weeks.

**INT:** Mm-hm. Quick romance.

**MATES:** Yes. It wasn't a romance. Sometimes you felt a need. I have to build, to...we were not **able** to have a romance. We were so **dull**. After you lived through, you couldn't be able to, because I remember the feelings of a romance when I was eighteen, you know, and so on. It has nothing to do with it. I was completely, just doing something for the point.

**INT:** You were getting physically healthier, and you wanted to have a family?

**MATES:** Yes, slowly, yes. Family, yes.

**INT:** What did you know about how she survived?

**MATES:** She told me that she was in Russia. They survived...also by a miracle. In other words, the Russians were also very...for instance, Lwow, this town what I told you, they were also refugees from another town, but she registered to go back to the German side. And whoever registered, they took all the people to Siberia. Because they thought they are such spies. They could take a whole town. If only they knew a few people are spies, they could take the whole town and resettle it. So ruthless. And she was with her brothers, and one brother, there was four children. She...was thirteen or fourteen years old, and then she had a brother who was twelve, and then a sister who was ten, and another brother who was six. And the parents. And they took them to Russia, and they told them, "Here you're going to build barracks," in Siberia. And they had to build their own barracks, and so on, you know. They treated them as far as food, the Russians had a heart, you know, so much you could buy and get. And she was going to the forest and picking up those berries and other things. And in the winter she was almost frozen to death, you know. But they survived.

**INT:** A different kind of hardship.

**MATES:** A different kind of hardship. A bullet you cannot survive, but everything you can survive. A man is stronger than a horse. He can survive **so** many things.

**INT:** So she had come back with her family to Poland?

**MATES:** She came back with her whole family to Poland, yes. Nothing happened to them. The mother, somehow they tried. She has some stories to tell about those details, but basically she knew that she had to support the whole family. She had to illegally sell and buy, you know. Do things, you know on the black market, and this is how kids could get away with things, you know. Whoever had kids, they would help and so on.

**INT:** So after four weeks you decided to marry?

**MATES:** Yes. We, not that we decided to marry. But I decided, I decided to leave Poland to go to Germany. And I offered her, you can go with me. So her mother said to me, "I am not going to send a girl with a boy." (laughs)

**INT:** You were much older than her. (laughs)

**MATES:** Yes. I said, "All right, so we'll marry." (laughs hard) This was a romance. Okay. We just didn't know each other, okay? Not enough time to know each other. I know only I liked her only because she was all alive, you know. I was serious, I knew that she's a survivor. She could get places, suddenly, it was a very...go-getter. You know.

**INT:** So you were attracted to **her** resourcefulness.

**MATES:** Yes. Resourcefulness, you know. And I thought she was physically all right, you know. And...I will show you the picture here.

**INT:** So Helena, she decided to stay there?

**MATES:** No. Helena, yes. She went earlier, okay? She was attending the wedding.

**INT:** She came to your wedding.

**MATES:** And she left for Germany. We didn't want to stay in Poland anymore. We knew that the curtain will fall deeper, and we will not be able to get out.

**INT:** Did you have any idea what had happened to Helen?

**MATES:** Yes, I met also. We lived all together.

**INT:** Oh, okay. I didn't realize.

**MATES:** Helen.

**INT:** So what a reunion that must have been.

**MATES:** Yes. Yes.

**INT:** Neither one of them were married at the time.

**MATES:** No. Helen got married, also met the boy in the same organization as I met my wife. He was a madrich, and very active. And, but I told her, when I had the store, the business, and before I decided, she was working with me, Helena. Both my sisters were together. And then I told her, "Here you have some gold coins, put in your shoes, and you are going away earlier on the American side. So you are not going to be dependent on anybody." But still she came to Vienna, on the other side, she got married, and she sent us, he saved her life, because he had something when they were crossing illegally, the Polish border, they got caught, and many were killed, you know, and so on.

**INT:** So it was still dangerous.

**MATES:** Oh, yes, yes. Crossing. Border from Poland to Germany, was very dangerous, because...they were, there were also a lot of Polish organizations who were against the Russians. They were killing Russians, too. Polish patriots.

**INT:** So you didn't know who was Russian and who was Polish.

**MATES:** No, also the Jews. They hated the Jews, too. We were hated even after the war by the Polish. You know, there were pogroms and so on. This is why I didn't want to stay in Poland. It was the end. I said, "This is not a place to survive and to live again."

**INT:** I forgot to ask, did you have experiences of anti-Semitism in the town, when you were growing up in Cracow before the war?

**MATES:** Yes.

**INT:** What was relationships like with the Jews and the Poles?

**MATES:** Yes. It was anti-Semitism, that we used to live with it, okay? Where Jews were in greater concentration, we had not too much contact with the Poles.

**INT:** You were pretty segregated?

**MATES:** We were segregated. We were living in ghettos, so we didn't see too many Poles, all right. Only when I worked in the area, in the gray areas were Poles and Jews, there were more intelligentsia, then they were, whoever was educated highly, you know, moved out from the ghetto. We were in the ghetto. And so we felt like in our own, like in Israel, almost. No, there were synagogues, we were going. We didn't feel it. We didn't feel any anti-Semitism, because people who are just, who are non-Jews, came to work for us. They came to us to work and they had a job.

**INT:** Like your father had the furniture business.

**MATES:** Yes. We had a lady, a Christian lady who would come in and sleep with us, and took care of the house, because she had to work. There was no time. There was a lot. Because they didn't have washing machines and so on. It had to be, it was hard work to keep a household. And we didn't have...even those buildings, you know, you had still to have coal for the winter, to prepare for things. She had small children, she needed help. So we had a lady who lived with us.

**INT:** So for the most part there was tolerance, and Poles worked for Jews, and lived together.

**MATES:** Yes, yes, yes. Only, in those extreme places, you know, let's say, when I went out someplace, and I met others. I had one incident.

**INT:** Did you have any particular experiences as a boy growing up?

**MATES:** Yes. When I met outside, let's say went to a movie someplace, which was in town, I remember one time, and a group of Polish boys started to you know, kicking me, aggravating me. You know.

**INT:** Calling you names?

**MATES:** Yes, calling names, and started to, you know, physically touching and so on, aggravating, and I didn't answer them, because I didn't want to fight. I know I'm not going to win. They were a whole group of eight or ten boys, and I was all by myself. And...it was next to



a movie, and I was going away, and one was after me, and I started to run a little bit, he wanted to really hurt me, and then I turned around, and I kicked him here in the bone, shin part. He cried out, and I run away, and they start to run after me then. And I run into a building, and I saw a mezuzah. I said, "They're going after me." You know. So the owner from the house went out from the building, saw a whole group, and he says, "Oh, he...he will not fight," no, he said, he wait for him, tomorrow morning when he goes to work. They he will catch him. You will not be able to find him now. Then later I left, you know. And of course, they were waiting the next day.

(END TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO)

**MATES:** We were not much in contact, because we didn't mix together.

**INT:** Do you think your parents warned you, how did they protect you from growing up, from Poles? How would you describe some of your upbringing? Were they mistrustful of Gentiles?

**MATES:** No, they didn't...nothing went through our mind about protecting ourselves. It was like living in conditions, let's say, if you lived in Alaska, and this is a house where you have to meet, and this is how you grew up, and we know they are enemies, our enemies, we have to watch, and so on. And just like living with enemies in our place. Like today in Israel, people, Jews with Arabs, and they know when to protect themselves, and so on.

**INT:** So you really felt like the Poles were enemies.

**MATES:** Yes, because I was working in a place, where I was working with the Poles, a Jew had employed me, and he had some Polacks. And I saw the anti-Semitism. They made jokes, Jewish jokes, and so on. And, but we were...the Jewish life was so intense, that we didn't care too much. We were organized. You know, Zionist organizations. We were, you know, thinking about our future, and building Israel and so on, and it was such a spirit of, how you say, how you call that, in the spirit.

**INT:** So you were hopeful that you'd have a life in Israel?

**MATES:** Later, yes. Oh, yes. Yes. I belong, and I knew I'm going to go. It was a building spirit, you know, how you call the beginning. Pioneer spirit, yes. It was very strong then, you know. We knew that our future is not here. Okay? We knew that we are only guests here. And then they were saying, Polish (Polish) Ours are the streets, and yours are the building. And it goes in rhyme in Polish. And...

**INT:** So you didn't really belong.

**MATES:** No. They hated because wherever Jews were active, in whichever area, they excelled, and they were envied. And they said, "Why you are only a guest here, and you are better than

we do?" They were always guests. And Europe particularly was, because after the war, I thought, I lived in Berlin, Germany. I made my master's degree, as a watchmaker. And because you couldn't open a jewelry store without being a professional.

**INT:** You went back to school when you were in Germany after the war?

**MATES:** Oh, yes. Not much school, but I had to go to make my diploma.

**INT:** I see. Your high school?

**MATES:** Not the high school, but you had to go to a professional school for watchmakers.

**INT:** Oh, I see. Technical.

**MATES:** Yes. And I had to make, and they told me prepare for a job. And an exam will be made by competitors, they will examine you. They kept the profession clean from people who are not professionals, because you are serving the public. For instance here, only a barber, you know, has to go through, otherwise they don't give him the license. The same thing a watchmaker in Germany. He cannot serve the public, you cannot open a jewelry store if you're not a jeweler or watchmaker, one or both. You have to, they have to trust you. And then if you have a complaint, you went to the watchmaker's organization, and make a complaint. And then they give you a reprimand. And if more complaints will go, the license will be taken away from you.

