

UNAUTHENTICATED

Interview with Majlech (Meilech) Kisielnicki (Kisienicki)

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Abstract

Michael Kishel was born Majlech (Mailech, Meilech) Kisielnicki (Kishlenitski, Kishelnitski, Kisleinicki, Kisienicki) in Kaluszyn (Kalushin), Poland, to a family with a brother and sister. They were in the grocery business with a restaurant and gas station. His parents had many siblings, and only one aunt survived. The family was Orthodox but not as strict as the older relatives who were Hasids. The family spoke Yiddish at home and Polish with visitors. His father acted quickly for the few problems they had with anti-Semitism. The only prohibition was against higher education. He was close to his great-grandparents who had a bakery. Kishel completed elementary school at age 14 and attended trade school in Warsaw for six months. Then he worked in the family business and saw his friends in the evening, including a girl friend. In the summer he attended camp with other teenagers. His grandmother ran a newspaper kiosk. Some of the family emigrated to Argentina, France, and Israel (were Zionists). He went to the Russian border for a short time and soon after he returned, the Germans occupied the town. They ordered a Judenrat be formed, and Kishel's father was one of the 10 men chosen. Wherever Jews lived was an open ghetto. They learned that Warsaw was worse, so they got permission to bring some of their former residents back to Kaluszyn. Kishel was on the sanitary committee to prevent typhus, but he caught it once. He and his brother got a passport to live on the Aryan side of Warsaw. Soon they moved in with their cousins in the ghetto and were caught up with a deportation on a cattle car to Treblinka. They succeeded in jumping out of the train and returning to their cousins. When the Germans came, they hid in a basement bunker that exited into the sewers. Soon the Germans gassed the bunker, and they were deported to Majdanek. Kishel went into the hospital when he got sick and recuperated; and soon was deported to Auschwitz where he remained for two years, until the war ended. He was beaten numerous times, was transferred to various subcamps, including the coal mines, and finally on January 18, 1945 was evacuated. He was on the road until May 8th when he was liberated and returned to Kaluszyn. He shows pictures of his relatives and indicates a Yizkor book was written of Kaluszyn. He came to the United States in 1948, and around January 9, 1949 he married a Polish woman who emigrated to Costa Rica. They have two daughters and reside in Queens. He was in the export business with his brother until they retired in 1988. He believes that his father helped him survive.

Michael Kishel: My name is Michael Kishel. I was born Kisielnicki. At my bris I was given the name of Mejlech. I lived in Kaluszyn, Poland, which is 56 kilometers east of Warsaw, on the way to Brest Litovsk (Brest, Brest

Litowsk) (6). The first years when I was a young boy I was attending Cheder, and later I was attending Beta Safer, which was a Hebrew school only to learn Hebrew and public school to the seventh grade. My family consisted of parents, my father, Mojsze (Moishe, Moshe, Majsze); my mother, Raizel; my brother, Abram and my sister, Chaie (Chai) Sura. We had lived very well, and in the late 1920's or early 1930's my father had a business of retail and wholesale groceries. In the early 30's my father got to make a gasoline station, as the town that we lived in was a main road from Warsaw to the east, which was very heavy in traffic. He also made a restaurant that was open 24 hours a day, practically 365 days a year. Of course we only had closed on major holidays. Saturdays we closed the front, but things were done in the back. We also had a business in wholesale kosher products, such as petroleum, nafta, coal, rice, sugar, salt, and many products that had to be brought in from Warsaw to sell to the local grocery stores. We were well off in many ways. (23-25) no voice. My father was born also in Kaluszyn, and I believe it was in 1895, and my mother born in 1904 in Kaluszyn. They were young people when they got married. My mother was 17 or 18 years old.

Interviewer: Could you tell me a little bit about your people, your parents' family. Did your father have a lot of siblings?

Michael Kishel: My father's family consisted of, there were two brothers and two sisters. One sister immigrated to Argentina in the 20's, and another sister immigrated to France, also in the 20's; and he also had a brother who also lived in Poland. And my father's brother had a family, consisted of him and his wife, and they had 9 children; and they all perished. My mother had, there were four sisters and two brothers. One sister lives now in Israel, that she is the only one that remains. One sister died in Russia after she run away from the Germans in 1939; and one sister and my mother died in the Holocaust in September 1942, when they were taken to Treblinka.

Interviewer: What did your father's father do? Was he also in business?

Michael Kishel: I don't remember what my father's father did, cause he died in the 20's, and I don't recall exactly what he was doing. I believe he was dealing in produce they brought in from Kaluszyn to Warsaw during market days, and from there he brought back merchandise for stores that ordered certain merchandise.

Interviewer: So he was kind of a wholesaler?

- Michael Kishel: Sometimes it would be called like a supplier of things, whatever someone needed. My mother's father, I was told, used to work for someone that lived in the forest, like the princes or very rich gentiles, and they used to sell their woods and he used to be, I suppose, their accountant, or something like that, in that respect. My grandfather died at an early age.
- Interviewer: What kind of education did your parents have?
- Michael Kishel: My mother had an education; she was attending during the First World War in the Russian schools and of course Jewish education. My father only had a Jewish education.
- Interviewer: Do you know what age he was when he went to school?
- Michael Kishel: No, this I don't know. I do not know when my father left school or my mother. But I do know that they could go along with knowledge of many, many different things.
- Interviewer: What languages did you speak in the household?
- Michael Kishel: In the household, we spoke mainly Yiddish. Occasionally when there are people, gentiles, that came to visit us, we spoke Polish.
- Interviewer: Did your parents ever discuss the circumstances of their meeting?
- Michael Kishel: I believe my parents did not discuss with us the circumstances of their meeting, but we know that my mother wanted to marry my father because he was very industrious, although the family of my mother was more prominent than my father's.
- Interviewer: You think they just met through friends?
- Michael Kishel: No, they did not meet by friends, they were about the same age, although it was a difference of about five years, but when it comes to marry, this is the ages that you marry, between four to six, seven years apart.
- Interviewer: And did you always live in the same house as a child?
- Michael Kishel: As a child I remember until 1929 or 30, we lived in an apartment, which was a one-bedroom apartment; and we were three children, which was a little too tight in today's standards. But in those years, the more the merrier. There was no such thing as there is no space; you cannot sleep here or sleep there. There was no such thing. And if somebody came to visit, there was always a place to find for them. And later on when we had business in the late 20's, there was a house that my father rented in the

beginning, which later on we bought. Was on a lot that you consider here like 75' by 200' in the length, or maybe 60' wide and about 200' long. And there was the house that we lived, and the house had a store, and the back of the store we had the living quarters. We also had an attic which a tenant lived there before, and then because we needed the apartment we paid them to move out and we occupied that apartment also. Because of the space that we needed more, my family rented an apartment which we used only for a bedroom, and about two houses away, which it was only about 10 steps away. The back of the lot was a warehouse. Of course, all the things that was necessary for the business, and there was—sometimes there was a lot of space we used to plant fruits, like onions or potatoes or strawberries or whatever my mother or the people that worked for us liked to do for us; because we always had people helping us out in many, many ways.

Interviewer: Non-Jewish people?

Michael Kishel: That's right. I don't want to mention it over there.

Interviewer: So, you remember growing up in this environment?

Michael Kishel: Yes.

Interviewer: What kind of a street or neighborhood was it?

Michael Kishel: Well, it was – the neighborhood, our town was a town of a population of about 10,000, and we had about 75, 80 percent Jewish. Maybe not exactly 75, but it was about 65 percent Jewish. And that I remember for many, many years. The town lived from mainly from different trades. There were a lot of people that had a trade making prayer shawls, Tallisim. There were also a lot of people that made sheepskin coats. There were a few people that dealt in skin-making leather, like tannery. And, of course, shoemakers and tailors were abundant. And the majority of it, the rest, were mostly, I would say about 30 percent of the people who did have businesses, businesses of textile, like selling materials for suits. There was no such thing as ready-made suits here. There were tailors that made ready-made suits, but they were making them for out-of-town, for business people in Warsaw or other ones. But if you wanted to have a suit, you went to the store to buy three yards or three meters of material, and give it to a tailor who made it for you. I remember that we always had two suits a year, for Passover and for High Holidays. After that year, the following year, my mother gave the suits away to relatives who were less fortunate, and if they were still good in the same condition, they wore it that way;

and if not, they turned it over on the other side, the material, and remade it so it looked like new. The same thing was with shoes and other things.

Interviewer: How would you describe the relation between the Jewish families and the non-Jewish? Were they Catholic?

Michael Kishel: The Gentiles in our town were 99 percent Catholics. The relations between the Gentiles and the Jews, officially were supposedly good. We particularly had no problem, because all the Gentiles that used to come around had respect for my father. And especially the precinct, the police, were practically stationed in our house because it was a station that the trucks and buses that used to pass by our town made a stopover, taking gas, filling with gas, and all the passengers came into our restaurant to eat, and for this it was very lively in our area. And the town was—every evening young people used to stroll along the street, especially the main street, it was called Warsaw Street, or Warszawa (Warszawska) (132, Polish name of street). And especially when it came Friday night and Saturday night, you could not pass a certain area without bumping into one another because they were walking four or five in the width. And old friends and young people and everybody was very happy. Of course, there were occasionally were anti-Semitic slogans, not to buy from Jews, because this came from other places that instigated against Jews and, of course, it dropped off among other populations or areas, and the same thing dropped off on Jews in our area.

Interviewer: So there were local fascists, youths?

Michael Kishel: Yes, there were fascists, but officially they did not come up to say exactly what they are. But in a group they were barking. But many times the Gentiles had very much respect for my family, for my father, and there was no hesitation that if someone came into our house and said something against the Jews, that my father could take him by his neck and throw him out with a kick in the back, in the rear end, and it was o.k.

Interviewer: And, as the decade of the 30's progressed, did things get tougher?

Michael Kishel: Well, it started to get a little tougher after Hitler came to power, and it was a lot of writings about how he was treating the Jews. And, of course, there was a Polish anti-Semitic party, it was called, NDEC (?), the National Polish Party. I don't remember exactly what they are called, but there were a few of them. And they had their newspapers, and they used to write many articles about how bad the Jews are; and what the Jews did bad to Poland, and what they do to this and what they do to that. And, of

course, many Poles did not have anything, or did not have any incentives to go out and work and better themselves; only saw that the Jews take everything away and the Jews have everything. And this made anti-Semitism a little more.

Interviewer: So there were more incidents?

Michael Kishel: Actually, there were no incidents. The only incident that was once was in the county, I don't remember exactly if there was someone that killed someone in the county, or if it was at a time when a German ambassador or counselor was killed in Paris. That person that killed him was from Minsk-Mazowiecki (165 – name of town). I don't remember exactly if this was the case, but there was some incident in Minsk-Mazowiecki and, of course, did not do much good. But people still lived, and there was no other choice to do but you had to live with them, to make the best you can.

Interviewer: But your freedom of movement or opportunity was restricted?

Michael Kishel: No. Freedom of movement was not restricted, and of course, there was restriction on higher education in schools. There was no higher education in our town. Our town was only public school up to the seventh grade.

Interviewer: Tell me again what your schooling was?

Michael Kishel: My schooling was that when I was a boy, let's say 4 or 5 years old, the first thing he would attend was a Cheder. I remember during my time of Jewish education I went to four different rabbis; from the one that started with small children and bigger children and so on and do forth. And then when I was about 11 or 12 years old I was attending a school which taught only Hebrew, because my father was a Zionist, and he wanted us to know Hebrew. So we went, and that day, 11, 12 and 13, I was going to that Hebrew school in the morning, let's say from 9:00 to 12:00; from 1:00 to 6:00 I went to public school; and from 7:00 to 8:00 or 7:00 to 9:00, a rabbi came to the house to finish my religious education. So for a time we were busy educating ourselves.

Interviewer: And you were Bar Mitzvah when you were 13?

Michael Kishel: And I was Bar Mitzvah when I was 13.

Interviewer: What was the ceremony like?

Michael Kishel: Well, the Bar Mitzvah ceremony was new to me, when I came to the United States. There was no such thing as elaborate Bar Mitzvahs that

they have here that was there. There was only at a time when I was Bar Mitzvah came on a Saturday, I was given an Aliyah and I was reading from the Torah—I don't remember exactly what I read, the part that I was supposed to, but after that there was a big Kiddush in the synagogue and a lot of friends came to the house and we had a separate party in the house.

Interviewer: But were you, ----? _____ little kid put on a pedestal?

Michael Kishel: We just went to a Bar Mitzvah. _____(c.195)

Interviewer: Yes. We'll get back to the Bar Mitzvah. You were going to talk about your great-grandmother, Miriam (Mayim) Gelbarg (196-name?) (?)

Michael Kishel: The picture you see here is my great-grandmother. Her name was Miriam Gelbarg (Gelbog (?)). She was a baker woman and the whole town knew her. She also made boxes for Tefillin. She died in 1934 at the age over 100. I was told a story here in the States when I came in 1947, through her son, that her son run away from Kaluszyn as a young boy, maybe 16 or 17 years old. He came to America; his name was Wallis (?) Gilbert and he told... When he contacted after the war to some Kaluszyn landsmans, I was told by some landsmans that went away before First World War or right after the First World War that when her son run away to the United States, run away from home, she did not know where he is, and she almost forgot him. When one time came a picture from him and without a hat on his head, was standing in front of the oven in the bakery, she saw the picture and threw it into the oven.

Interviewer: And you remember her?

Michael Kishel: I remember her being sick, laying in bed in the early 30's. These two pictures are of my grandmother who is the daughter of my great-grandmother and my grandfather. These pictures were taken, I believe, in the 1930's. Her name was Rifka Rzondzinski (?). She perished during the Holocaust in 1942. My grandfather's name was Fischel Rzondzinski (?) and he died before World War II, sometime around '32 or '33.

Interviewer: And your grandmother, Rifka Rzondzinski, lived in Kaluszyn?

Michael Kishel: Lived in Kaluszyn until the--. My grandmother originally lived with my aunt in Minsk-Mazowiecki (230-city(?)). Since 1939, after Kaluszyn was burned out, lived with her daughter and her son-in-law in Minsk-Mazowiecki. In 1942, after they start to liquidate the town of Minsk-Mazowiecki, my aunt and my grandmother came to live with us in

Kaluszyn, and my grandmother perished in the Holocaust in 1942 on the way to Treblinka or in Treblinka.

Interviewer: They were living with you for awhile? Was she born in Minsk?

Michael Kishel: No, she was born in Kaluszyn, as far as I know. Yes, they were born in Kaluszyn.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. Do you know anything about her background? How many brothers and sisters she had?

Michael Kishel Yes. On my grandmother's side there were three sisters. One sister died a long time ago, that I did not know, that lived in Kaluszyn who tended the bakery together with my great-grandmother. Her husband, Moishe Aron Siroka (?) who lived until 1939, I'm sorry, until 1939 when the city was destroyed, with his wife and also had a bakery. After the city was destroyed, he went away and went out of town, but I do not know what happened to him.

Interviewer: He was born in Kaluszyn also? You don't know. Do you have any idea how old he was in 1939?

Michael Kishel: This great-uncle of mine, Moishe Aron Siroka must have been in 1939 maybe 65, 70 years old.

Interviewer: And he and his wife, they ran a bakery; and so your great-uncle, Moishe Aron Siroka owned a bakery, or he ran a bakery?

Michael Kishel: He ran a bakery with my great-grandmother was still alive, but later on he run a bakery also. His wife died earlier, but I don't remember her; but he remarried, and he ran the bakery.

Interviewer: How many children did they have?

Michael Kishel: They had four children, three sons and one daughter. One son died during the Holocaust in 1942. One son went to Israel in the 1930's. One son went to Russia in 1939, as you will see with a family picture, as well as the daughter.

Interviewer: So these would be your second cousins?

Michael Kishel: My second cousins. They would be my second cousins.

Interviewer: So your Uncle Moishe Aron, did you know him when you were a kid?

- Michael Kishel: Yes, I knew him very well because we had a restaurant, and we needed cakes. He was the baker that made cakes.
- Interviewer: Did he have people employed in his shop?
- Michael Kishel: The employees in the shop was only he, his wife, and his daughter and a son; because the other son went away to Israel, and one son had a shop in Warsaw with my aunt in partnership. They were making knitted goods. They were knitting and making garments for—they were contractors.
- Interviewer: So your great-uncle, Moishe Aron, do you remember—what was he like?
- Michael Kishel: He was a man like you see today. I could see it today. You go in an area where a lot of Jews lived, you can see the same type of man that he was then; you can see it today also.
- Interviewer: He was very pious. . . .
- Michael Kishel: If you look at a picture, you can visualize in going, let's say if you knew New York, Borough Park or Williamsburg, or the east side, you can see Jews like this, just like him.
- Interviewer: Was he—do you remember him as being nice to you or---?
- Michael Kishel: Well, he had no reason not to be nice to me. We were not the type of young boys that went out and making mischief to all the people. We had, as you call in Yiddish, “der cheretz” (c.300) (?). We had—we honored the older people. We had respect for them.
- Interviewer: So, do you know, he probably had Yiddish schooling and--?
- Michael Kishel: Oh, yes. He was very well-versed in. . . .
- Interviewer: He's not Hasidim, is he?
- Michael Kishel: Yes, he was a Hasid.
- Interviewer: He was?
- Michael Kishel: Yeah. But he was a Hasid with his brother-in-law, my grandfather, I don't know. But my grandfather was a Hasid—used to call “keren vitz Hasidim” (ph) (c.307). Used to be like say we have a gerech (ph) (c.309) Hasid. You have different—from different towns—rabbis. People go to him for holidays; they go to him for benedictions; they go to him for very important questions. My grandfather was a Hasid of a rabbi that called “keren vitzachoosit” (ph) (c.312). You need spelling, I'll. . . .

Interviewer: So it was a very religious family? The whole extended family—but your...

Michael Kishel: Yes. My mother's side was very religious, but my mother herself was not that way because she was already another generation and more modern. Although she knew all the rights and wrongs of religion, in the house we practiced religion. There was no such thing as a non-kosher home. In Europe, there was no such thing. You could not visualize even the people that did not have much, to go out and buy for the house, non-kosher meat. Younger people of my age at that time—13, 14, 16, to be—considered to be a wise guy, he went into a Polish delicatessen and bought himself a piece of kielbasa, and said he had it. Like he conquered, who knows what.

Interviewer: Did you ever do that?

Michael Kishel: I did that too; but I didn't eat it. I just had to be someone with a group, although my group did not go there because it's required, maybe it was cheaper than Jewish salami. Although I had it in our house, this salami which was better quality because it was more expensive but to me, it would cost me nothing. But it was a big thing to go in with a group and to participate.

Interviewer: So in your household, you celebrated all the holidays?

Michael Kishel: All the holidays; in our household everything was 100% kosher, we celebrated all the holidays. Although the—as I mentioned before, business—we did conduct business. The main thing the restaurant was not open on a Friday night or till Saturday; but we did sell gasoline because we had employees, that was a whole night. They were gentiles, and they were selling the gas and brought the money in.

Interviewer: So there were a lot of vehicles at this time? You know, running on gas? I always get the picture of these _____.

Michael Kishel: Pardon me?

Interviewer: There were a lot vehicles running on gas?

Michael Kishel: Oh, yes. If you ask about vehicles—this was a main road. Same thing like you have New York to Boston or New York to Washington. There was a main road, traffic of trucks and buses that were going with passengers to Warsaw.

Interviewer: But there would be a lot of horse and wagon _____(c.348)?

Michael Kishel: Oh yes, there were horse and wagons too, but we had nothing to with horses since we had the gasoline station.

Interviewer: Did your family have a car or truck?

Michael Kishel: We had a truck for business. You ask me if my family had a car. I remember in 1937 or '36, there was an old beaten up Ford, and it was called the Model T Ford. Because we had two trucks, and we had chauffeurs, so we were depending upon them to fix it, to run it. My brother bought the Model T Ford and was fixing it. It did run, but looked like. . . I don't remember what happened to it because my father did not allow because it was too—taken away from things that he supposed to do otherwise. Maybe it wasn't good enough or something. But we had two trucks that were—I don't remember exactly whether there was two—or maybe because two, there was different models at a later time. I remember the first truck we had was a 1926, then was a 1933 or a 1936 Chevrolet truck.

Interviewer: So if we could just finish the story of your—I know we're skipping around—of your great-uncle. Did he live also with your great-grandmother?

Michael Kishel: No. My great-grandmother lived with her daughter, Miriam; at a time when I knew her. Before maybe she lived with her daughter, his--.

Interviewer: Where did your great-uncle live?

Michael Kishel: In his house, in his place. He had the bakery, the bakery was downstairs and upstairs, they lived.

Interviewer: Okay. With four children?

Michael Kishel: With four children.

Interviewer: And his wife, what was his wife's name?

Michael Kishel: I don't remember his wife or his wife's name because she died before I even knew her.

Interviewer: But then he remarried?

Michael Kishel: He remarried. He married a very nice lady who worked with him continuously till....

Interviewer: And were the four children all by the first wife?

- Michael Kishel: The four children were all from the first wife.
- Interviewer: They didn't have any other children?
- Michael Kishel: No.
- Interviewer: So, did you ever get together with this great-uncle for family occasions?
- Michael Kishel: The family occasions we're together is not with the uncle, was already the younger children, because the uncle was the age of my grandmother. The age where we got together was my mother with her sisters and brothers and their children. So the older generation was not included in the gathering unless the grandmother came—the same thing like you have here. You invite the parents, or you invite the children of the parents, or you invite the cousins, or the cousins not excluded.
- Interviewer: Right.
- Michael Kishel: It was something like that but not to that extent as it's here.
- Interviewer: You started to talk about your bar mitzvah and the family party. How many members of the family---?
- Michael Kishel: There was no family party. The only bar mitzvah that I had was a Kiddish in shul. There were a lot of people that were more friendly with—more friends of my father that invited them to our house to have another drink and another fish or another. Because usually, in the shul, you give a party, you give whiskey, cake like sponge cake, and herring. You invite them into the house, you give them fish, or you give them challah, you give them some other things. You give them beer. This was the party in the house. But no family things, there was no such things as gifts here, as a check---
- Interviewer: _____ was it?
- Michael Kishel: I don't remember that I got it. But I probably did. Maybe I got another tallisgut (ph) (c.405). You know a small towel, you know what tallisgut is? It's a small towel that you wear on maybe I got it—but I stopped wearing it when I was maybe 10, 11 years old.
- Interviewer: You were 13 when you were bar mitzvahed, weren't you?
- Michael Kishel: Yes, but you see that tallisgut you wear when you are a child. Many times you see the young kids, they run around, the fringes still outside and they are running.

- Interviewer: And so just about the same time, you left school?
- Michael Kishel: The school—when I left school I was about 14.
- Interviewer: And that was the end of elementary school?
- Michael Kishel: That was the end of elementary.
- Interviewer: And then you went to___?
- Michael Kishel: I went, yes, after I finished the elementary school, I went to Warsaw to attend a trade school which was run by the Jewish community by a Jewish crebovska (ph) (*c,417), It was a street where the Jewish... I attended that school for about six months, and I lived with a family that were very religious. It was not too much to my liking, and I was a little bit of homesick.
- Interviewer: That was 1934?
- Michael Kishel: That was 1934.
- Interviewer: What do you mean by they were too religious? What did they expect of you?
- Michael Kishel: What I mean by too religious, that I had to sleep with a yamulka on my head. I had to pray every morning. The people that I lived with were distant relatives of my mother. He was a barber that worked in the house only for those people that cannot go take shaves. Only very religious people came to take haircuts; special haircuts that you cannot use a razor or... It was such a thing that was very special. I was too restricted, and this gave me a little bit—made me a little bit lonely. I came back to Kaluszyn, to the house, and from there I worked in our business because we needed me. My main work was, we had the shifts, daytime and nighttime. Most of the time I worked nighttime, because in the evening we used to go out with friends. I say till about 11 o'clock or 10 o'clock and after that I came home, and I attended the business at night till about 5, 6 o'clock in the morning.
- Interviewer: You mean you worked in the restaurant, the gas station?
- Michael Kishel: In the gas—pumping gas, in the restaurant.
- Interviewer: What sort of things did you do with your friends in the early years?
Movies--?