**INT:** Sounds like a union a little bit.

**MATES:** It's a union to protect the consumer. Even if you buy shoes, you have to be a shoemaker, otherwise you cannot sell shoes. Just because you have money, you cannot have a store. You have to be a professional. Okay? Like a doctor, or like any other profession, and it was hard to get into a profession. If you want to be a toolmaker, you have to have four years apprenticeship. And this is how I got today, my son keeps my license from the, in the store.

**INT:** So you left Poland, it was feeling very anti-Semitic after the war.

**MATES:** After the war **worse** than in the beginning. Because after the war...

**INT:** You go to Germany, and how were Jews treated in Germany?

**MATES:** Oh very, no, they were feared. You know, they wanted to show their best side. They wanted to atone, you know. And they didn't know how, you know. I'm getting a lifetime pension, a fair amount.

**INT:** Reparation?

**MATES:** Reparation, yes. And it's less than social security, but it helps a lot, you know, and I was going every two years, I could go, this year I skipped, on a cure (?), means to a spa. I had to be there four weeks. And they paid of course half, but I took a better hotel, so all I got is just for the airfare from my wife. And the hotel I had to pay for myself. But because they don't, no luxury. You can go. So I went every two years. This is a place, see, I went thirty years to a doctor here. And they told me that when I reach the age that I will be bended over.

**INT:** Your backbone.

**MATES:** My spine. Curvature of the spine I have.

**INT:** That's because of the war, what happened?

**MATES:** I thought. I thought so, you know? Because I slept in places, and on the ground and so on. So I, so I told the doctor here, he said, "Look, it could be contributing, what you went through. Not necessarily. We have here people who never had a bad day in their life, and they have the same thing." So my theory went out of the window. But they knew that I am, you know, handicapped, so they gave me a larger pension. And I was scared, so I went to all different places I could to find a cure for it, because I was getting here injections, and they didn't help, and I got immune to those injections, and the spine, injections are very painful, even they were very professional about it. He didn't feel it so much, but still I was getting those gold shots and other things, you know, my knees were hurting and so on. It was pain, I couldn't keep a job. And this is even for my own business, because I didn't know. I remember I took a job in Omaha before I came to here, as a corps of engineers, as a draftsman, an opening for a kind of draftsman. And I made application, and I didn't have citizenship yet, and they told me, "We can hire you, but we don't know whether we can keep you if a citizen comes in for the job." I said, "All right." But then they looked me up, because there was some classified work that is always there for making airfields and so on. So I...so they checked me out, and they said, "You're all right, but how long do you intend to stay here? You are jumping from job to job." I said, "If I like it, I stay." I have to like something. So just like this, and they find out for the first time I find out that I'm color blind. They check my eyes and so on. And I work just a year there, and I left, and this was the time when I started with my own invention, and I moved here. But I worked only a year every place because I wanted to gain experience, as much as I could. Because what I created is the essence of everything I lived, you know.

**INT:** How did you and your wife decide to leave Germany and to either go to Palestine or come to America? What led to that decision?

**MATES:** Yeah, this is a question. I had the store in Berlin. And I had a factory also. And I had the invention of the calendar attachment I told you. But the technology took over, changed, that this was obsolete suddenly. So this was...and so because I had also a patent for United States, and I knew I couldn't do nothing in Israel with it, so I decided to go to the United States. And Helen also, the sister, wanted to go to the United States. She said, "I had enough hardship." Because Israel in those days was really hardship. So they choose rather to go here. And we all settled here.

**INT:** So were you the first to come over, or did you all?

**MATES:** No, Helen came first. And then after she was about a year, I left. She went to Kansas City, and I went to Des Moines, and then to...to Omaha, Nebraska. Gina was born in Omaha, Nebraska. Sam was born in Omaha, Nebraska.

**INT:** Then Helena ended up in Baltimore?

**MATES:** And Helena in Baltimore later. Oh, Helena, yes. No, she came with us here, because she was living, she came to Philadelphia, and then she...no, she was living with my sister Helen in Kansas City. This is where she met her husband. And her husband is a Ph.D. engineer, and in electronics. In those days, electronics was beginning. And he was also for projects for the government, for Westinghouse.

**INT:** So you didn't have any children that were born in Germany? They were all born in here?

**MATES:** Two were born in Berlin, Germany. Harry and Joe.

**INT:** So they were young when you immigrated.

**MATES:** Yes. I remember Harry, he was four years old, five years old, and he speaks so beautiful German, with a German accent, there was a German woman helping us, and she was raising him, and because we were busy, you know. And when he came to the States, and he suddenly heard another language, he didn't know what happened to him. Suddenly he lost his speech like. We were watching him, he was playing with the kids, we were glad, and suddenly, the next day, he stepped with his foot, and he said, "Was (?) du? Ich verstehe kein Wort!" What are you babbling? I don't understand a word! (laughs) And four weeks later, he was translating us. (laughs) Four weeks later he was talking, and he was translating to us, because he knew German and English. He was only five years old, and both languages he learned perfectly. But later we didn't speak German, and he got lost. So you asked me, and Joe was little. I can show you just a few pictures.

**INT:** Before we go back to more about life after the war, I forgot to ask some more questions about your family life before the war, and it occurred to me, particularly about your parents' roles. Was your father more dominant than your mother? How did they make decisions? What was family life?

**MATES:** Mother was more dominant. Father was very religious, honest man. And people could take advantage of him. So she took over and arranged the business. And this is why they moved away from the family within, because she didn't want to have any conflict with the other family. This is always, when you marry the second time, so she wanted a separate life all over. And this is why they went to Cracow, and a big city. And big city life makes a different influence on a child than a small town in Poland. There were two different worlds, in a small town and a big town. I know how it is here, but this contrasts, this was much bigger. Because there's no communication, and it's easier than it is today, when you go from one town to another.

Going from one town to another was a big thing, you know. So you grew up in a different atmosphere in a small town, and you could realize the person who comes from a small town, and a person who comes from a big town, and I felt this, when I met people. It made a difference, whether you're from Lodz, or Warsaw, or Cracow. It was approximately the same. Or you met a small shtetl and so on.

**INT:** What about you being the firstborn? Were there more expectations on you? Were you treated differently?

**MATES:** Yes. Yes. No, I felt the obligation more, because they depended that the children were happy. It's not like here the parents help the children, but you had children so that your life later could be a little bit easier. You see here your earning, you can buy on your earning potential. Over there you can buy only what you earned after you're alive. Everything was going only for cash, no credit, except small credit, you know. So the idea of credit is here more, that people could buy and not have earning potential. And so the expectations of children was so much, you know, that I felt that they are expecting from me, and this is why I didn't want to go to school. And I started to help them. And I felt it's my obligation. On my pay, I got only ten, fifteen percent of my pay from my money, and the rest I had to give it all.

**INT:** So you were very responsible, a good son?

**MATES:** Yes, yes. And I felt, even, that I refused even to go to kibbutz.

**INT:** You had turned down that opportunity?

**MATES:** Yes, because it was already, I am already an age that I could go. Because otherwise, I could go to the army and so on. And I said, "Oh, all roads lead to Rome." And retirement is coming, my parents are now depending on me. I will go to the kibbutz. I have first obligation to the little sisters and brothers, to my father's expect from me. And my father was...already...55, 58, you know.

**INT:** So he was getting older.

**MATES:** Yes. Because my mother was twenty years difference.

**INT:** Were there extended family like grandparents at that time?

**MATES:** No.

**INT:** On both sides?

**MATES:** Both sides, no one was alive, yes. See, those people didn't live so long in those days. So very seldom, a few only had grandparents. They had a grandparent from first, from...his father's a grandparent from his mother's side. Their mother's side. But not from father's side.

**INT:** Do you think that they had a certain philosophy, or attitude about life that you learned from your own parents? How do you think they influenced you?

**MATES:** That's an interesting question. I thought I am smarter than they are. (pause) I thought I could do better in life than they can do. I thought that their ideas are old-fashioned. And I think my children think the same way (laughs). But I am going through with my children a certain competition. I notice this. Because (phone interruption).

**INT:** So was there competition among the children when you were growing up?

**MATES:** No. It was not affectionate.

**INT:** Your parents were not affectionate?

**MATES:** No.

**INT:** Mother and father towards you?

**MATES:** No.

**INT:** Did you observe them being affectionate towards one another?

**MATES:** No. Not...that they had deep respect and feeling, but they didn't show affection like kissing or something like this, no. The same thing they didn't embrace us, you know, so, it was just respectful to each other, and a deep obligation. My mother could, see a little bit more meat. Or he had, she was worrying about him and so on.

**INT:** Your younger brother? Your father and siblings?

**MATES:** Yeah, but as far as my father's respect, I wouldn't talk to him back you know. But I notice, you know, I am more worldly, and I was reading more about things, and schooling more. Even if I was only seven grades, but I liked to read and discuss things and so on. And in this he give me a lot, you know, of... (pause)

**INT:** Ideas?

**MATES:** Ideas, you know. The influence was good. You grew up with a outlook, with a relationship to anything. What is my relationship to it, you know, and so on. And you could...enjoy and discuss it and so on, intellectual exchange and so on. But I saw my parents more primitive in a way, that they are...like I would say when my kids grew up, they saw me always now working to make a living, to start to build up. Something else, when you are younger, you have other ideas. But then I saw I played around with inventions till I was thirty. 38, 39, I said stop. You have to make a living.

**INT:** So was there a closeness that you felt towards your parents? You describe a feeling of one of more respect.

**MATES:** Yes. The closeness, the difference is, I see more...it was a culture, you know, in the old country, I don't know, I cannot say for everybody, but most people I knew, I know there was no...emotional showing you know, to, like you would call affectionate, you know. No, it was a distance. Was a distance, but it was a respect, you know. For the older, you don't speak back, don't talk back to an older man, and you respect him, because of his age. Age was respected. And...

**INT:** Were you disciplined by either one of them?

**MATES:** Discipline, yes, I was more by my mother disciplined, because sometimes she was more, when she was mad, you know, she was mad. And my father still was holding back a little bit. And she could tell him, "Why are you staying here watching this?" (laughs)

**INT:** What about with your sisters?

**MATES:** We got good relations, yes, yes. Yes, I could...we could confide, you know, things, to a degree, you know. Boys have different ideas than girls, but still we kept...

**INT:** They were treated differently.

**MATES:** Mm-hm. And of course, my mother was closer with her daughters. Talked to them than to me. She understood that I am changing, I am getting, so she tried to talk to me in a different way. (laughs) But interesting was when I was running away from home to the Russian side, and I was packing my things up, my father said, "Why won't you take your tefillin?" Because in the morning you have to go through, but my father used to tell me...

**INT:** He was religious.

**MATES:** Yes, he was deeply religious, but he wasn't fanatic, he had a beard. A short beard. But not locks, you know. But he used to tell me, First World War I, he was in the Austrian army. And he was in the barracks, and he had put on the tefillin, and a siddur, and he got up in the morning an hour earlier, and he was davening in the corner. And one day, it was early, an officer came in to wake everybody up. (laughs) Special situation, suddenly he came, and everybody had to wake up. And he was caught, and he didn't want to make fun of himself. He just took the tefillin away. To make, you know...that he was...davening. And he didn't turn around. And he noticed the officer far away. And he said, "Bruner." Our name was (?). We shortened it to Bruner here. "(German) He's a brave man, he didn't look around when I came in, and his first...G-d's duty he did before anything." And he used to tell me that. So it reminded me when he told me. But my mother said, "No, he has more important things to take, surely. He's on the run. You don't take tefillin." So she was more...of course, I wouldn't have taken, but she explained to him some.

And I forgot to tell you one episode to mix in. I was in camp, when I was working in the watch making department, I had with me a watchmaker, a jeweler. He was specialized in diamonds. He had a big store in Cracow before the war. He had a jeweler shop and so on. And he was by, selected by the camp commandant, what you saw in the movie, to select all of the diamonds, and to, when they confiscated from people that they killed and so on and so on, and they had all the diamonds, he had to select the values, and so on, and sizes and qualities. And after he selected, the commandant said to him, "(German) I heard the Jews can swallow diamonds." Because he said it straight to him. "Herr Commandant (German) Herr Commandant, this does not appeal anymore. If you have, this would be worse than kielbasa I would have swallowed, but not diamonds anymore." He said to him, "(German) It's high time that the Jew to his senses come." That was the exchange. He just died three years ago in Tel Aviv. He had a nice jewelry store.

**INT:** You kept in touch with him.

**MATES:** Mm-hm. And my wife bought from him, before the wedding, we visited him in Cracow, got back his store in Poland, but he left and bought a, she bought a little star from him.

**INT:** You touched on your father's religious life. How do you think that affected again, before the war, your Jewish identity? The celebration of holidays, family life, what did you feel about Jewish family?

**MATES:** I tell you, it was the influence of the whole street. Of the whole ghetto. You are a product of the whole community, not of the family. Whoever were your friends, these were your...Family had little influence on you. There were three areas of influence. The family, the school, but mostly your association with your friends on the street.

**INT:** With the community.

**MATES:** Yes, community. This is the biggest, because like they call here the boys, how they call it.

**INT:** Peers.

**MATES:** Yes, yes. This had the biggest influence. This I remember. It didn't have an influence. The opposite. I, for what I was, I was a product of. And of course, later, in the years in Russia I met Jews, they were...also refugees from Warsaw, you know. They run away from the German side.

(END TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE FOUR, SIDE ONE)

**MATES:** From until I was nineteen. If I would have the influence till I was twelve, I wouldn't have any. But nineteen, I was already completely influenced by the complete background. So when the war started, I had an outlook of life. There were different values to me than let's say,



nothing could ruin, spoil or change. No matter what I went through anymore. I was hardened already. I, whatever I met, it was just...I acted according to my outlook. I was also, not depending on anybody's help. I was completely...others leaned on me, than I would lean on someone else.

**INT:** So you were independent, but also when you say hardened, were you optimistic still?

**MATES:** Yes. I was always optimistic. Oh, I was always optimistic. I remember when I was in the camp again, and we were, it was a summer day, and it was 1941, '42, they started to get beaten, the Germans, and so on. And...the two facts. Number one, we were outside, and it was hot, you couldn't sleep in the barracks, because they were all infested, you know, the barracks. So we sleep on the grass outside, and I say, I know, I can feel that we will be free some day. This nightmare will go away, the nightmare. And the fact that I told my sister, "You wait for me in Cracow after the war." When I jumped out from the train, okay, I had the feeling I will survive. And without this I wouldn't survive. And in the last moment when there was **nothing to lose** anymore, I still had the power, you know, to go and survive myself, and I was already **in the mouth**, in the lion's mouth, okay? I could get out, slip out, you know. I remember they told, later they were all killed by the soldiers. They were so ashamed that I could slip out from under the nose of two armed guards, German guards. And so they were, because they found out later.

**INT:** Later that there were some guards there?

**MATES:** No, what happened to them. Because I run away. Because they were locked up. They had to knock and others had to open the door. (laughs) And they were (?), you know what is (?)? A slap over the face. Like degraded of a high officer. Because he couldn't believe that I slipped out. But I took those chances. But I didn't took them after the war. I changed completely when I didn't want to. I just say I won't push my luck any harder.

**INT:** So how do you understand your ability to cope and take risks to survive before the war and after?

**MATES:** And not later? It is something... (pause)

**INT:** A function of your age?

**MATES:** No. The function of, the fact, I did some other stupid things that I couldn't forgive me after the war, you know. Why did you took such chances? It wasn't involved too much the need, like here saving your life. One time, one time, see, I was, in the watchmakers, among the youngest among the watchmakers, and I was sent out from the shop to, out of the camp to the German officers' barrack, to take in the watches for repair. And sometime, out of, quietly they slipped me a piece of butter, and I brought this back in camp, and we shared it. And one time he gave me a bottle of whisky. And I know I couldn't hide, so I removed the labels and everything, I opened, you know, and it was like water in front. And just when I was holding it, I went through the villa where the commandant was. I had to go through, you know, to pass his villa to

go to the entrance to the camp. And when he came out, I had to, you know when you saw him, okay, and you are walking, immediately you have to look in his side, not to wait whether he calls you. And not to lose this, you had to stay and go and look to the side. This was the rule. And I passed, and if he would call me, "What do you have here?" there was no lack of water in the camp. I thought, what a stupidity! He could kill me **immediately** for it! It was, it was just in the blood. You take chances even when it was not **necessary**. So after the war I start, "What did I do? How could I do things, things I did smart, and things I did stupid."

And there was something beyond, I wanted to bring, we had to bring in the shop, and he just came out of the villa. And I had **such a luck**. This luck was also, you know the Germans did things to us right after Lwow, so I run away from Lwow. They took me one time to a work unit to carry trees, you know, for fun. They could take a big tree, they took eight men, and they said, they took two men out from under the tree. They took another two men out, and I was on the end of the tree, and I collapsed. Because this is for fun they did it. They took for fun, you know, tall boys to go on a tree, and then cut the trunk. For fun. If somebody complains, they said, "(German)." It means, "we cannot take away the fun from our soldiers."

**INT:** What do you think happened to your faith? How was it changed?

**MATES:** Yes, this is a question that I came back and I said, "I have to raise a family. I have to give (?) away, even if I don't believe." I was far apart from religion. But I know it's just, faith is something you cannot take away, you should not take away. And let them come to their own thing. But my obligation is to give them, show them the way, I will show them, and I felt this deeply, and I joined a synagogue, and so on. And I'm glad my daughter really did such a job that my father would be proud of it, you know. She, and she intermarried. Okay, he is not Jewish. But she brought them up so nicely, more Jewish, than any other way, you know. And he not only went bar mitzvah, but he went, he made his after bar mitzvah...

**INT:** Your oldest grandson?

**MATES:** Yes.

**INT:** Mm-hm. Confirmation.

**MATES:** Confirmation and so on. And the others are making confirmation. Just to show the way. Also she brought them to a Reform synagogue. Because of her husband that he could more identify, be more comfortable. And I didn't realize, I enjoyed the synagogue, because I saw more sincerity than anything in it. Because people...understood more the prayer was more meaningful. But even the music and so on. It was uplifting a little bit, you know. And so I liked and although I didn't go away from my synagogue, but I learned a lot in the Reform, Main Reform synagogue. You know where it is on City Line.

**INT:** So what do you think happened to your faith or beliefs or values or feelings? How were they different? What did you question?

**MATES:** My question is that I saw it in a completely different light. That I didn't want to take, let's say to tell my son to believe in the same thing that I do. I saw the whole thing in the aftermath, that this is nature's work, okay? This has to happen, and it will happen again, in a different form, a different people. It's like to anyone who is in the wrong time in the wrong place. And we were. After all, they say, "Who created Napoleon? The time, or the time landed Napoleon?" Same thing. Hitler was a creation of the times.