Michael Kishel: We used to go to—movies we only went Friday night, Saturday night, or Sunday. Or we used to go out in summertime, in daytime we used to go out bike ridings, and evenings we used to go out just walk around the street, strolling and telling stories, just like you have fun here; but not such a degree that many time you see here. The public school also supplied one school was open evenings so that children, students, could come in and congregate there. We used to play various games, domino or checkers. We used to develop, I don't know if you ever heard of, literary cards. Like you take a—if you have in a deck four cards of each four kings, four queens, four jacks, four aces and so on. We used to make those cards, by literary cards we mean, known literary people; like poets or musicians. As a matter of fact, I wrote down here, writers---

Interviewer: Composers?

Michael Kishel: Composers, musicians, writers. Different type of very known people, politicians. We used to play cards just like you pull a card from someone—if you have four kings, four composers, you go out. First you go out with the cards, then you win. We also played like blackjack and other types of games with cards. This was our times we---

Interviewer: Did you start dating in your teens?

Michael Kishel: We had a group of friends dating, but we did not go directly with each other. We were always going in a group; two friends, two boys and two girls, or three boys and three girls. I have some pictures of those friends. These are my first two girlfriends. This is my first one; this is my second one. I did not bring my third one out. I forgot to take the picture which the third one was during the war from 1940 to 1942. But my fourth and last one...

Interviewer: This looks like a very modern girl, wearing pants.

Michael Kishel: My ultimate and last one is this one; my two daughters (?) (c.495)

Interviewer: Wait a minute. This, your wife?

Michael Kishel: This is my wife.

Interviewer: She's not in this picture?

Michael Kishel: No.

Interviewer: You met your wife in ____?

- Michael Kishel: I met my wife in New York. She is not—my wife is not a Holocaust survivor. This picture was taken in 1936, '37, on vacation in Mrozy. Mrozy was a railroad station. We used to go out there for vacations. It's five kilometers from Kaluszyn.
- Interviewer: That's M-r-o-z-y.
- Michael Kishel: That's right. On my right is Idzia Pignabish (ph) (c. 504), that's her; to my left, Marsha (Masza) Tennenbaum (?) (c.505). Both died in Treblinka from Kaluszyn on December 9. Idzia Pignabish (c. 508) had a sister whose name was Lolly—Lala, we used to call her. We called her Lala, this is why we called her because she was a doll. She looked like a doll. The family had a store of—liquor—a liquor store. She was my friend for many, many years.
- Interviewer: Did she go to the same school as you?
- Michael Kishel: We went to the same school, the same public schools.
- Interviewer: And she left when she was fourteen also?
- Michael Kishel: Yes.
- Interviewer: What did the girl students do when they left school?
- Michael Kishel: The girls didn't do much. Some girls that their family were not well-off, while needed, some girls went to work as a seamstress, to learn a trade. But these girls were well off, the people were well off, so they did not send them.... As I can remember, maybe, because I did visit her when she was in Warsaw, maybe she attended a school in Warsaw, I don't remember exactly. I don't remember exactly because I did see her in Warsaw a few times, where she was.
- Interviewer: Maybe you could talk about this being together in 1936, '37, in Mrozy.
- Michael Kishel: In Mrozy, yeah.
- Interviewer: Because I could write about that, what were----?
- Michael Kishel: During summertime, we used to go for vacation to a town called Mrozy, which is a railroad station five kilometers from our town. Our parents sent us there because they had a friend that was running a vacation house for children of our groups. We were there for about six weeks; four to six weeks.

Interviewer: Was it on water or____?

Michael Kishel: No—water was about a mile away, and it was mainly in the woods. A house and we used to get up in the morning and used to play ball and go on hikes. Although there wasn't much to do, but we enjoyed it because it was in the air. We had fresh air, and no one had to tell us what we can do and not do because the people that wanted us to be there, treated us very well.

Interviewer: How many years did you go there?

Michael Kishel: I believe I went there two years, two consecutive years. I went there, and my sister went also there. There was no need for me to go home during this time as the parents want to see us. They used to come to see us, how we're progressing; because to them children on vacation was mainly that they should eat more. Because we had everything in the house, we had to get paid to eat. So they sent us away to a place where we can get to stay with friends and eat together and be there.

Interviewer: I don't understand that. What do you mean eat more? So you ate very good food at this____?

Michael Kishel: So being you are in fresh air, you get more appetite to eat.

Interviewer: I see. And the food was good?

Michael Kishel: The food was, ____ good food mostly butter and cream cheese and sweet cream and fishes and herrings and all kinds of things what we like; because nobody knew about cholesterol then. We had eggs practically every day.

Interviewer: So how many of you teenagers would be together there?

Michael Kishel: We were there about 18 to 20 teenagers.

Interviewer: Did you sing songs together at night?

Michael Kishel: Yes, we would sing songs, yes. Here, I'll show you two pictures, again. One picture is Aldra (?), myself, with friends. We all attended the same school. The one that stays with me, her name is Sarah Aronson (?). She was married—she married after the war with a man by the name of Cooper. He died in France. She lives now in Nancy, France.

Interviewer: You still stay in touch with her?

- Michael Kishel: Yes, I'm staying in touch with her by telephone. She visited us a few times. I saw her a few times in her house.
- Interviewer: So where were you rowing to?
- Michael Kishel: This was all in Mrozy. That was all done vacation time.
- Interviewer: There was a pond there?
- Michael Kishel: Yes. The person that sits at the end of the boat, he is the son of the woman that was running the house, the vacation house. This is Idzia Pignabish (?) (*,669). The person in the middle, the two in the middle, one's name is Adam Kamyenki (ph) (c.671). His name is—now he lives in Israel, and his name now is Sella (?) (c.671). The girl next to him is a girl that came to visit my sister, she's from Warsaw. She died, I don't know where she is now. So she came to stay with us one summer, and she went for a vacation.
- Interviewer: You look quite old here, all of you, to be doing camp things. You look like you're in your—well you were, you were 17 or 18 years old. So that was _____.
- Michael Kishel: Yeah.
- Interviewer: That was really a luxury for kids that age not to work in _____
- Michael Kishel: That's right. This is a picture of the—this is the mother of my friend that you see in the picture with the two girls. And the other one here; the one below her is her daughter, her younger daughter. The one next to her is the daughter of the woman that runs the summer house, which is a sister. Next to her is my sister, and the couple above are the parents of the boy at the left, of this boy. This picture was also taken in that summer house, summer camp. It's getting complicated.
- Interviewer: Yes. So you had a very—it was a nice break from your regular routine. But you don't remember what these two girls did when they went back to town after that summer camp? How young, were either of them married before the war?
- Michael Kishel: No, no. Marsha Tannenbaum (?) had relatives that originally came from a town called Kobryn (Kobrin, Kubrin) (ph) (c.691). Kobryn, that's about 50 kilometers east or northeast of Brest Litovsk (ph) (c.692). That would be about 200 kilometers from our town. She had relatives there and her parents were, not druggists; in New York or in Kaluszyn there were not

such a—were a drugstore, but there was also a store that used to sell ready-made prescriptions. Like you could get pills for—against headache, like aspirins. Or special soaps, like you have a drugstore today but without the drugs. But her father could have made drugs, but he was not allowed to; maybe because he was Jewish, or because maybe he didn't have the license to be a druggist, but he was there.

Interviewer: Did he own the store?

Michael Kishel: He owned that store.

Interviewer: And he lived ____ (c.701)?

Michael Kishel: They lived there; they lived there, in Kaluszyn for a time, all that.

Interviewer: You don't know if she was born in Kaluszyn?

Michael Kishel: She was born in Kaluszyn, yes. But she had an older sister and a brother. I don't know where they were born, in Kaluszyn or they were born in the other town.

Interviewer: She had an older sister and an older brother? And she was the youngest?

Michael Kishel: Yes, she was the youngest.

Interviewer: Okay. And she had the same schooling as you. The school you went to was for boys and girls?

Michael Kishel: Yes, we went all together.

Interviewer: So it wasn't—there were _____ Hasidic schools were segregated weren't they?

Michael Kishel: No. This was a school, a public school.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. But there were a lot of Jewish students?

Michael Kishel: Yes. As a matter of fact, the public school—we had two public schools. One public school that only Jewish students attended, only Jews, although it was a public school. The only school that non-Jews attended with the Gentiles were those that had very heavy accents and to make—to straighten out the accent—to teach them better the Polish language, those had to go to a Polish public school. But we went, all of us, everything was conducted in Polish only. The public school although the attendance was all Jewish, but the schooling was only in Polish.

- Interviewer: And the teachers were ____?
- Michael Kishel: The teachers were Jewish and Polish teachers.
- Interviewer: Oh. Was Marsha a good student?
- Michael Kishel: Yes.
- Interviewer: Were you a good student?
- Michael Kishel: We were all good students.
- Interviewer: But there was never any idea that any of you would go on to some secondary school in another city?
- Michael Kishel: She went back to a school from where her parents came. How many years she went there, I don't remember.
- Interviewer: The name of the town again is ____?
- Michael Kishel: K-u-b-r-i-n.
- Interviewer: Okay and her parents were from that town?
- Michael Kishel: Her parents were from that town. They settled in Kaluszyn; since I knew them, they were living in Kaluszyn.
- Interviewer: Before she was born?
- Michael Kishel: I don't know. I only know her because we went to school together.
- Interviewer: Oh, okay. You've told me a little bit about ____?
- Michael Kishel: Idzia.
- Interviewer: Idzia. Her father was the one who owned the liquor store and she had sisters and brothers?
- Michael Kishel: She had this one sister.
- Interviewer: She just had one younger sister, adorable—Lala.
- Michael Kishel: The word, lala, is a doll. The word, lala, in Yiddish is a doll. Her name was different but we didn't call her anything else but Lala.
- Interviewer: Is Idzia—is there anything special about her that you remember?

Michael Kishel: We were very good friends, all of us; with Marsha and with Idzia. As I said, she was my first girlfriend. How did she become my first girlfriend is also a story. And the story goes back as follows: After each school year, the school made trips to towns in Poland; historic towns, like Warsaw, Krakow (Cracow, Krakau, Krako, Krakoy, Krakuv, Kroke) and Kazimierz, which was a king in Kazimierz which was very good to Jews, and then Tooteenia (ph) (c.738) which is on the north, on a port. And supposedly on the way back, we went by train, on the way back was sitting on the benches. I was sitting supposedly next to her, and she was next to me, and we were sleeping. All having our heads this way, that way. Supposedly my head touched hers, and her head touched mine; and it came to know that a maid that used to work for us a certain time, worked later on for her parents. She used to come to us and go there—used to bring—tell stories. Whether the stories were true, that she likes me; and she came to tell me, and I said I like her too. This was the story. But besides her, was a very nice girl, and there was no reason not to like her. At the time we did not think—we were 13, 14 year old children. We would not think to go out tomorrow to get married, but we were very good friends.

Interviewer: Then you said that this was also a girlfriend?

Michael Kishel: Yes.

Interviewer: But just a girlfriend: ____(c.750)?

Michael Kishel: As a girlfriend, we can say more than a girlfriend.

Interviewer: Oh. You're very close. Well, tell me something—a little bit more about her. She went to the same school?

Michael Kishel: Yes, we all went—was only one public school. One public school was one large building that had—in that school we had from the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh grade. All of the grades were located in different parts of the town. There were a building that had the first and second grade, and the second and third grade, different areas. But that school was a large school with a large yard that we used to come there, and that was the main school.

Interviewer: What did she do? Do you know what she did after she left school? Did she help in the liquor store--?