**INT:** So human nature or evil?

**MATES:** Yes. It is like, it has to come a fire and burn out the forest just to grow up again. It's an interesting phenomenon, that those countries, okay, Japan, Germany, and Israel, they were with ashes. And they got out of ashes and recoiled with such a power, okay, that the whole world was wondering. No one could believe what happened to Israel, that it could be a power and there could be soldiers, and we could fight, and we can do the things that nobody...the Jews start to understand too, they say they are ubermentschen. And the same thing, Germany and Japan, they didn't finish the war. Japan had to show that they were not defeated. And they were making the last laugh. And the same thing Germany. They are, the people get just from a defeat like this, they get up in a different time.

Of course, why is it so? Why are we going away? Answers to these questions, and you see renewal, and you start watching your child, grandchild, you say, this is the way, you know.

**INT:** This is the reason that you lived.

**MATES:** Yes. And we don't mind. We get slowly our thinking gets adjusted to we have to go, live another few years, and how to make the best out of the few years, and so on. Keep busy, so I don't think about what happened, and so on.

**INT:** Anything more about how you took it upon yourself to act, to be active, and take risks and opportunities whenever you could to survive. What do you think that was about? You had a strong will to survive while others you saw and what you witnessed, gave up.

**MATES:** Here, it's hard to make a theory. This is a destiny. Pure destiny.

**INT:** It was your destiny.

**MATES:** Yes. It's beyond any logic. Because things have happened that are completely irrational, and you don't know why, that you were just in the right light. I remember I was, it was a sorting out, every tenth should be lynched. For punishment, this was in camp Plaszow. Because I couldn't go to the every day life, but in conversation, I can recall suddenly the episode. And I remember, and here was the one before me, he was destined to be lynched at that time, you know. A group responsibility. The Germans did it, every tenth has to be, you know, either killed or lynched, or something else, you know, they will pick out. They, this is why they created so much hate in other nations. Because once they went on the road to hate Jews, they hate so many other people, they didn't stop with Jews. It started with Germans, actually. They

started to kill all those mentally ill. They started to kill their political opponents first. And then they started. Once you go on this road, there's no stop. And it was so irrational, so crazy what he did. You know, when people look back. And how crazy Japan got to take on America. It's something like a self-destructive element lives in us, and it is a part of us, and...

**INT:** With what you witnessed, how did you experience the losses of your parents, half-siblings, and a brother, how did you deal with it? How did you feel?

**MATES:** I tell you. Here you learned why a soldier could kill. Once he starts killing, he does it the second time, third time, same thing. We got dull seeing so much tragedy, so much killing, that even if it happened to our own, we just, we couldn't be shaken anymore. Because we were prepared to die ourselves. Okay? It was like...right now the same thing. You don't...think too much. Reading the obituary, people dying because of age, and so on, you know. It's normal. And the same thing almost is normal. And during a catastrophe like this, that you see things happening, and you don't shake it, shake it up only one time, the first time. The second time less, and the third time, suddenly. You saw hanging people. They took for little things, they took girls, two girls left the camp and went to the ghetto when they build the camp in Plaszow. And they didn't have a...paper or, to go to the ghetto, illegally. And to teach everybody a lesson, they hang those girls. We were watching.

**INT:** So it's almost like you didn't have time to mourn.

**MATES:** No, no. There was no time, because it was just...you know, maybe I should tell you this episode, too. The same (?)stein, who was the diamond dealer, he was an elder man. He was operated once on his stomach. But he couldn't eat black bread. He had to have white. (laughs) In the camp white bread. Anyhow, and he had some resources, some hidden many diamonds, and he somehow got smuggled into the camp. See, this guy, he was, I'm telling you about him, what unbelievable luck he had, that with all this operation, he was older and so on, that he could survive. He was on Schindler's list. So he was protected. If he wouldn't be on Schindler's list, he wouldn't be alive, okay? And he got to it. He bought himself onto Schindler's list.

**INT:** A different situation.

**MATES:** Yes. He bought himself. There were many people who were not bought, and people who bought themselves, because they knew (laughs) this is a way to get in. And he was lucky, and he said to me one time, because once in a while they came in, and they made, picked up older people, just to kill them, to liquidate them. You know? And he was afraid they will come in the shop, and they will pick him, because he was the oldest one. So he looked down, he said, "Mates, let's eat some kielbasa." He had enough. "I don't want to hang on an empty stomach." (laughs) This is to illustrate how you feel about things. It was, it didn't matter anymore. The killing was so massive, so big. That the Germans were insensitive about it, and the people, their victims, were not sensitive anymore about it. It was on both sides. There were victimizers, and the victims almost on a mental level almost the same. If you were running away, it's something else. But if you were there, you were expecting it almost. This is like we said now, we have to face that something is going to happen. We say to ourselves, "Thank G-d for this." So you got

another day and so on, you know, and you know it's our time. Somebody who is over 75, you know, suddenly he looks something happens to him. Also, the same way almost. I can see a parallel in accepting it, okay? I didn't want to think about it when I was thirty years, and somebody called me to buy a (?), or something else, but 75 is the time. And yes, it's the time to buy it. (laughs) So this maybe answer your mental attitude that you have.

**INT:** How do you understand G-d's role in the world, and what happened then to your identity and tradition, since you were raised differently, and how did that change in your own family?

**MATES:** You see, it turns the whole Jewishness to a tradition from a religion to tradition, okay? It's just that we have Passover, we have this holiday, wherever you go. Rosh Hashanah. There is no deep religious feeling, maybe because of the experience. And you are completely, you know what you are doing, even if you bring up the children, you want him to think for himself. Just show him the way, and I never insisted too strongly, you know, if they didn't like to go to Hebrew or something, I said, "Look. Finish up and later you will..." I lost, you know, this in the war, particularly. When I suddenly discovered that it was not, G-d was created just to, we are better people to another man. One man to another. There is an area, there is an area that no law can guide. A relationship between man and man has to be through G-d, you know. And this is where the rule of G-d comes into question, I mean, into play, and plays roll till today, you know, because it's like a punishment and crime.

**INT:** Mm-hm. What was important to you about having children, given your war experiences, raising a family, what did it mean to you to have a family?

**MATES:** It mean to me first of all, I had to fulfill, because so much was lost. Even when my daughter married a non-Jew and so on, I was glad that she converted, tried to convert him into Judaism, we don't lose third generation. She knew how I felt about it. And this is, I know that my influence was strong in this way. She would not otherwise go over to Catholicism. Because not so much because of religious but because exactly what you are talking about: identity, okay? Nothing else. We died just because we were Jews. Whether somebody was third generation a Jew, they picked him up. You forgot already that he's a Jew, and they told him, "You are. And you're going to be killed." And they were, there were women, German women, who married a Jew, and the children, her children were killed. And then later, because she was trying to save them, and she went to the camps, and she saw too much, and they said, you cannot go out from here alive. So it is...what man to man could do, is beyond, it's beyond that he wouldn't go through this. I don't wish, I'm glad that my children didn't have to go, taste this and so on. But it comes from, you know.

**INT:** Could you describe a little bit about your marriage, and how it was different than your parents' marriage? What was important for both of you, and how you raised your children?

**MATES:** Our marriage was typical for survivors right after the war. There was no love. There was no love. We didn't, we just married out of obligation to reproduce, you know, the next generation. Not that we felt this, feeling a romance or nothing. I can't say for others. But I know I was so dull. I didn't know what love is, you know. You couldn't get out from me, you know.

Because I remember a little bit from before, and I know this wasn't it. And there was no time even to romance, to go out, and so on. And, but still, it survived. It survived. I remember the marriage many times that I regret that I would go to a divorce. But I said, it's more important than my convenience, you know.

**INT:** Or your happiness?

**MATES:** Happiness. I, this is why I maybe found my work to make me happy. I...can say this. We need a certain amount of happiness. (laughs) So we get it from substitutes and so on. And we didn't have the same outlook. Okay? We couldn't discuss things.

**INT:** How the children were raised, or decisions about your marriage?

**MATES:** The children, also, I talked to him, and I had an influence on them. I know that I was a strong influence on the children, because I tried to talk to them, discussion and so on. I talked about subjects, and I know my wife wouldn't.

**INT:** With your sons.

**MATES:** Yes. Today we don't talk, I think, too much, I don't know why.

**INT:** Between you and your wife, your communication?

**MATES:** There's communication, yes. But not a discussion. Or not a...you know, we have different views of things. Different values. And we look different at things. But we, I love, I appreciate her very much, more now than maybe before. Because I know she, if it wouldn't be for her, maybe I wouldn't be as healthy as I am. She takes care of the cleanliness of the food. She takes care of the practical things. I told her, we had almost a crash when I started my project. She said no. I don't need it. We have enough. I'm not going to spend the money that you acquired for retirement. It's your retirement fund. But what are you going to get if you lose it now? (laughs) I don't want to get, but you keep your part, let me keep mine. (laughs) This was, I'm not going to come to you. She did not give in to me.

**INT:** So you could compromise?

**MATES:** Yes. Compromises, we found, and she didn't want to lose me, and I didn't want to lose her. We know that we need each other, so we kept temper over, a little bit of our, our tempers, a little bit, you know, controlled. We could fight about something, but I told her, how long you gonna keep your nose up and so on. Started to keep two days, three days, sat and talked. Of course, physically, after for five years, okay, you're not active anymore, because you lose, so I enjoy good food. I enjoy something to read nicely, as I'm going to do things. So... (pause)

**INT:** It's changed.

**MATES:** Yes.

**INT:** How do you think you made decisions affecting your children and other kinds of decisions in your life? How did you handle problems between both of you? Was that different than the way you were raised from the way she was raised?

**MATES:** Yes. They were children...my wife is devoted very much. She finds ways, she make herself love the children, although sometimes, it's hard for them to take her, you know, but now she's not calling. She's not mixing in, and she's not too...

**INT:** A little less involved?

**MATES:** Yes, she feels that she's not wanted, and so, even in the store, she has a different, you see, my daughter has a jewelry store. She could have so much help from my wife. But she didn't like how my wife talks with the customers. So she, she sees how much she lost, and in fact maybe she didn't succeed. But you cannot tell the children. They have to go through their own experiences. And they have to find out that it's a hard way sometimes. It's impossible to protect them from these things. And I don't try. I stay away. You know, if they want me, I'm here. But I will not call too much and so on. And my son, Sam is a very smart guy. You can talk with him, but he's overwhelming. In other words, I have to be the listener.

**INT:** So you do the listening.

**MATES:** So I do the listening, and so I don't like to listen too much. I talk too much. (laughs) And not that I want to be the one who people listen to me, but I like a fair exchange.

**INT:** Mm-hm. A balance.

**MATES:** A balance. But with him is not a balance. The other son is different. Everybody's different, you know. They have different personalities. You think they are, they say, the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree, but when you look close...

**INT:** So your children are a combination of both of you.

**MATES:** Yes, yes. It's interesting. But they are all...they are all very much individuals, you know. Strong individuals. And...

**INT:** How did you deal with the war and your experiences with them?

(END TAPE FOUR, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE FOUR, SIDE TWO)

**MATES:** Survivors a little bit in a stronger degree, because I could see, you know. And to me it was important. I kept a very strong safety net for my daughter. I didn't want her to, she did some things, you know, that she lost a lot, so I can...

**INT:** So you were financially supportive to your children.

**MATES:** That's right, yes. She almost lost this house. I saved it, you know, and so on. I didn't want her to go through. Maybe, I would **let** her go through, but there were grandchildren involved, and so on, so I said, no. But they don't appreciate this, okay? It is not appreciated. It's just like, oh, it's...

**INT:** It's taken for granted?

**MATES:** Yes, absolutely. Of course, it comes a moment. I can show you cards. When I look back at birthday cards, and all other cards they send, you see how they have a sense to express theirself [sic] nicely. My wife keeps all the cards. Beautiful cards from the children.

**INT:** Did you tell them much about your experiences growing up and your experiences during the war? Did you tell them?

**MATES:** I told them once, I don't repeat it. I don't repeat it. I told them once, I know they know a bit. So I don't repeat it anymore. If they ask me, yes. Sometimes the grandchildren come in, and I will talk to him, and so on.

**INT:** So did your children ask at different times and some were more interested than others?

**MATES:** No. They're not interested. They hear it once, and they don't want to hear again. At this age they don't want to hear again, but I don't want to, just be repetitious. And I think they have a good memory. And they are pretty aware of the identity, Jewish identity. This is strong. I sent them to Israel, and I thought they're going to grab them and do something with them. They didn't, because I thought I wouldn't mind if he would be staying there. And so on.

**INT:** So did you feel like you had goals for them? Expectations for them that you wanted them to have more of a Jewish identity, or a connection to Israel? Was education important to you? What were some goals or values that you believe you had for them?

**MATES:** After I gave the baccalaureate, after I gave [money to go to college], I didn't insist too much. I didn't influence too much. Because I knew it wouldn't help. It wouldn't help. I gave them free rein. I exposed them to things. They see the anti-Semitism, if they taste it in school, they told me about it. If they were called, "Jew" and so on. There were, even my grandchildren, you know, they knew, they were told if...(pause) They knew that they are from a mixed marriage, okay, but they choose to be stronger identity, of Jewish identity.

**INT:** This is your daughter. What about your other two sons?



**MATES:** Same thing. [Joe] He also has, but he divorced, he's now, he has two children.

**INT:** Custody?

**MATES:** Custody. They are with him. And she returned back to her religion. And the other son [Sam], the same. Also married a Christian girl. But they are, as you can see here (showing pictures). He sings Hebrew songs and so on. They have those tapes today, you know, when they watch TV.

**INT:** How do you want your children and grandchildren to view you, given the experiences you've had?

**MATES:** I...I'm a little bit disappointed, okay? But I learn to live with it. And I thought that they gonna respect more. I thought they...will let me in more, you know. But I can see and I can understand, you know, that they all know what is coming. And maybe it's good, so that when it comes to the end, that they won't have too close people so that it's easier to say goodbye, you know. (laughs) If they're too close, too binding, it's sad, more shattering, you know. So it's a cooling of the situation before, then this is a healthy, natural disposition. My expectations are wrong. I feel this to my sister, we could talk a lot, and every week, closer. Now our talking more distant, you know, and then I feel, maybe this is the right thing, because she would be more shattered, she had a deep commitment to me. You know. She felt she owes me a lot, you know. And I said, "No, I did my part, you know." And I know now that she will be less...let's say it will be easier for you to say goodbye if somebody is hollering at you. (laughs) So let's say, but talking about (?), of trying to find an expression. That when we go apart, it's a natural thing, actually, to separate yourself from the rest, slowly, and I see the separation coming with the whole family around, you have more, the distance is larger. So that it will be much easier to take when you go away, so that you don't have to feel like a husband and wife, you know, they are always close, and you feel a much stronger, you know, when the separation comes, they are much more tragic than with children or any other thing. You know what I mean.

**INT:** I think it **will** be difficult.

**MATES:** Yes. For husband and wife it's something else. But because the boundaries are close, and it's every day. And for children and for grandchildren, so it's part of living.

**INT:** My next two questions you started to answer was about regrets or disappointments in your life, and then successes? So any other regrets or disappointments in terms of your life?

**MATES:** No, because I understand, you know, that this situation is sometimes, people are disappointed if they (?) or they don't see the sequence. The sequence of life, what station you are, and so on. Or like I said to my wife, you know, twenty years ago, "Now we cannot travel. Because later we will, we can afford it, but we will not be able. Now we can less afford it, maybe we have too long, but I will travel now." So I mean, we did, you know. So we went to see the world. I said, "I like the tradition, and we went to Alaska, you know, fifteen years ago. I couldn't go today, you know.

**INT:** So you went back to Poland?

**MATES:** Yes, yes. I took my daughter. I took my son-in-law. I want him to know what Judaism is to me. I took him to Auschwitz, okay, and this was their honeymoon trip, and then we went together to Austria, and then in Berlin, and then I let him go, and they went on their own honeymoon, and they were with us only ten days, and then they were two weeks on their own. And they went wherever. So...I didn't show to my other sons, but to my daughter, because...it was just...she was more interested, and so on.

**INT:** What do you see as successes in your life and how you achieved them? What do you attribute to your hard work, your success?

**MATES:** It comes from a big amount of trust in yourself, that's all. If you are confident in yourself, and you are willing to take also chances in your life. You have to believe, even if you are wrong, you have to believe, and then I did a lot, I know that I did mistakes. I look back and I say, "Why couldn't you do this?" but I wanted to do these things. But all the mistakes I learned from. I never let it become a big mistake. And I said to myself, "Don't worry about mistakes. This is the road to success."

**INT:** These were more like business decisions you made?

**MATES:** Business, yes, yes. This is the road to success. If you can learn from it, then it is not a mistake. But if you don't learn, then it is. Okay. And to my employees, I said, "You are allowed to do mistakes, but don't repeat it please. The second time you can repeat, but don't...(laughs)" And this is, I...(pause) If you instill in the children, you know, the confidence that he can do it, you know, this is the first step, you know, to be successful in life. But it depends sometimes, when you have bad luck, it has nothing to do with anything. You know, whatever you try, just shlimazel, you will come...We got a few of these things, too, you know. But that's also a part of life. Bad luck, you know. Some you win, some you lose, like they say. (laughs) And you have to take them both the same way, not with a tragedy, and not with an extreme, not with crazy happiness. You take both, that's life. And you learn, you know, also to...to...accept the bitterness in life could be sweet, too, you know. It has some sweetness in it, too. You know, if you look back, you know. And because you learn from it. Because that's how people, they have an influence on you.

And I met, I started to tell you, I met an engineer from Warsaw, and I was the first time in Russia, on the Russian side. And I was a printer, you know, what I learned in Poland, and I saw I couldn't work as a printer in Russia because everything is so dirty, so...and what they confiscated all the printing shops, and took (?).