- Michael Kishel: No, she wouldn't help in the liquor store but, most of the girls didn't do much.
- Interviewer: What did they do? I mean I'm really---.
- Michael Kishel: There was not much to do.
- Interviewer: Did they babysit with the little kids, little sisters?
- Michael Kishel: There was no-no. Maybe sisters—babysit for her sister but---.
- Interviewer: Did she weave, embroider?
- Michael Kishel: Yes, we were—maybe. As I mentioned before, I believe that she went to Warsaw to a school because I met her a few times in Warsaw, because I used to travel to Warsaw occasionally because I had nothing to do also. I wanted to take a trip to Warsaw.
- Interviewer: But—so 18, 19, 20's, you didn't have any specific work to do?
- Michael Kishel: No. Twenties was already the war—during the wartime, 1939.
- Interviewer: Oh, okay so that changed _____.
- Michael Kishel: That changed. There was not much—in small town was not much to do.
- Interviewer: Oh, okay. So between the ages of----. But most of these girls would generally marry pretty young back then.
- Michael Kishel: No, I would say that there was no such thing as marrying young; married in their twenties. There was no—twenty, twenty-one—there was very few that would marry younger. Very few and there were no accidents—had to marry.
- Interviewer: There weren't?
- Michael Kishel: No, I wouldn't say so. There were more respect for girls than it is—We never thought—all right—let's say we used to be in love with girls—kiss and hug and touch. But to go to extremes, I say it for myself, that I wouldn't take chance because you never know what can happen. No one wanted to----
- Interviewer: So nice Jewish boys wouldn't---?
- Michael Kishel: Do that. That's right.
- Interviewer: Even though you were very good-looking.

- Michael Kishel: Thank you. Wait until you see another picture.
- Interviewer: All right. So to return to your grandmother---
- Michael Kishel: I remember that after my grandfather died--- Rifka Rzondzinski.
- Interviewer: R-z-o-n-d-z-i-n-s-k-i who was your---?
- Michael Kishel: Grandmother. My mother's mother. My maternal grandmother. After my grandfather died---
- Interviewer: In the early thirties?
- Michael Kishel: In the early thirties. My grandmother got herself a kiosk to sell newspapers, and I remember that there was a time that came—an area that made a train to go to the train; like a small train, a feeder. Because before and even during that time and later on, used to be special porters, special guys that used to have a horse and buggy, horse and special, what you call it? Not a van, it's a—used to be a horse and carriage; used to take passengers from our town to Mrozy to go to Warsaw which is west or to go to Siedlce (c.798) which is east, or to other places wherever they need to go. Then it became the city, made a train. A small train with a huff'n puff locomotive with one caboose, with one to carry passengers to the train. My grandmother had there a kiosk to sell candy and newpapers and sodas and whatever there was. When the newspapers used to come in from Warsaw, came by train to Mrozy; and from Mrozy they used to bring in with that train to Kaluszyn, and she used to sell it. Later on the train stopped going because the city was losing. The owner of this was losing money, and a man that used to be the conductor of the train bought himself a horse; and he was riding with the horse on the rails with that train to Mrozy. But it did not do good enough because he didn't have enough money to feed the horse; so he stopped going. So that kiosk was transferred to another part of town, and she had that kiosk in the town. Then we had to bring in the newspapers from Mrozy to Kaluszyn with the regular drivers, with the regular carriage, horse and carriage that was running. But because there was competition, there was another man that had a kiosk; we as grandchildren, my brother or I, or my grandmother's son used to go with a bicycle to Mrozy and get the newspaper, a pack of newspapers, Jewish newspapers and Polish newspapers and load it up on the back of the bicycle and bring it faster. Who brings faster the newspapers is able to sell it to those who are interested to read. Because not everybody wants to buy a paper. There was—if one bought a paper, he used to give it to all his neighbors to read it. Or two of them bought the

paper—you buy today, I'll buy tomorrow because a paper used to cost 15 or 20 Russian-naught (ph) (c.824) maybe more, I don't remember exactly. But it was an amount of money that no one wanted to spend day after day after day. So from this she was having—making a living.

Interviewer: How old was she then? I don't think you told me her approximate birth date?

Michael Kishel: I would say that when she died, she must have been in the seventies.

Interviewer: Okay, your grandmother was born about--?

Michael Kishel: Around 1875.

Interviewer: In Kaluszyn?

Michael Kishel: Yeah, let's say in Kaluszyn. Yes, I believe because they all came from Kaluszyn.

Interviewer: They went back for generations?

Michael Kishel: Yes.

Interviewer: So she had the kiosk and after your grandfather died around—did you say around 1933?

Michael Kishel: Yes, in the early '30's.

Interviewer: Her husband was a Hasid?

Michael Kishel: Yes. Was a Hasid, yes. But he did not live from the Hasidic. He lived—he had a job like going to the places of woods, the forest. He used to—when they used to sell the trees to make the wood, he used to give assessment. I really don't know what he was doing but I do know that he was connected with the forest kind of business.

Interviewer: All right. So, and your grandmother was just at home then with the children?

Michael Kishel: Yes. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. And she only started working outside the home after her husband died?

Michael Kishel: This is what I know.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, that's very difficult, a woman her age to start going--.

- Michael Kishel: But there was not much; to run a kiosk is just to stay there and take—and help out. But because her daughter helped out; because her daughter remained with the kiosk later on.
- Interviewer: The daughter---.
- Michael Kishel: The daughter, the oldest daughter.
- Interviewer: What was the oldest daughter's name again?
- Michael Kishel: Hannah. I did not put the name on.
- Interviewer: Hannah. H-a-n-n-a-h?
- Michael Kishel: Yes.
- Interviewer: She helped her mother with the kiosk?
- Michael Kishel: Yes.
- Interviewer: So her mother wouldn't have to stand up, outside_____? Cold and stuff_____ (c.850).
- Michael Kishel: Was colder than that. She helped out, and her family helped out; and they remained with the newspaper business, with the kiosk.
- Interviewer: So she did that after 1933, and kept it going?
- Michael Kishel: Kept it going until 1939.
- Interviewer: Did she only speak—she spoke Yiddish?
- Michael Kishel: Yiddish, yeah. My grandma she understood, I believe she spoke Russian, too. But not to me, because I did not understand Russian. And Polish—we did not talk to our parents, to our grandparents in Polish. We talked to our grandparents only in Yiddish.
- Interviewer: Do you know what your great-great-grandfather did? Could you tell me-?
- Michael Kishel: No, about my great-grandfather, I know nothing about.
- Interviewer: Do you know how your grandparents met, by any chance?
- Michael Kishel: No, I do not. Those days there was no such thing as meet. My grandparents was only a made-up marriage because you did not go...They were more religious in that they would not be—not to say that they

wouldn't be interested—but their parents would not allow for them to go out and see each other, and then say we want to get married.

Interviewer: Right, so it was arranged?

Michael Kishel: Was arranged marriages.

Interviewer: Were they happy?

Michael Kishel: Evidently. If you see Fiddler on the Roof; he said it, do you love me, what's today is love? His parents told him, they'll get to like each other.

Interviewer: Do you remember anything about her house? Where she lived?

Michael Kishel: What I remember only when---that they lived in a house where my great-grandmother was with her. In a house, she was in a bed. I always remember my great-grandmother laying in a bed, she was sick. Occasionally she was out, but the few times that I went in to see my grandmother, she was there. I saw her there. But there was not—what can I tell you?

Interviewer: Did she live near you?

Michael Kishel: No, there was not far away, maybe 100 yards.

Interviewer: Oh, oh. Did a lot of the family members live in the same area?

Michael Kishel: Yes, most of the family lived in the same—unless they moved out. Which family members you talking about? It's only my grandparents and my aunt; this aunt that she lived in Kaluszyn. The other ones did not live there. For instance—

Interviewer: Well you talked about your great-grandmother and your great-uncle?

Michael Kishel: Yeah, all right, they lived 100 yards further. But this is already considered their second generation or third generation of me.

Interviewer: Right. Okay, just trying to get things in order. All right, before 1939, some of your family members emigrated to Israel?

Michael Kishel: Before 1939, my mother's sister--.

Interviewer: Whose name was ____?

Michael Kishel: Whose name is Nahama Houseman (ph) (c.895); left for Israel with her husband, Meyer Houseman (?).

- Interviewer: They were Zionists?
- Michael Kishel: Before I do that, I'll say differently. Before the war, let's say about in the thirties, maybe '34 or '35, my mother's sister Nahama had a partnership with a cousin whose name was Fishel Soroka (ph) (c.899) in Warsaw where they made knit goods. They knitted goods and cut into articles like sweaters and jumpsuits for children. Later on my mother's sister married and went to Israel. Another sister—
- Interviewer: Were they Zionists?
- Michael Kishel: Yes.
- Interviewer: There were—so a lot of your____?
- Michael Kishel: Practically all of the family was Zionists, Zionist oriented.
- Interviewer: How was the decision made? How did certain people decide to leave then for Israel? Was it a matter of—because I understand there were only a few places...
- Michael Kishel: They decided because—first of all they decided to leave because they were idealists. They wanted to go to Israel. Of course, they also had to have a certificate. With the certificate is a permit from the British government that they can get into the country. So that's what they did. When they got the permit, it was just like today somebody gets a visa from a country that it's out of some place and tries to get here which is the most important thing.
- Interviewer: But was there any idea of escaping something that might happen?
- Michael Kishel: At that time there was no thought about escaping. The only reason people went to Israel was because they were Zionists. They wanted to help build the country.
- Interviewer: About what year did she leave?
- Michael Kishel: It was in the early thirties.
- Interviewer: You mentioned some other family members who emigrated to South America?
- Michael Kishel: The other families that emigrated to South America was my father's sister, to Argentina.
- Interviewer: That was much earlier?

- Michael Kishel: That was in the late twenties. Maybe not late twenties, maybe middle twenties. Another sister went to France, also about the same time.
- Interviewer: Just to make better lives for themselves?
- Michael Kishel: That's right. They married people that were making for themselves a better life for their husbands; to make a better life in those countries. One was making wooden articles from—like for toys and for furniture. That one was for Argentina and the one that emigrated to France was a tailor. He had a very important tailor shop in Paris.
- Interviewer: You kept in contact with your cousins?
- Michael Kishel: Yeah, we kept—I remember the addresses from the cousins, from the relatives in Argentina and in France because when they were writing letters in there, I used to read the addresses or address the letters, the envelopes to them. So when I came back after the war, I remembered the address in France of my uncle and to see whether they are alive. After the war somebody was traveling there, and I gave him the address, he should look up and see whether that address exists and whether they are there. He did bring me notice that a son was alive of that uncle of mine, which is my cousin. We were in touch with them since.
- Interviewer: Were his parents killed?
- Michael Kishel: Parents were killed.
- Interviewer: They were deported?
- Michael Kishel: They were deported in 1939, in 1941 or '42 when the Germans started to bring all the people to the concentration camp, into the gas chambers.
- Interviewer: They were deported from Paris?
- Michael Kishel: From Paris.
- Interviewer: Is that--?
- Michael Kishel: They're not in this picture. This I'm talking about my father's family, my father's side.
- Interviewer: So those were the family members that left. Otherwise---
- Michael Kishel: Those family members in this picture are all family members from my mother's side. From my father's side, I have only one picture which is my

father's cousins, and this picture was taken sometime in, I would say, in the thirties or twenties.

Interviewer: Did all these cousins live in Kaluszyn?

Michael Kishel: They all lived in Kaluszyn; they all perished in the Holocaust.

Interviewer: So when—please talk about what happened after Germany invaded Poland.

Michael Kishel: After Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, we were under the belief, as we were told by the Polish government, that the war will not take long; that the German armaments are made out of wood and cardboard things, and things will fall apart, and they will not last long. But soon afterwards, maybe two or three days in the war, a plane passed by, and we all thought that this is a friendly plane because it came in so low. What it did, it just threw down a little bomb in our town; as there was a line in front of a bakery to buy bread, and a lot of people got killed. After this had happened, we realized that all the propaganda that we were taught about before is not as true as it seems to be. Being that we had trucks and some other people and friends of our family had trucks, we decided that we'll take two trucks and go away to the east, towards the Russia. In the meantime things will slow down and stabilize itself. The reason why we went away is because the older people knew from the First World War that when Germans come in, the first thing they do is they take the men; the young men and the older men to work, and they tell them to work on the roads and—forced labor to work for them. Being that Hitler came to power, the fright was a little bit more than before. So everyone said for the young people to move away.

Interviewer: But in 1938, after Kristallnacht in Germany, nothing happened at that time?