So I didn't want to stay in it. And I had some background in drawings, mechanical drawings. But not in higher mathematics, you know, to be a construction, to be in construction. So I met an engineer from Warsaw. He was working in the same place, and he gave me lessons, you know, automatic, and how to figure out, you know, things when you build something, to construct some simple things which...And then I said, you know, "I don't know how I can ever repay you," you

know, because I was then as a refugee. And he said, "Look, if you just do for the rest of the people who ask you, this is enough." So those people, and I say to my children the same thing. You know. It pays to, and I did it in camp even. Yes, I did it too in camp. I remember we...when we were starting to liquidate to go to another camp, I had some platinum, you know, that I could exchange, some other things. I said, "Look. They could take away everything from me." And I said to my sister, "Give it to your friends, and I will give to my friends." So sometime they need, maybe they will give it back to us. If I put it in the ground, it doesn't matter after the war. This way, they can buy a bread, and everything was in bread values. How much a half a bread you can buy, or one bread, you know, for so much on the black market. Somebody would break into the camp, risk his life, in order to get it. So I said, and some sheets will go. And this happened. She was lucky. Even she was in Schindler's camp, there were some, my friends who worked in the kitchen, she could get some more food. (laughs) They said, "I'm not doing it for you, for your brother." And this is...so philosophy, life that it pays to do good things on the end, that maybe you don't get food, but you get part of it back.

**INT:** That's wonderful. You see your family or children as successes in your life?

**MATES:** Yes. Of course, with my daughter, and sons it was different. But Joe, they are successful, because, not because I was, but because they believe in themselves, and they know. Sometimes I know he's doing a stupid thing, but he still believes in it, so he has to do it this way. We cannot judge, it's the wrong to judge the thing. Or I may not, one time, my son says to me, "Dad, why don't you invent something else?" He saw me so fanatically working on this project. They were surprised that I have so much stamina and so much energy for it. And he said, "Why don't you work on something else?" I said, "Joe, you don't understand. If you would understand half of it, what's in it, you wouldn't say so." And so now they start to see, and they are a bit embarrassed.

**INT:** They were not as supportive as you would like?

**MATES:** No, no. Even my wife was not supportive, and so on. My daughter was in so far that she, she started to, I needed her help, and I guaranteed the usual, she did, but now she loves it, and I like it the way she takes it, and it gives me in the morning that I can get up and sing, you know, and do. (laughs) So even if it takes longer, it's a blessing in disguise. Because if I would reach a destiny too quick, it will be over. (laughs) So the life is interesting, you know. (Yiddish) You know Jewish?

**INT:** Yeah, I grew up with Yiddish, hearing Yiddish.

**MATES:** (Sings a Yiddish song.) It goes about a road that is sunny, it's not destiny, so much.

**INT:** So you say into English what you just said, so I can translate it.

**MATES:** (Yiddish) Let it be that I build the castles in the air, in the skies. (Yiddish) Let it be that my G-d is not in the skies. (Yiddish) Let it be that I will never get to my destiny.

(Yiddish) That my ship will never arrive to the shore. (Yiddish) It doesn't matter whether I arrive or not, but it matters that I have arrived on a sunny side of the road.

If you could translate from Polish to English, I have a **beautiful** poem that I remember from a Jewish poet. It will be so hard to translate, because it's a long one, you know.

**INT:** You remember it in Polish, but it would be hard to translate into English.

**MATES:** Yes, yes, because it's a philosophy of life. And it tells you. When I remember Polish, I'm surprised that I could remember something that happened sixty years ago, and I don't remember something that happens twenty years ago. It's interesting how the storage memory works. You remember everything from childhood. You remember the Mamaloshen, what you learned, the language. See, I learned, right after Polish, I learned perfect Russian, because I went on the Russian side, and I worked for a Russian factory. And I could perfectly read and write and converse, and now I can't. I understand when they are talking to me, I understand a few words to say. It's hard for me to read now, and it's hard for me to understand.

**INT:** Yiddish you still remember?

**MATES:** Yes, a lot, yes. Yiddish I remember, because it was from childhood. German I learned well, because it's combined a little bit with the Yiddish, and I know the...There was a business in Berlin, and I could translate well. But also it's fading away. English I learned, and I'm surprised I can write, compose a nice letter and write. But I have to do it slowly, and think about it, you know, and so on. And translate.

**INT:** How important is it to your children, your grandchildren, that they know about the Holocaust, that they read literature or see films? Does your experience affect your political views and how you see the world? So it's two questions about the importance you see of the Holocaust for this generation and the next generation.

**MATES:** I don't see any importance in it. I think... (pause) I think...I'm not for it, for monumentizing [sic] what we went through. I think it has some negative part. Because some people are stupid enough to say, "Maybe we deserved it." Because we ask **ourselves** this question. Why did we deserve it? And you hear today voices. Somebody's mad. Hitler didn't kill all. So I wouldn't monumentize this. I would forget about it. And I don't repeat too much. I feel my generation should remember, but I feel later it should be forgotten. Because this is how the world is fated, with so much blood. By so many millions of people, others before. And why is one better than another? What is religion and what is other people's religion? The reaching for religion, you know, is something good and bad in us, you know, and both have their role to play. And I don't know why. It's a mystery. But I don't feel that it should be monumentized.

**INT:** Do you think the Holocaust Museum does this?

**MATES:** No, no. I don't think, I think it's important for respect, you know, to memorize it, to be a part of the history. But not to make it a nationalistic part in it, you know. And...If you read,

you know, the Bible, you see how much Jews have slaughtered other people, you know. And history repeats itself. You can watch now how millions carrying on hatred, and they try to kill. Some people are innocent. I saw Germans in Auschwitz visiting, and I looked at them, and when we got out, they said, "What our fathers did?" And I had sympathy with him. Because he saw it and he went, and he admitted. They carry, they have to carry now the burden. Not we. They have to carry the burden, a black page in their history. And their children's children have to learn and look at it, what their fathers did. We...it was a tragedy that happened, and the dead doesn't get up anymore. If we could get it back, then I would do anything. But this is, when you look back, you know, I have a different view of it. I can't understand those people who are, you know, the fever to build it, you know. But the same thing. I believe the monument what they made for the Vietnam people, a hundred years later, they will take it apart, tear it down. This is...not a pleasant thing to look. It has meaning right now for the generation, but two, three generations later, it has no meaning. Nobody will remember any. They just, they will just...whether they will do it or not, but I think, who remembers? The new generation...about Kennedy, and so on.

**INT:** Are you worried or fearful for Israel's safety or that the Holocaust could happen again? Wars go on all the time. Does it affect your concerns politically in what's happening in the world?

**MATES:** My station, you know, again, things will evolve the way they should. The way they should. Whatever happens, it's not for us to worry. Okay? We go away, the next generation will do a good job, maybe a better one than we do. They have a lot to learn what we left, you know. There are more books in the library than there were before. And (laughs) they (?). So it's hard to visualize, you know. We thought so many things about the atom, what it will do to the world. It didn't do anything. It's instilled more fear, you know, and so on. But we thought because it has so much power to do so much good, you know, and to improve the lives. But you see, like...the good and the bad, like when they invented...was Nobel invented the destructive power, he unleashed the good power. He gave all the money away. (laughs) So there is hope. Because there is a fight between the devil and angels all the time, going on, within the man himself, within the nations. So maybe the armies will come to their senses, too, and they say it doesn't make sense to fight, and to lose, and it will help. If you could see today on the news, that they announced that in New York the crime went down. (laughs) It is such a jungle, you know, it's the worst place in the world. And they say they are tired of doing it. (laughs) Then it comes down. They look at the...he says now he tries to punish small things more harder, so that they learn earlier to stop it. Well, it's true. They have to learn something. They have to come up with ideas. Democracy is no good by itself. Justice is no good, the rule of the totalitariat [sic]. But it's somewhere in between. The totalitarian is a blessing in many areas, I have seen. And democracy is a curse in many areas, we have seen, you know. There has to be an interplay of like, say the government role, the public role.

(END TAPE FOUR, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE FIVE, SIDE ONE)

**MATES:** Because they were beyond any logic, the things that happened to us. So I said, we have an angel over us. You have to believe in it, that you carry through the worst thing in life. You have to believe in it again. That you will survive. "Because the same angel that was over me," I said, "is over you, Gina." There is something that destiny, this was when in a dark moment, when she was struck by cancer, I was so shaken by it, you know, that she was so young, she didn't have a chance yet. And she has such a nice personality, you know. And it's just...we had also the problems with our son, Joe. He had health problems.

**INT:** With Crohn's disease?

**MATES:** He has Crohn's disease.

**INT:** And also Gina had Crohn's.

**MATES:** A little bit, but he had it more strongly. He was operated. They took out **twice** part of his intestine, you know.

**INT:** How do you think you coped or handled with your children's health problems, and a terminal illness?

**MATES:** With Joe we went through, because he was so young and so promising, and look what happened. But I don't know. You know...it's not for us to decide about anything. We are dealing here with this, that we are just observers, we cannot do anything, you know. But it helped us, you know, just to believe that things will change. I know what means believing, you know, as an observer, I could observe with my father. He was religious, but sincerely, in a way that when he knew that he will read a portion of the Tanach or whatever it was, you know, the Bible, he will get well. And he got well, because he believed so strongly in it. And when I saw what belief can do, I said, nobody has a right to take somebody's belief away. You know, and tell him, "Look, there is no G-d, or so on." Don't take this away from him. Because this is such a healthy, strong thing, that he cannot get from anything else. Just a strong belief that he can get better. And it was amazing, and all his life that I knew him, that he was hardly, when he was something worse, just believing it will go away. And...