Michael Kishel: After 1938, we were only frightened but we did not think that this thing would come up. Because when Hitler went to war with Poland, was only that he wanted to have the corridor to go through to Danzig, to take away that right and so on. But nobody knew that this is going to come so far. Later on, everything—his propaganda was that the Poles want to attack him, and so on. But when the war came, all was towards how to escape from Hitler that they're coming in. Because their radio and the news came in that the Germans have entered Poland, and they are pushing in certain areas into the country more and more. So my father and his friends took

two trucks, and we went away about 20 people. We took some food with us towards the Russian border.

Interviewer: Your whole immediate family?

Michael Kishel: No, only my father, my brother and I and friends of ours and friends of other people—their families. My mother and sister, at that time, my mother and sister and my grandmother, my father's mother, was living with us as her husband passed away some eight, ten years before--. They remained because nothing was taught that they will do anything to the women. So they remained. After we went back about 200 kilometers from our town, we heard that a town has already been taken, but we did not realize at what cost. We waited later on to go further and further away. We were up to the Russian border, about 3 kilometers from the Russian border. The name of the town was Mzorich (ph) (c.018). It's a town past Ro_____, ____ (c.019) and so on. Then on September 17, the Russians came in. The Russians came in from the other side, started to take occupied Russian area. At the same time, also came news that the pact that the Russians made with the Germans was that the Russians will go up to the Vistula (Wisla), and the Germans will go up to the Vistula; and that will be the dividing line. Being that we were on the east side of the Vistula, we presumed, which is logically, that we will belong to the Russians. So while the Russians were pushing forward, we were behind the Russians going with our trucks; going home to see our parents, to see our mother and sister and the family. When we came to a town, 33 kilometers from Kaluszyn, which town's name is Siedlce, we were told that the Russians are not going to occupy until the Vistula. They're going back to the Bug (ph) (c.035), which is another demarcation line. At that time we heard the news that the town of Kaluszyn was bombed out—all—everything. Was a big fight there because there were many groups of soldiers were there congregating, put up a big fight against the Germans; so the only thing the Germans could take revenge was to burn down the whole town. Our house was on the outskirts of the city. Actually we were coming from Warsaw to our town; we were the first or the second house entering the city. So the outskirts of the towns were remains; our house remained standing. Being that we were in Siedlce, we heard the bad news about it; we decided that no matter what, we will go back to see our mother and sister and the other relatives and see what happened. When we came, we saw the very bad situation with the town burned out and were told how the fight happened; that they took all the Jews and other people into the church, and were closing the doors; I supposed they

wanted to kill all the people. Well, anyhow, we came in, we started to realize that many people were living in our house, because they did not have any place else to live. So we see more strangers than our own. So we start to negotiate with the people that were there, to either to go to their relatives to live there, as we had our relatives to take into our house; or to some people to give money to go to other towns, because they did not have anything. Slowly, it took about maybe a week, maybe ten days, I don't remember exactly, that the people vacated our house. We took in our relatives to stay with us at the time. Then the town was without any government. The Germans weren't in; the Russians did not come in, and the Poles did not know what to do. But there were militia, the civil—

Interviewer: Wait, the Germans did not occupy the town?

Michael Kishel: The Germans, being that the Russian was supposed to go to—after the Vistula, the Germans moved out. The Russians did not go in, were very close, did not go in, so the Russians didn't come in there. So the town was by itself. But there was civilian employees of the town hall, the town government, they patrolled; the city should remain and see what happened. A few days after we returned, the Germans start to come in. They started to come in, and they told the mayor of the city, which was a neighbor of ours, to order the Jews to get a—to make a Judenrat, to make a Jewish government to attend to the Jewish things. But what they had in mind was not so much as to attend to the Jewish problems, as to supply them with whatever they want. Their appetite became bigger and bigger. They wanted for the Jews to supply them with furniture for their occupation, that they're going to be there. Being that they did not have a place in the town because the town was burned out, they moved into a town, five kilometers from our town, which is Mrozy. They settled there, and the Jewish Judenrat (c.097), the Jewish community, had to supply with all the furniture, tables and chairs and beds and everything there. They also ordered the mayor of the town which his names was Pliwaczewski (Plywaczewsky) (ph) (c.101) to nominate ten Jews, ten rich Jews, that they should be responsible for anything they will want to. Among the ten Jews was my father also. I wrote a separate article in Yiddish about the function of the Judenrat. This article I wrote in request of some Jews that came back from Russia and settled in Israel. That being that we were very few from our town that remained alive, he wrote to me, and I responded to him. I wrote an article in Yiddish, sent to them to Israel, to publish it. They took out a lot of items that needed and put it in the book, of a Yiskor

book, a commemoration book for our town. Maybe they have it. Evo (?) has it. It's in Yiddish. I brought it with me here.

Interviewer: All right. We'll deposit that in our archives. ____ (c.124).

Michael Kishel: To be exactly—what happened how it went through, through the time the Jews lived in the German occupation until 1942 is mostly described in this article. Being that my father was in Judenrat and doing all the things what the Germans wanted—

Interviewer: What specifically did he do---?

Michael Kishel: Specifically, his main object was to make the laws, or their requests, or their orders smaller; which he many times succeeded, most of the time succeeded. For instance, although the town was living mainly in the center of the town before the war, when the town was burnt, all the Jews—there were older people that lived on the outskirts of the town. When the ghetto was made, the Germans ordered that all the Jews should go into the center, they should have more of them. What my father did is to make the Jews live the way they are in the outskirts of the town. Wherever they were before, make it like that. When they closed the ghetto, because the ghetto was an open ghetto—that means you could go in you could go out—when they closed the ghetto, it also remained the way it was. Jews had no right to go out of town. Most of the Jews that lived there, that remained there, made their livelihood from the villages; from the farmers that lived on the outskirts. They used to go out and sell them a shirt, buy from them the cheese or the eggs or anything. This was their business. This is how they—their livelihood. The orders were not to go, because they will be shot. Of course, there were many instances that some were shot going to the railroad. My father succeeded in getting many permits for those people to go out during the daytime. There were many things, for instance, for the community itself. There were ...

(Tape 2)

There were many orders that the Germans came in requesting that they want to have for their families—rings and earrings and dresses and things like that. The first thing they did is they came in to ask, because we were the first house, almost in town. My father was the person that used to deal with them. They came in and gave always orders. They need this, and they need that. If not, they will do this, and they will do that as punishment. Most of the time, he succeeded in all this to come down with the orders that they wanted, and sometimes it happened that they couldn't

do it either. They killed a family of two children and a friend of one of them—a very bad situation. But most of the time, although it was very painful, it did succeed a lot of them.

Interviewer: There was no wired ghetto then?

Michael Kishel: No.

Interviewer: Just a designated area____?

Michael Kishel: Was a designated—the ghetto was wherever the Jew lived. In Kalusyn was the ghetto.

Interviewer: It was not closed in?

Michael Kishel: There was no closed in like you have—you had in Warsaw ghetto with a gate—closed around. There was no closed in. But the closing of the ghetto meant that they cannot go beyond the area where they lived—they can only go in the town. They are not allowed to go to the village, not allowed to go out of the city without a permit. There was also succeeded, my father succeeded is to bring back food from the county. Because the gendarmes, the police, the German police used to confiscate from the farmers—they used to bring to take food to sell in Warsaw and other places. When they passed by, they did not allow to do it, they used to confiscate it. They used to give out to the churches and to different areas. So my father used to go there and ask them to give some of them to the town where they made a kitchen to feed the poor people and children. My mother was attending this kitchen for a long time to see that the supplies are enough.

Interviewer: But your father's business was totally disrupted, or did he continue to pump gas?

Michael Kishel: There was no—the business was disrupted in 1939 because there was no gas. Jews could not have no gas business, and the trucks were not available; and we did not have any supplies. The only thing is what we had was a store that we could still have like the restaurant going for us part-time and some groceries to sell. But most of the time my father was busy, because they made my father busy with the Judenrat business.

Interviewer: What did you do?

Michael Kishel: I was also getting----. They also requested that the Judenrat gets Jewish police and Jewish sanitation people, people that help out to keep clean the

houses because--. On top of that our town was destroyed in 1939. They send in a transport of Jews from two other towns that the Germans annexed to Germany. It was a town called Pabianice (c.37) and Kalisz (c.37). A few hundred people from each of those towns were brought into Kaluszyn, and they were settled there; said this is where they have to live. They had to be given a place to live into other families and some to live—to repair in the buildings that were destroyed. Many of them couldn't do it, and they felt that to go away someplace else better or their relatives lived and that remained. Then to be able to keep the apartments or the houses clean, there was no facilities to bathe. There was only one mikvah and to have these people—they did not have much—and to ask these people to have clean, where to take them preferably by inducing them with bread or with other things they should go and take it. Because they were afraid that going to the mikvah or something, being that it is an order from the Germans, will be something wrong. Being that everything was closed, the city became infected with typhus. I was one of the men going to the sanitary committee. About a dozen friends and non-friends, other people that were designated to go out to those houses to see that the people keep clean. There were times that we used to take a brush and clean up. There were so many—you could see on the floors so many lice working like bugs, was terrible. Slowly, we had to induce the people to come, to get clean. Every day of the week, we had other groups of people to take into the mikvah so they can go in there and take baths and get clean. In the meantime some people left over, while they were in the baths, to cleanout the houses. They come on back clean.

Interviewer: What were the non-Jewish_____?

Michael Kishel: The non-Jewish population, they did not do anything. They were staying—they still lived there because many of them, they were older-got burned out. But they had the right o go anywhere they wanted. They were not restricted. It was only the Jews that were restricted. That went on and on. Then came the German companies.

Interviewer: What was your sister doing?

Michael Kishel: My sister wasn't doing anything. Occasionally, they used –yes occasionally my sister helped out to induce people to go because they needed to have people to direct them. Where to go because some of them were children without families. Some of them were older people and they needed help.

- Interviewer: So all of you were involved in some way in the effort ____?
- Michael Kishel: Yes, in the effort, yes. This went on to—in many ways...In the beginning of 1940, 1939, '40.
- Interviewer: And your grandmother and your grand-uncle, they were old.
- Michael Kishel: I don't know what happened to my grand-uncle during the war. I don't know what happened to him. Whether he died—I don't remember him—what happened during the war. But my grandmother went to live—because they were burned out—went to live with my uncle's family, with my uncle. My mother's sister, my mother's brother-in-law, my mother's sister's husband had relatives in Minsk-Mazowiecki (c.85). Minsk-Mazowiecki was not destroyed. So he went to live in that town, and he took along my grandmother. My aunt, with her husband, took along my grandmother. She lived there until 1942 or even before, 1941. Because my aunt did not have an apartment large enough, so they sent in my grandmother to live with us. My grandmother, my mother's mother lived with us. My father's mother also lived with us during that time and she died of heart failure; my father's mother, in 1940 or '41.
- Interviewer: But did people have enough to eat? Did your family have enough to eat?
- Michael Kishel: Well, we had—there was always not enough to eat, but you could always get for money to buy. It was very expensive, but we managed. There was a lot of—of course there were—there was a flour mill nearby. They used to mill four—we used to get it. Food was a problem. It was expensive. The thing is a lot of people did not have the money. They did not have much to do in the work. Coming back now to work—there came in a time that the Germans came in to take people to work. What they needed was to clean up the roads because the army used to pass by and the road was full of snow. They could not pass by, and they grabbed Jews to clean. Later on, they had to repair the roads and came in a civilian company; a German civilian company by the name of Wolper and Goebel (Volpher and Gable) (?) (c.103). They used to grab Jews to come to work for them without anything. They used to come in as Germans. Although they wore civilian clothes, but he was a German, he had the power. Nobody could go fight against him. They used to go for days, grab every day some other people to come to work—take them away four or five kilometers from the house—from the town, and they used to work on the roads. Break stones and work on the road and do different things. Later on, being that this has happened, my father used to – we go to the Germans for many things that

they wanted, so he said you're always coming to bring me this and bring me that. Why don't you see that the company that takes the Jews to work that they should pay? So he was calling the German civilian company, told them they have to pay for the work that they . . . Although before, no people wanted to go to work because they got beaten up, and they didn't get paid. After it was an arrangement that they are to pay, a lot of people wanted to go to work, but it still was not enough payment what they wanted to pay. Because at that time, they paid five zlotys a day, which a kilo bread which is about 2 ¼ pounds, cost ten. So all they could make is a half a kilo bread; so how could they go to work? So being that the Judenrat wanted to have the people work and do in something, so the Judenrat supplied with the bread. With each worker that goes to work, will get a half kilo bread. The money what he will get for the day's work, he will have for other things. There was also some other supplies that used to bring in from Sec_____ (c.124), merchandise, the potatoes, onions or salad or some vegetables; used to bring in for the kitchen. Many times used to be extra potatoes, used to give to the poor people to...and this is how they lived. Was very hard but...

Interviewer: There were a lot of deaths?

Michael Kishel: Yeah.

Interviewer: And there was a lot of typhus?

Michael Kishel: That's right. As a matter fact, typhus, as a matter of fact I got sick with typhus, too.

Interviewer: And there wasn't any medicine?

Michael Kishel: Yeah, the only thing we got was strychnine. There was injections. My brother also got sick, typhus.

Interviewer: That was in 1940?

Michael Kishel: That was in 1940

Interviewer: And you were really sick?

Michael Kishel: Yeah, I was sick; I had a lot of fever. The typhus is, it's not water typhus; it's louse typhus that you get very high fever.

Interviewer: And was there any question that you wouldn't live?

- Michael Kishel: Well, a lot of people died. And there was also—they built a hospital—they established a hospital. There was only one doctor, and there was one nurse. She was actually, before the war, she was like a midwife. When the hospital was established she was supposedly running it. The only thing the hospital to do is to at least take out the patients from the house, that they should not infect the others and attend to that. But later on, other patients from that family also came. A lot of them died, which there was no medicine to support, and some of them came out.
- Interviewer: So how long were you sick_____?
- Michael Kishel: I was sick about—I would say about three or four weeks.
- Interviewer: And you and your brother were the only ones who got it in your family?
- Michael Kishel: Yes, my brother and I were the only ones who got it. We stayed in our house because we tried to keep the house clean, that it should not get—all get infected. This is how we got out of it. But a lot of people got out from the hospital; it's the luck, it's the attention and everything. More explanations is in the story that I wrote in Yiddish. Different sections of different times what the Judenrat had to do, and how they did it, and who was responsible, where and how and so on. How many people were working in what work was there. If it would work out on the pages, would be if you have someone that reads Yiddish...if you'll make the copies, so if there's any question, you'll tell me which page it is, then you call on the phone and I'll talk to the person exactly what it is. Then when it came in 1942, when they started to send the Jews to the gas chambers and supposedly to work in the east—first they started at Warsaw. Then we get closer and closer—they came to Minsk, and they came to Kaluszyn.
- Interviewer: You had news of what was happening in Warsaw (c.161)?
- Michael Kishel: Yes, we had news. As a matter of fact, we had news because there was a time that we could get a permit from the German authorities to allow us to bring in the family from Warsaw. There was also many German Wehrmacht, soldiers, that were drivers that were there. That was in 1941, '41 or '42. They were working on the—to dismantling the synagogue. So we used to induce him to go to Warsaw and bring out some people. So my brother used to go out with him to Warsaw and bring out the relatives and some other relatives of other people used to be there. Of course, we took them out from there, but then they came into us, and they perished through—later on. Was very hard but this is what happened.

- Interviewer: Did they have to sneak out of the ghetto?
- Michael Kishel: Oh, yes. Unless they come with a group that was going to work outside the ghetto. This is what happened when I was in Warsaw.
- Interviewer: Did the German army know what was going on? (c.176)
- Michael Kishel: Some of them—most of them knew. Those that knew, that were working around—let's say they were guards around the ghetto. They knew—they guarding the Jews not to go out. Or many Germans that were just in the Wehrmacht, just in the army, did not know; they just knew that the Jews are their enemies, but they didn't tell them anything. But those that used to take care of all these resettlements are mostly SS, and their helpers were mostly Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians, from Latvia, and Poles. All Volksdeutsch, the Germans that used to live in Poland before, they used to call them Volksdeutsch. That means Germans, folks of German extraction. They were the worst because they knew exactly who is who, and what is what, and they were the biggest obstacles.
- Interviewer: So you got some of these people out and then _____(c.189)?
- Michael Kishel: Well then it came in 1942, it was in September which I already told in the beginning. When I run away, then I run away to—I came to Warsaw
- Interviewer: Can you repeat that part?
- Michael Kishel: Yeah. Well, in 1942, when the Germans came, it was in Yom Kippur, 21st of September, and told the Judenrat that they have to have people to go to the camps. To work in camps because they need a lot of people there. Whether they need it or not, because Germans want, a lot of Jews don't want to go. But some of them, a lot of them, went and they remained alive until later on. Those that didn't want to go, they used to—they remained there. Four days later they came, and they had an action to take, to send them out to Treblinka (Slobinka) (?) (c.202). At that time, I ran away from the marketplace through giving that I took pails of water to supply the people that were in the market. I went a few times with a friend of mine, and later on I—at the evening, when the evening approached...
- Interviewer: _____friend of yours? (c.205)
- Michael Kishel: His name was Josef Gontulsky (ph) (c.205). He was a neighbor of mine and lived across the street. After we watched them taking away the people in horse and buggy to the railroad station, when the night approached, we ran away to a camp, to a labor camp called Minya (ph) (c.210). There I

was for about a month, and I met my brother that was in another camp. We got together, and we stayed there in another place working on the roads till December 1. On December 1, the Germans released all the labor camps what were around the city, around Kaluszyn, and other places and send them all into town to make a new ghetto, supposedly. But that was only for the reason to make another settlement. Instead of taking— sending for each one from 15 different places, they got it everybody in one place and sent them out together. At that time, I ran away again; tried to run away, but one of the policeman tried to cut us and was aiming at me and at a friend of mine, went in together. He killed him. I ran back and hid in a cellar through the night. About 3, 4 o'clock in the morning, I walked to another—to the county town Minsk Mazowiecki (c.224) where there still remained a place of work. I was there for a few days, and I met another friend that came there. We bought—made passports, Polish passports, that we are Poles, we are Christians. He looked for a place for us in Warsaw on the Aryan side. We lived with a woman whose husband supposedly was in a prisoner-of-war camps with the Germans or was killed during the war. She was a poor woman and we paid her well. We were there since more or less December 15 to about January 10 or January 15. We heard that there are still a lot of Jews in ghetto, and that life goes on as before and there is no, nothing much is expected. So we decided that we'll go into the ghetto to see what's what. My friend had a sister with a family living in the ghetto.

Interviewer: In the Warsaw ghetto?

Michael Kishel: In Warsaw ghetto. And while there I found out that I had cousins living in Warsaw ghetto. So he went to the sister, and I went to the cousins. We were only about a block away, let's say about 200 yards from each other, and we saw each other occasionally. This—we were only there about a week, maybe less than a week, until January 18, 1943, when we got caught in another deportation. The Germans surrounded again the Warsaw ghetto and took out a lot of people to send them to Treblinka. So my cousins and I were going to the place, the gathering place. At the gathering place, I met my friend with his family, together. I said to them, and they said to me, let's stay together. Whatever we will decide to do, we'll do it together. Meantime my cousins were wise guys. They did not let themselves go that easy. They run away right away from the gathering place. They went back and hid, and they were all right; my friend and his family, which was a couple, a mother and father and two sons. One son remained hiding, and just the couple and the son and I and the friend went

into the train. We were together with a plan that as soon as we move out, we will jump the train. We made up that whoever jumps...

Interviewer: Was this a regular train with ____? (c.255)

Michael Kishel: No, not a regular train. Not with seats. There was no first-class train, or second or even third-class. It was a cattle train.

Interviewer: So this was a deportation ____? (c.257)

Michael Kishel: This was a deportation to Treblinka, not a forced labor. This was a deportation to Treblinka. So my friend and his family and I decided that who will jump first to go forwards to meet the other jumpers. This one that will jump the last, to go backwards to meet the jumpers. So the first one jumped, the woman, my friend's sister. She was also from Kaluszyn, but she lived in Warsaw. His father, his name was Micholson (Michelson) (ph) (c.265), my friend's—his father was originally the president of the Jewish community in Kaluszyn; his name was Micholson. In that explanation, in that story what I have there is written about that he was there. Anyhow, when she jumped, perfect, very good. Then jumped her husband.

Interviewer: What was it, in a ravine or ____?

Michael Kishel: Below was just a train, but on top on the roof were the Germans with guns. You only had to jump to realize where you're jumping because along the railway, there were poles of telegraph or electric poles that they should not hit. The second one that jumped was the husband of the woman. The third one jumped, the son. I jumped the fourth one, and I started to go back. So I found the son a little injured. Then going more forward, I found the father, more injured on his head here. And we were waiting to go forward, the three of us, because we didn't see the woman coming because there was already quite a distance; so we presumed whatever happened to her, she has to be on her own. Be with three of us. So I said, let's go forward, and we'll see whether his relative, my friend which was a brother-in-law of the father, whether he jumped.

Interviewer: The train was going _____ (c.285)

Michael Kishel: The train was moving very fast and to me, the only thing that happened to me is a button; a button from my overcoat, my jacket, that broke. But the two Micholsons, the two friends, the two people from the family, one got injured alongside on his face and the other one on his head, very heavy

injury. Well, we had no choice. I could not take them the way they are and we went over to—I knocked on a door at a farmer's, at a village. There was...

- Interviewer: Were a lot of people starting to jump?
- Michael Kishel: Oh, yes, there was a lot of people jumping, and a lot of people got killed.
- Interviewer: They were being shot at?
- Michael Kishel: Shot, they got shot because there was no other way out. You got to take your chance here while you can.
- Interviewer: You knew that you were taken to be killed?
- Michael Kishel: I knew that, yes, yes.
- Interviewer: How did you know that?
- Michael Kishel: Because we already knew that everything goes to Treblinka. The way that the road took because, see, I knew the area, Warsaw. The whole length of the road, I know where it goes. The train goes east, is on the way to Treblinka. Treblinka was, from my Kaluszyn, was about 50, 60 kilometers.
- Interviewer: And you had already heard that ____ (c.300)?
- Michael Kishel: We already—at that time we already knew because when they started at the beginning to resettle the Jews, the news was that they are settling to the east because they need a lot of workers to help on the front because they have attacked the Russians in 1941, and they need people to work there. And this is what they needed people. So this was the thought, but later on we knew because there were a lot of people that run away from Treblinka. So being that I knew that I am going, here is my chance, to do it now or to do it later. If I try it now, I have a chance. So I jump from the train, and nothing happened to me. But I had to do something with my two friends; I could not leave them. So I knocked at a door, and there was a woman that opened up, and she let us in. She gave us some water, she gave us some things to clean them up, that they should not be visible on his face, on his head that something happened to him. Being that was wintertime, took heavy clothes, had a big hat. I fixed him up good, and then she said we have to pay her. All of us had money. The money we had was belts, double belts, not double belts—they were belts that you could put in money in between the belt. He had money, the son had

money, and I had money. But he told me, he cannot take out the money yet because she'll see it, I should pay him. So I had actually money in the belt, and I had money in my pockets. So I took out the money and I paid her, a few thousand zlotys, I don't remember how much it was, but quite a lot and quite nothing; but we were safe. We went back to the station. The station was a station away from Warsaw, was Rembertow (Rembertov) (c.324). The name of the station was Rembertow. I went to Rembertow...

Interviewer: How far was that?