**INT:** So would you say that you're a more hopeful, optimistic person rather than pessimistic?

**MATES:** Yes, yes, I was always. Because even when I didn't, was not so religious, you know, it had influence on me that I know that a person has to believe, and it can go away when you believe that it will go away. So I...try to find some logic in it, out of pure, you know, blind hope. Belief, you know, in something. And this what had a strong sustainer. When I told you also about my younger sister, she was with me in camp, in Plaszow. It was the last moment, they took her away to Auschwitz, and probably to join with the group which belongs to Schindler's list. And I said to her, "Helena," everybody was here looking at me like... "You're going to meet me after the war on this street, and you will talk to me and find out." And this happened exactly. She had the belief that she will meet me, and I was sure that she will be there. (laughs)

**INT:** I guess I want to go back just a little bit more to handling the difficulties that you've had with your children. I think that you've been through a lot.

**MATES:** Yes. This was hard for me and for my wife.

**INT:** What do you think you felt and did you find a way to express your feelings, or did you hold things in?

**MATES:** No, no. I held things in. I didn't express. I just believed that things will somehow turn out. I knew it's not our thing to do, you know, to be mad at something, or just, I know we have to go on living. Whatever happens, you know. Whatever, we have only one thread, to hold on. We will hold onto it, you know. You just don't give up, because whatever happens to you. And...in fact, it was such a powerful thing with Gina, that I stopped smoking, because it was so hard to stop smoking. And I said to myself, "Look, if somebody would tell me that if I stop smoking, she will be better, let's see if I can do it."

**INT:** And she still smokes. (laughs)

**MATES:** She still smokes, but I stopped smoking, and then, you know, it was so much engrained in me for 45 years, you know, I didn't know how to stop it. And this is when I could stop, because I put myself, this is the price I'm going to pay. Let's see if I can do it. And somehow I talked myself into it, and I stopped smoking. And I was lucky too, because four months later I had an accident. I broke my leg, and if I had to be operated, you know, and under anesthesia, smoking would provide a problem, would be a problem, because they had to immediately operate, you know. And the anesthetist said, "It's nice that you stopped smoking. Your lungs are clear. We can...it's not so...dangerous to give you anesthesia. Your lung wouldn't fill up." So this was also like a destiny, in a way. And I didn't figure I'm going to need an operation and so on. But it happened. And the same thing now, when the doctor told me I have problems with my hips, and I cannot walk too much, so the doctor said, "You should have an operation." I said, "No. I will not have an operation. I know what station I am. And they will operate me, and I remember the operation from this leg that I had, when they cut into all the muscles. It takes a year and a half to heal, to walk again." You know. I said, "By the time you do it one, I need the other one. And then I need on the...knees, you know." I said, "It's not worth the benefit," you know, to the suffering that I have to, the suffering I will have, and the quality of life that I will have. I said, "No," I rather, even if I have to go in an electric wheelchair, you know, to move around, I'd rather do it than to go through this operation. But somehow, it helps me. Right now I manage, because I can stay, so it comes a couple blocks, I can walk. Up to and no more, then I have to sit down or stop. Because the pain comes in the muscles.

Now this, what has to do with survivorship. Of course, I believe more that survivorship is something natural, that I notice that kids are getting. Because children that are ten years old were suddenly mature very fast. They matured, they had to help their parents, you know, to survive. They could slip through, you know, where the older people could not. And they were helping a great deal, those survivors, those parents, you know, of the children. And they could behave suddenly like grownups and not to cry and not to...So it is a natural, a person is

suddenly... (pause). The children were more adaptable, actually, to the, for the surviving instinct, than older people. They...and they were helpful for many parents. When they were hiding, or had to go illegally to buy things, because you have to wear an armband by the small towns, you could just take off, and you can feel if you were young, ten years, twelve years old, nobody pays attention whether you are a Jew or not a Jew. An older person will soon be suspicion, but not children so much. So they were extremely helpful in bringing some food inside, even in the ghetto they could go through, you know, different holes, you could get through on the Polish side. They were not subject to suspicion. And they brought into the ghetto food and other things on the children. They were the link, you know, the strongest link of survivorship.

**INT:** Those were some of the things that you saw your wife do, Wanda, during the war?

**MATES:** Yes, the things she told me, the many details she will tell you by herself.

**WANDA:** I can't remember. You think I remember?

**MATES:** Whatever you remember. She remembers enough, when she starts to talk, and it comes everything to her. And there were interesting episodes, how she helped her father, and how she helped other people that were caught, you know, on the black market. Russians arrested for everything they could. And she could help those people in a way, you know, which was very unusual. It shows how a child resourceful becomes, and helpful.

**INT:** I wanted to ask, when you started rebuilding your life in America after liberation, did you experience a conflict in the type of European values that you were raised with, and how you raised your children in this country? Did you find it difficult adjusting to a modern world, being fairly traditional in your views and ideas about marriage, family?

**MATES:** Yeah. It...I don't know what...it is...the striking difference here was when we came to New York, that we saw a lifestyle that just, we couldn't see how we were going to adopt without having an income, you know, to adapt to living in those, in the city jungle, you know, day and night. You know, no day or night. So we took the option quickly after two weeks, and we went to Iowa. They told us, "If you want to have some help from the Jewish Agency, you have to go to Des Moines, Iowa. This is where you are assigned. If you don't want our help, you can stay in New York. It's up to you." So we went like I say, after two weeks, we went to Des Moines, Iowa. People were helpful, they gave us a job and so on, and they loaned us even some money for the tools, because we didn't realize that we have to have our own tools; as a watchmaker I had to have my own tools. So later I paid on and so on.

**INT:** I guess I was trying to get more in terms of your family, and how you...raised your family.

**MATES:** We knew that we could find our own way of life, we don't have to, it doesn't bother us the difference. Even if we notice the difference. But we know this is a big country, and they have so many different nationalities, and people, and we felt more secure in America, just because of so many nationalities. We saw the big difference, the hope in the United States,



because of the number of nationalities. In Europe, there is such a homogeneity. In the national religion of things that, let's say, if you are not a Catholic, you cannot be a Pole. All right. If you are, I believe not only, even if you are Mohammed, you couldn't be a Pole, you know. The religion was a part of the national...picture. And okay, a Frenchman could assimilate after a while if he was Catholic, to be a Pole. But not, but otherwise you are always a guest. You felt this when you get older, that you are, not second class citizen, in a way, because you are not a Pole. Born a Pole.

**INT:** America made you feel more welcome?

**MATES:** America, yes. America I felt that I will not be figured out as a guest, because everybody was a guest, and all the nationalities, you know, we felt more secure, more safe in the future. We had so many nationalities. Because one could support, find support with the other groups, and so on, against. But it is, human nature, you know, it's always a fight for whatever reason. And this way you get more support in fighting any prejudice, and so on, you know.

**INT:** I'd like to spend some time kind of reflecting back in terms of coping and adapting after liberation. How do you feel about your life, your marriage, your children? What do you see as successes as well as regrets or disappointment?

**MATES:** I tell you, the process of living, you don't analyze. Maybe in the...maybe in...hindsight, you can see, oh, this was my happiest day in my life. Or this was my successful or not. But when you are in the process of doing, you just do. And only because you are driven by whatever force. And I don't think whether this is, brings you happiness, or brings you success. You are just trying. If you are successful, then you are a hero. If not, then you are a failure. And it is, that your makeup, your personal makeup that drives you in this direction or the other direction. Or your vision that you have been given. That you can see what others cannot see, and believe in it what others do not believe.

And this is...a driving force that you cannot put your finger on it, and say it's a recipe, this is how you should go, this is what you should do. In hindsight, later, you see, or you were smart, or (?). (laughs) You were successful or not. But not that anybody has a plan to be successful. Because we all want the best. That's something...like they say, it's sometimes a matter of being in the right time in the right place, and so on.

**INT:** We talked a little bit about the inner strength to deal with the situation, and you do the best you can. And you've done that throughout your life. When you had to cope with your children's illnesses, that came into play?

**MATES:** It was also, sometimes I met, you know, I remember, I was without a job at one time. Or I was trying, you know, too long to play around with inventions and other things. And suddenly I saw I want to, a path, I cannot make a living to my wife and to the children, and so on. I didn't know what's going to be next week, you know. It was a short time of depression, a few weeks, but I believed somehow, we have to make it. You know. It's...and so on.

**INT:** It's pretty normal to feel depressed and overwhelmed...with life.

**MATES:** Yes. Oh, yes, it is. It is.

**INT:** You had mentioned the hardships and in dealing with your son's marriage. I was wondering if you had to come to an acceptance that you've done the best you can.

**MATES:** That's right. We don't...we don't look back on it as we failed in some way. We knew that this was something that we could not, and the same thing with everybody. Whether it's Gina's illness, or Joe's illness. So we are part of a family.

**INT:** But there's a lot of sadness with that. How do you make sense of it?

**MATES:** No. You cannot dwell on it too long. My wife would dwell more. It would affect her more. She is more sensitive to those things. She takes...these things, more inside. She's more sensitive than I am. Okay, not that I'm more cool, but I...

**INT:** She feels things more deeply?

**MATES:** No, she's more sensitivity, that it hurts her inside, okay? I let things, like they say about the Teflon? (laughs)

**INT:** Things rub off?

**MATES:** Rub off. I don't take it inside too hard. I may more take inside if, you know, my wife doesn't like me for something like that, I may take more hard. But everything else doesn't matter to me.

**INT:** Do you believe that's a way to protect yourself?

**MATES:** Yes. It's a self-protective thing, because then I can go on and do things. Because if it helped, then I would cry. But it doesn't help, I...I will cry of course, what brings me to crying. But not that I will cry because it will help me, and so on. So I don't know whether I can express myself right.

**INT:** I was struck when we spoke how you described when people close to you have died, and often how hard it is at the time of the crisis to be supportive, or to be very involved in the mourning and the grieving. That you tend to try to step back and move away. Is that also part of protecting yourself?

**MATES:** It's not only part of protecting yourself, but once you get a portion, an amount, of seeing tragedy, okay, it reaches a saturation point in your feelings, okay, that you are more turned into tragedies, not to take it, it cannot anymore affect you, because they come, comes a saturation point. I saw so many of them. And such a terrible way. That I couldn't get more. It's like you can laugh so much, and you can cry so much. And after it comes a saturation point, you

cannot do anymore. The same thing. Something else, a survival point, is that you try, you know, to live through. You run away from things. It's born in you, you know, what is the right thing to do or not. The same thing is also when you see a lot of tragedy, the same way like a soldier, I gave you an example, and he gets immune, like the first time it's terrible to kill somebody. He gets immune, and he's nothing. I could see when I was a little boy, and I went in a slaughterhouse for chicken. How could this man take a knife and cut the chicken, you know? It was horrible. Then I saw he was doing it, you know, as a job every day. A job. Or, and so on.

So people get...lose a sensitivity for things that they do too much of it, you know.

**INT:** What have you thought when things have gone wrong in your life?

**MATES:** I don't know whether I can answer this question. Again, it's...you take the... (pause)

**INT:** Part of your destiny?

**MATES:** Part of destiny. Yeah, part of destiny. And it's hard to answer what, because you don't have an attitude to things, you know? You just do it, and later you can see in hindsight, you can see whether you did right or wrong.

**INT:** How about when things go well in your life? Are you capable of showing joy and happiness, contentment?

**MATES:** Yes, yes. I will express myself. I will have a feeling, you know, that, because creative work, or I did something, it works, you know. And then in the morning I want to test and so on, and will go on. This is a part of my makeup, creative work, you know. Whether it's a letter, you know, and I write a letter, and I think, it could be better. I could improve it. (laughs) I'm surprised that I could see it so perfect. And then two weeks later, I see it's not so perfect as I thought. So I don't know...

**INT:** Would you describe yourself as a worrier, and do you feel safe or frightened for your family, the future?

**MATES:** No. Not a bit. Not a bit. No. I think it will work out, have a way to work out.

**INT:** You tend to take risks?

**MATES:** Yes, this I will. But measured more, you know. I could, let's say, when, was a time when I was gambling, but I could see myself that I'm doing the wrong things, and I could cure myself out of it.

**INT:** How do you understand that about yourself?

**MATES:** I saw that this is a wrong thing. I could look at it, what am I doing, you know. And wake up, and I said, I remember when I was a boy, I talked to my sister. I said, "Look." I gave

her the money that I played with it. I said, "You keep. I know I will gamble, I will lose." You know.

**INT:** Are you able to relax, slow down? You talked about starting a business when your wife was interested in slowing down and enjoying retirement. What is that about yourself?

**MATES:** Yes, this is something that I'm driven.

**WANDA:** Selfish.

**MATES:** This is something that I am driven.

**INT:** What about that? She calls it selfish, or self-absorbed.

**WANDA:** Self-absorbed, that's right.

**MATES:** (laughs) But...this is the dividing line. And I'm looking in life a little bit more substance, okay? I can say this is not...that I will spend my time. It is talking from emptier to emptier. Just for the sake of talking. It has to have a purpose. The time is too precious, just to waste for something that is not creative, okay? Whether it's wrong or right, this is my view of it. So let's say I could have engaged in empty (?). Or I would just like to talk with you, I enjoyed, you're asking me questions, and my life, and I can answer them. Give some...hindsight to it, you know. But otherwise, I am interested in doing something that makes sense, that creates. Whether it is a small invention, and I had a lot of pride, when we applied for 27 claims, and my patent, and the patent office gave me all 27.

**INT:** Mm-hm. You had said that.

**MATES:** And this was quite an accomplishment, because they had to search in all countries, in all different, for this kind of idea, and they couldn't find anything similar. So this is, I felt a quiet satisfaction and accomplishment. So whether, from what you get satisfaction, is something that drives you. And this is why I wanted to leave a legacy. This is my...how you say, the legacy that I have created. Something for the whole world hasn't got up till now. How small it is. And...I know it is so well designed that nobody can improve on it. Maybe they can. You know. But so far, people have tried, and craftsmen have tried. And only the craftsmen appreciate this. When I show it to them, it's something that they couldn't believe it could be done. So it's a small little thing, you know, but it...I get a lot of recognition, and I enjoy this recognition, and it comes through my daughter, you know, when she hears what they say.

**INT:** Because she works with you.

**MATES:** And after all, suddenly I know nothing. It's now, we're getting in 12, 15,000 a week for it.

**INT:** So there's a real source of pride.

**MATES:** And I know it can grow to a hundred times as much. But I have to open the doors. So slowly now people are coming to me. I said, wait, I don't have to go, it will come to me. Slowly they are coming. But we had certain walls to overcome, and it was not just the product, but all other difficulties that are combined with an invention. You see, we didn't invent something entirely new. It was already on the market. We made an improvement on an idea. We found a better solution for the idea. And now they are used to the old solution. And our small expense, we can't compete with the price, that ours is cheaper than somebody else. They have to pay 50% more, and they are dropping the other one, which costs less, buy ours and pay more for it, okay. But I said, I have a way to make it cheaper than the other one, but we have to invest a lot in new tools. And so before we drop this, I have to go slowly now. Get in touch with some people who can see that it has potential, and they are willing to invest in it.

**INT:** To summarize now as to what you see as the impact of your Holocaust experiences on your life and the lives of your children. And any concerns that you have about how it has affected all of you.

(END TAPE FIVE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE FIVE, SIDE TWO)

**MATES:** What was the impact. I know that it was a terrible tragedy that it was destined for me to go through. I know also that no generation was given this opportunity to live through so much, to see so much happening in this century. You know, that I saw through (?) suffering. That we saw such an evil like Hitler could see. I think the Germans could be such a strong power, undefeatable. That they could be defeated. I never believed to see, you know, (?). Something, you know. I never saw, believed that Russia would fall apart. Never. I could never believe that even here on the political scene, that we will succeed, you know. That China could be our friends. Because they were instilled in babyhood to hate America. It was like a man in the moon, when I saw that Nixon was then in China. I saw they could, of course, the biggest thing, right after the war, that Israel got to be a nation.

**INT:** To bring it down to a more personal level, do you believe that your suffering has contributed to strength or resiliency, and do you see that in your own family?

**MATES:** I don't know why, I say it was a tragedy that I could see. Then again, but I was maybe tested in fire, so to speak. When we survived, we were different people than we were before. We were different. It had to have a tremendous impact on what you do later.

**INT:** So that's true of you?

**MATES:** Yes. When you go to a war, that's a major event, and you survived it, and you went through the same like a person goes through a war.

**INT:** So how did it change you?

**MATES:** It changed me, I cannot make out. I will say that when a person goes through difficulties, and it is a better person. This is why my wife saw, she saw about the people who made fortunes, built railroads, and created a second generation of their family, they enjoyed it, and the third destroyed it. You know. And the Ford family, it's the same thing. Somebody built, but eventually, families, they are destroying, because they get used to the good things, and they take them for granted, and so on. It's different when you build a house with all your sweat, and something somebody gives you already a house, you know. So the generations who are building, and when they remember all the generations who were building Israel there, and the pioneers, you know, they went through the hardship, but they enjoyed it more. There is a balance, in these things, you know.

And so building is a drive also. It can be. And by the next generation the children, they had everything (laughs) and now Israel is the same as America, as any other country. You know, you have all the evil in it, now the bad and the good and so on. It was just a... (pause). The good, the bad and the ugly. (laughs)

**INT:** Israel has become.

**WANDA:** When did the Germans took over Poland?

**INT:** September the tenth. The war broke out, and right away the first day they were in Poland, six days later.

**WANDA:** Because it says here on September 10 they came to our town.

**MATES:** Oh, to your town, yes. September 10. The war started the first, September first, exactly. And September 6th, they came into Cracow. Okay?

**INT:** Okay, is there anything that you would like to add?

**MATES:** No, I think that I told you the story in those fragments, that I don't know how you're going to combine them, you know, because there were so many fragments, it's a hard job to put them together. But basically when you go (?), for some reason, you have that impression. Not that you are (?) but through the experience of life, you get more of it, you know. A big dose. The tragedies, and when some happiness comes, of course, but, you're taking both later the same. You're...I don't know. When I say to my daughter, you know, if we would now suddenly achieve our goal, I don't know what I would do. I have to go on fighting. I like the role now.

So it's...in disguise, blessing in disguise that we didn't achieve it. (laughs)

**INT:** Well, it seems to me that after meeting your daughter, I'm looking forward to meeting your other children. That they are successes.

**MATES:** Yes. And she gave a good upbringing, the children, too. My daughter.

**INT:** To her own children.

**MATES:** To her own children, yes. She did an excellent job. I admire, you know. She did even a better job than we did. Because she paid attention to it. She saw the mistakes that we did, maybe, or whatever born abilities she had. She showed a nice way, and we had grandchildren.

**INT:** You also have a son that's raising his children, and you have another son that has children.

**MATES:** Yes. We all happen to be close by, and we managed to keep the children close by. I always was saying, if you want a bird on your hands, keep your hand open. And if you want to close it, it will fly away. (laughs)

**INT:** Thank you very much.

**MATES:** You're welcome.

(END OF INTERVIEW)