Michael Kishel: We walked about three kilometers to the station. I went in, and I bought three tickets back to Warsaw. My looks were like a Pole. Nobody could recognize me that I am a Jew because I had, from pictures that you'll see, you will see, if you know the features of Poles, you'll see my features. I bought the tickets. They had a place, my friends had a place in Praga (ph) (c.331). Warsaw was a two-town...There was one side of the Vistula called Praga, and the other side of the Vistula called Warsaw, but together was Warsaw. They had a place prepared so I took the train, and he went off with his son where they supposed to. They got to the place where they were hiding then, right when I took them back. I went further, to Warsaw, and I had also a place that I could go in because my brother had a friend, a Polish girl. She took him; that Polish girl's sister got an apartment in Warsaw, and she took my brother there. She was hiding him from them. When I came back, I had to go some place in. I went into that place, together with my brother. We were staying there together till a few weeks, maybe two, three weeks. At that time, there were two ghettos in Warsaw. There was the regular ghetto and a small ghetto. The small ghetto was a place where many Jews, tradesmen, tailors or those used to work in leather things, to provide the Germans for their needs, for their clothing, for whatever they needed. They needed people that know how to sew, how to cut things. So we thought, my brother and I, that we will go into that ghetto and see maybe we can stay there because we did not want to antagonize the people that took us in. But being that there's a place, in case something will happen, we have a place to fall back. So we went in there, but we couldn't arrange anything, we couldn't do anything. We went back, and we were staying there. But being that my brother was there, and I see that it will not be too good to stay two together. If something will happen, let happen to one, not to two. So we look for another place, and I went to a separate place, to another Pole. He was a shoemaker, and I don't remember how much money I paid him. Every time I paid him for the week, he said oh the price went up so much; it cost

so much money and this and this. I have seen that shortly, I'll be out of money, and I won't have a place to be there. At the same time I knew that there is a place, that the regular ghetto is still alive, still there. So I thought I'll go into the ghetto again. When I came into the ghetto again, I found my cousins, the same ones that we went out—that we were taken to the umschlagplatz (c.368), to the gathering place, to go away. They hollered at me, why didn't you stay with me, why did you run away, what did you want with them? I said look, he's also Kaluszyn. Well, I started to live with them, period. We went—occasionally we went out of the ghetto because you could go out with a group supposedly to work, to get the bricks here and there. I saw my brother and told him what's going on; that they're still alive, and we could come in there. Being that they were—my cousins were dealing in food. The place what they had—where they lived—was called Smutcha and Miller (ph) (c.379). There was almost a corner building. Right after the building was the wall. From one side of the wall used to come in the workers that used to work on the canals, in the underground, not the underground; where all the water goes through—the sewers. They work in the sewers. They brought in, through the sewers, they brought in to my cousins, hams and butter and breads and everything. There was a regular business going on. It came out with a story that in case something will happen, those Poles will lead us out to the Aryan side, to take us away from there; which was good. But nobody trusted them, and we built a bunker in the building we were there. The bunker, what was called a bunker—it was closed from all the sides. We can only have—knew one opening to get inside and was so camouflaged that seldom anybody could find it. Of course, we did. As a fact, when the—

Interviewer: Say that again. The bunker was made of____?

Michael Kishel: It was a basement; it was so camouflaged. To get in there that you could not see that this wall, one touch of this wall would come out, and you'll be able to go in. It was camouflaged. So we were there until May 8. Since..

Interviewer: May 8, 194_?

Michael Kishel: May 8, 1943. When the action started, I think on the 19th, or the 18th or the 19th, in Warsaw ghetto. I have it written some place. We were there almost three weeks; we were there, and we couldn't be found. Because we always heard that the Germans are coming in through the walls, through the places, and they are looking. Because they were knocking places, and they couldn't find it. Finally what they did...

Interviewer: You hid in the basement ____? (c.410)

Michael Kishel: We hid under the building.

Interviewer: For three weeks?

Michael Kishel: For three weeks.

Interviewer: How many were there?

Michael Kishel: How many we were? Well, my cousins, there were three boys and two had wives, is five. The wife had a sister, is six, and there were all those people that live in the building. Was a dentist and his brother was eight. The brother has a girlfriend is nine and a child. We were about 15 people.

Interviewer: In this cellar?

Michael Kishel: In the cellar, yeah.

Interviewer: That was connected by sewer to ____?

Michael Kishel: Connected, yeah. We could go out through the sewer. From there we could go out into the sewer and go out, in and out.

Interviewer: You did that all the time?

Michael Kishel: No, we did not go in. The workers, the Poles that sold us the merchandise, they delivered to us through the sewers.

Interviewer: Was this common in the ghetto? Were the other people getting bunkers like this?

Michael Kishel: That's right, that's right.

Interviewer: The Germans didn't know anything about it?

Michael Kishel: They knew, but they didn't know which way to get in there. But you see, to get into a building—in Warsaw built in such a way, that there's an arch. Two sides of the building, inside is an arch. When you go in the middle, usually was like concrete in the middle; and like trucks or wagons used to go in, used to pass by here. Then they realize, maybe they should bomb here. So they started to throw in bombs into that concrete while getting into the building, into the complex with gas. This gas got to us. So instead of being caught by them, we went out through the sewer to another place, to another bunker which that bunker was already raided. That was a bakery; we went there, and we hid behind, my two cousins and I, hid in

that bakery behind the flours. Because the bunker was already raided, so there was nobody there; a few people came back. My brother meantime, wanted to—and another cousin and one of the other people that were in the bunker, wanted to know what happened to the people across the street, because we were living the side of the street. On the other side of the street was another bunker. We were connected; we could go to them, they could come to us. So while they went to see what happened to them, my brother got caught from the Germans, and they took him to the umschlagplatz (c.451). They send him away. We were waiting a whole night or...

Interviewer: He survived?

Michael Kishel: He survived. We were waiting almost a whole night or a day. We don't remember whether, it was day or night, and he didn't come back, so we presumed what had happened. Meantime, the Germans knocked us out from our bunker, and we went into the bakery. Later on they came into the bakery. We had some guns with us and...

Interviewer: You did?

Michael Kishel: Yes, we did, but we were afraid to shoot because as long as you are quiet, they did not find us. Had they find us this way, we would have been there much longer. But we were thinking the only time we would use the gun is for last resort, you or me.

Interviewer: How did the Germans try to find you?

Michael Kishel: They had—they knew that each building had people in there. The upper floors were bombed, there was nobody there. The main floors were also nothing there. But they knew that there's people in there, but how did they get there, they didn't know.

Interviewer: So they would put tear gas?

Michael Kishel: They put tear gas in. First, they bomb it to make a hole. Then they put tear gas in or other kinds of mustard gas or other kind of gas. As a matter of fact, I got gassed; which I'll come later on to tell about it. So they came into—to get us out from the bakery bunker. We, my friends, my cousins and I, we had two guns between us. There were three of us, we threw the gun away. When they took us out, they found the guns later, and they asked whose gun is it. We said we don't know; we just came in this

morning. We know nothing about the guns. They looked at us, and they didn't find anything.

Interviewer: What language did you speak?

Michael Kishel: German. I speak German. Yeah, everybody spoke German. I mean, you spoke Yiddish, you spoke German. I speak German well. So they took us into the gathering place, the umschlagplatz (c.487). I was gassed heavily from the gas they threw in. I could not breathe too well, but my cousin, one of my cousins, was worse. So I asked the wagon to come to the place because he at least, while they're pushing you and shoving you this, he should not get killed on the way there. Maybe he'll sit down and relax and feel better, whatever happens later on. Before we got into the umschlagplatz (c.496), came over a German says, why you drangen (ph) (c.497) this dog, or something like. He took me away from him and put a bullet in his head, finished. I remained...

Interviewer: What was his name?

Michael Kishel: His name was Manischewitz (?). I remained by myself there with two of them; with another cousin because there were two of them, one cousin was with my brother. Somehow, the other cousin, either he wanted to run away, I didn't hear from him since then. I came in on the road to Majdanek. I could not escape any more because I felt very bad. I could not get into another window to crawl out to escape and then, in the condition that I was then, I wasn't sure that I'll make it. But I'll see what happens, where we go.

Interviewer: Where did you go?

Michael Kishel: We went to Majdanek. Majdanek is a camp near Lublin, a concentration camp.

Interviewer: You were deported there on the train?

Michael Kishel: Deported on the train—all train to Majdanek. Overnight, well I don't know what time it took, but we left in the evening, and who knows how long we were sitting in the trains until we were sent out. That was in May, May 10. I came to Majdanek on May 10. Then in Majdanek, we had to strip. They said, whoever has a double belt, throws it away over there; because they knew the double belts contained money, jewelry, anything that they wanted. So I happened to have a double belt, I threw it away. A single belt, that means it's only a piece of leather, like this. No danger, so

you could keep. Okay and then there were taking, go here, go there. In Majdanek, also had gas chambers. They also had people they did not take into the camp. They killed by various means. I was into the line to go into the camp. I showered. They throw us—they gave us some new clothes, camp clothing. I went into the camp. I was assigned in a certain bunker, a certain bunk to be there, and that's what's there. The following day, they took us out to work. While they were assigning us, they named this, I got a number 14677. My number in Majdanek was 14677. I realized later that I'm not the 14th thousand man there. These numbers are taken away from one died before and given new ones. So that same number could have gone out four, five, ten times of the quantity that the number said.

Interviewer: Did they put on you _____ (c.552)?

Michael Kishel: No, no. Was a, not a bracelet, but a piece of metal, a piece of thing you put on, inscribed on the uniform the number what you have. There was no tattoo; in Majdanek there was no tattoo.

Interviewer: In the barracks, was it mostly men your age?

Michael Kishel: Mostly men my age, older ones, younger ones, mostly my age.

Interviewer: How old were the youngest ones?

Michael Kishel: The youngest? Later on came younger ones. The oldest must have been about sixteen at that time. But because I felt very bad, I was afraid that I would go out, they took us to work, to dig ditches, what kind of ditches it was for I don't know but we had to do whatever they wanted us. I felt that one of—I'll go another day, another day, I'll collapse. At the end of the workday, the kapo asked who wants to go to the hospital, who feels bad? I volunteered, I had no choice. Because if I am not going to hospital, I'll be shot on the road going or coming. Lucky me—I couldn't breathe—lucky me, I got into a hospital, the Zindel (ph) (c.576) Hospital, and I was there. They gave medicine; I remember, I was on a diet. They gave me hard-boiled egg, where nobody else got a hard-boiled egg. The medicine that they gave me because everything was on my chest. I couldn't breathe real heavily; I couldn't breathe. They gave me a medicine like a liqueur, a little sweet, and it put the phlegm down, and it helped me. By coincidence I found a man in the hospital that was a son-in-law of somebody that I knew in Kaluszyn. He lived in Warsaw and I asked him what happened to your family? No. He was there and he said, here they'll treat you, it'll go

out. I never heard from him again, because he went probably—he went—either he was in another, another (End of Side A, Tape 2)

Tape 2, Side B

Michael Kishel:

What happened to the man, I do not know. But anyhow, I felt better, and I went back to work in Majdanek. By coincidence, I heard that my brother is in Majdanek but in another camp; in another part. Going to work or from work, I met him. We greeted each other, and we say we'll talk; we hope that we'll see that. We did see another time also. At that time also happened to be transports. They were picking up people that were there to send transports to some other places. So being that it was the end of transport, I communicated with my brother, and he with me, that when comes the next transport we should run to get into the transport. At least maybe we'll be together, shipped out or whatever is going to be. Something happened, that he went—when it came the next transport—he was taken, I was not. He was sent to a camp called Scarjisk (ph) (c.617). There was a camp that they were place of work that they were making ammunitions for the Germans. From there they sent him to Chantzdehovot (ph) (c.619), to different places, to Buchenwald (c.620) and there where he was liberated. I remained in Majdanek for about two months until about July or mid-July...

Interviewer:

_____ work? (c.621)

Michael Kishel:

Yes, we worked on the gang outside digging ditches. What the ditches were for—many times you would think they're digging ditches for us. Maybe one of these days they'll line us up there and.... Then it came new transports and we're talking, got friendly with one another and said look, what do we have here? The watery soup—at the beginning when I came there, I couldn't eat anything because nothing tasted good. I came out from a place that the Poles brought out hams and cheeses and butters and breads and all kinds; so you come into a camp, they give you watery soup, and I think nothing help you. So I said, let's go in a camp; let's go someplace else. The little watery soup we'll get someplace else also, or the piece of bread, or whatever it was. Well, it came, the next transport came, and I run in there, into the next transport. They shipped me out to Auschwitz. We came to Auschwitz, was in July, end of July or beginning of August, I don't remember. We came to a camp and they....

Interviewer:

So it was totally your choice, the way it's been described to me, they just wanted a certain number of people and you_____?

Michael Kishel: Probably. I was lucky. They kept sending me from one camp to another. I came to Auschwitz, it was part of Auschwitz 2, Birkenau, there where the gas chambers are. We came in, we met by kapos and by other one and the language that I heard there, I did not hear until at that age when I was there; such foul language, unbelievable and such murderous language. Not by kapos, not by SS, but by kapos, by Jews, by Germans, all people that were in the camps.

Interviewer: What date did you arrive there?

Michael Kishel: End of July or August, 1943. We were assigned in a camp which...The camp Birkenau was just building. It was started to build maybe three, four months before. We came in, we also had to start building. The grounds were all full of mud, full of clay. We had to straighten out this, and the work was not easy because everything was hard. You know, to push wagons and rails, with a shovel, pick and shovel and carry cement up or down in different places.

Interviewer: Were you still ____ (c.845)?

Michael Kishel: I was still, because the fright made me strong.

Interviewer: But I mean constitutionally, you ____ (c.845)?

Michael Kishel: Constitutionally, yes. My mind was strong because I always said, whenever I've been assessed, I have to live this through. Because if anyone in the camps, that said oh, what should I do, was beaten up. If he would stand up, because he was beaten up by a German, by a SS man, because he didn't work. If he would get up by the first hit, they would not beat him anymore. He would go up and start to do something, but if he didn't, he beat him more. We ask him why didn't you do? He says what for? I'll be killed anyhow. My philosophy was different. I said, I have to live it through. No matter how much of beatings I got...

Interviewer: Why did you think you had to live it through?

Michael Kishel: I wanted to see the end of Hitler. I want to see who, why is it that the world...Later on, you closed it, and I tried to do my best to work as hard as possible, as cooperative as possible, not to give anyone a chance, whether it's a German whether it's a kapo at the work, whether it's a blockaelteste (c.859) which is the headman of the block, whoever it is not to give them a chance to beat me. I could only take a chance to be beaten when I've seen someplace over there lays a piece of bread. That's have to

nourish me, that's—I have to take a chance. If I'll catch it, I'll have it. If I get beaten up for it, but I had a piece of bread. Those chances...

Interviewer: Did you get beaten ____ (c.882)?

Michael Kishel: Yes, I got beaten but I had the bread.

Interviewer: How many months were you--?

Michael Kishel: I was there till May 8, till May 8 to the end of the war.

Interviewer: Oh, you were. Okay so you were there almost two years?

Michael Kishel: Yes. Then, the workplaces—in the Birkenau, worked mostly those people that belonged—lived in one bunk, in one place. They go out all together with a kapo, work from this place. So he does not have to go out from other places to look for people to work. I was working there from one or two places, but was not steady. They transferred me from there to another bunk. The first one was block number 24. From then they transferred to block number 16; was a kapo, a Czech. He took us in to work in the third camp, which was the hospital camp. See, there were four camps, four blocks, four camps; the women's camp, the men's camp, the Gypsy camp, and the krankenhaus (?), the hospital. Beyond the hospital were the crematoriums. So I was working with the....

Interviewer: You were only Jewish ____ (c.878)?

Michael Kishel: Yeah, all Jewish. They were occasionally some non-Jews but most of them Jews.

Interviewer: All of you from _____ (c.877)

Michael Kishel: No, no because there was no such thing as from. We did not have a name, we had our numbers. In Birkenau I got a number, 129354. It was a tattooed number. I forgot to mention that while we were still in Majdanek, came a transport from Greece. They were very, very fast to fall. Even in summertime, they were not used to the climate, and they were falling like flies, very bad. We, although we had it bad, we had pity on them. That Czech kapo...there was another kapo used to work—he was from Krakow. We used to work at the hospital block. Because at the hospital, they had a lot of people, although they were taking people to the crematorium—but they were still taking people—taking the inmates to the hospital. Why, I don't know. First, they made them well, and then they took them to the crematories. So we worked in the hospital block, in the

hospital camp, to straighten out the roads. They should be straight, should be no mud and walkways and flowers.

Interviewer: Would this be considered an inside job?

Michael Kishel: Not an inside job, because we came in the morning and went out in the evening back to the bunk.

Interviewer: So how far did you have to walk to ____?

Michael Kishel: The walk, maybe a kilometer. Not far to walk. Later on, we were told that they beautifying up this part, that the Germans ordered to beautify up the hospital camp because eventually it's going to be an international commission come to see how they treating the people. So they show, they will show that they have a hospital, and they have a nice place to stay and so on. Somehow, I lost that job. I didn't lose that job, but I lost the work in that area. So being that I was left over, they transferred me to another block, number four. The prisoners that were in block number 4 did not have a steady place of block. So whenever somebody needed some prisoners to work, he went there and got him; 10 people, 2, so it was never steady. Today you work in one place, tomorrow they take you, another kapo takes you someplace else. I was in that place maybe for two months, maybe for a month or six weeks. That was the worst block, the worst that I was there because you would never know where you're going tomorrow, and where you're not going tomorrow. Also at that time, was a selection. They came in, the Germans, the SS, and took out a selection of a lot of people to take right into the crematorium. We won an appeal, we were outstanding, and they used to take out, this out, this in, this out.

Interviewer: The people who were sick (c.712)

Michael Kishel: They looked through who was more ill than—know who had swollen legs, and who had injured legs and this and that. I remember like I see it like today—there was one prisoner that they choose him to go to the crematorium. He run away and hid. He hid someplace, and they couldn't find him. They couldn't find him, and they were held up practically a whole day; but they could not let go because they thought who knows what this guy is. Maybe he's a spy, maybe he's something that he knows. They finally—they took the rest of them that's selected to go to the crematorium. They took them, and they kept down looking for him. They finally got him. They walked with him through the camp that everybody should see what happens to somebody that runs away. Separately, the witness there, while they were in camp, there were.....they brought back

some guys that run away. That run away from the middle of work because they want to run away from camp. They got a beating, I don't remember whether they shot him or they hanged him. I don't remember that. But hanging was in another place.

Interviewer: Did you see _____ (c.728)

Michael Kishel: I saw. There were also two bunkers, two blocks that I call it bunker or block, that we lived in. That called effektkommando (c.728) and sonderkommando (c.728). They were all our people. The sonderkommando worked—excuse me—the first, the effektkommando, when the transports came to Auschwitz, to Birkenau, the effektkommando used to look up at the—look at all the clothing, after they got undressed. They looked at all the clothing and looked for all the hidden valuables, rings and monies and all the things, and they have to bring it all there. They themselves had nice uniforms because the Germans treated them nice. Everybody wanted to go to that job, to do it, because you had a lot of bread, a lot of this, a lot of that, they were well-fed, and this is what they did. The other ones were called sonderkommando. The sonderkommando were the ones that were working to put the people in—from the gas chambers into the fire. They were also well-fed, but they were also very dangerous. The effektkommando, their block, and the sonderkommando, their block, being that they had fed—they were fed before very well, so their portions, their rations, what they were getting, they gave it away. So it comes after we came back from work, we all congregated in front of them because they were throwing out their bread and their potato. You could have a piece of potato or something, _____. Separate, the sonderkommando made a revolution, then there were trying to be with (c.744) the ones that were working for them. They realized that they worked _____, what's the difference, we got to do something. They tried, some of them, they got caught, and this is what happened. I was in that block 4 until about December 1 or December 10, something like—it got colder. When it came a new transport; they sending away new transports. The new transports, they used to send to the coal mines. There were coal mines like Yavorznow (ph) (c.749), there were different; I don't remember the other ones. There were a few different ones. So we thought we'll go there. As long as we'll go away from the crematoriums; let's go away from the crematoriums. We didn't realize that they can bring you from there to here, too. They send us away to a new camp, to build a new camp called Lagischa (Lagisha) (c.755). Camp Lagischa, they had almost two barracks and we had to finish up all the things what was necessary to

live there, to stay there. The lageralteste (c.756), lageralteste means that the German, that he is the head of the lager. He said you build yourself a camp, you'll have it. That means it's my business, I have to have a camp. Otherwise, I cannot live without it. But we had no choice; we had to build one. The building of the camp is the worst thing that can ever happen, because you come in to a row of places where there is not anything there. You got to start from scratch. There was very little food, very little bread, very little—but hard labor and a lot of beatings and a lot of that. Well...

Interviewer: _____ (c.781)

Michael Kishel: We didn't even do the things that we didn't do—everything. There was no water, wintertime. We had to get ice, not ice, snow to wash yourself because your hands were dirty from the work, the only thing we could do was to wash with snow.

Interviewer: Where did you sleep?

Michael Kishel: They had—we had bunks. We had some places to sleep, and this is how we did. Slowly, it bettered up the place, but it's still coming... There was in winter of 1943, December or beginning of January. I found when I was in Birkenau, I found a landsman of mine, from Kaluszyn, that also came from Majdanek; but he was in a different place, so we didn't see each other. But we came to Lagischa (c.772), we saw each other. We were keeping together to see what we can do. He was an older man; he was a man maybe 10, 15 years older than I was. Somehow he got beaten down. They were starting to get a selection to get some people, no—sorry—was not a selection. He registered to go to the hospital, to the krankenhaus (ph) (c.776). They call it krankenhaus, the infirmary, infirmary. They had an infirmary. One thing I have to mention was that whenever I see friends of mine, I mention it because it was frieden (ph) that I was sorry about; for asking him. Of course, you did not have anything yours. Everything was from the camp, you got a jacket, you got pants, you got a shirt. Somehow, he had a sweater, and you knew it. Whenever you go from here to there, they take away everything, even the spoon. I ask him, will you please give me the sweater. He said to me. I'm still alive; you want to be my heritant? You want my inheritance? I said please you know that you'll go there; they'll take it away from you. At least I'll have it for the time being, and if you come back, I'll give it back to you. He said that—I did not take it, and for this day, I'm sorry that I mentioned it to him. For this reason, I keep repeating that he should forgive me that I ask him that. It did not take a week or ten days to send him to crematorium, this guy.

We remained there working, and they were building their new factories, new buildings. The buildings we were working on with wagons and like on rails to supply cement and sand and different things and to work different—to work a lot. One time as I got beaten up, I got beaten up that from here I got a scar. Water was, no blood, everything was so thin that water was running; could not heal. Working there for a few months, and it came sometimes in April, May, or maybe June of 1944. It came in a new selection, new guys from another place, taking away people from our camp, either to send them to the crematoriums because they couldn't work, or sending from there to coal mines. I presumed that I will go to a coal mine, so I was rushing to get into the line to be taken to the coal mine. When the SS man saw me, he put me out over there. That means he doesn't want me. I did not want to give up. I wanted to go to coal mine, I sneaked in again. He recognized me because he said, he took his stick and hit me here. He says you are already here, I told you I don't want you. He called in another SS man and said to give me a beating. So I got a beating from him later on. But I got lucky because the man from the block, the head man from the place we were there, he went over to the SS man and says, I'll take care of him. That means he'll give me the beating. He was not a kapo. He'll give me the beating, not he, which was good because I saw, of course, many times kapos were beating up guys. But it was still better than the SS men were beating up. So he said to the SS man that he'll give me the beating. Of course, he gave me the beating because there was somebody who was squealing. I was glad that I got it from him. And I was there, I wasn't taken—not to the crematorium not to Yurvosnov (ph) (c.822) to the coal mines. Later on came, later on came about a month later, came another group to go for another transport. They was sending me into Monowitz. Buna was another Auschwitz camp called Auschwitz 3, Monowitz to Buna. When I came to Buna, I got a vacation. For a week, I walked around, I roamed around the camp, and I didn't do a thing. I was just getting breakfast and dinner. In the morning I got a piece of bread, and at night I got the soup. Nobody took me to work. A whole group of us, because we were so undernourished that they couldn't do anything with us. And why did they do that to us, I don't know. They could have as well send us to the crematorium. There I got, they sent me into a place where they start to take us to work. I was working on a place they called Kandbiegvirg (ph) (c.835). They produced synthetic carbide; know what carbide is? It's a chemical that when it comes together with water, it gives out gases. We were working in that factory to make this. There was also a place that they said that they're

making there, synthetic gasoline. I don't know how—this synthetic gasoline or whatever this. This is what I was doing in Buna. Later on, I lost that place, and I went to work in Rustung (?) (c.840). It's called, they put up pieces of—to go out to a building, alongside a building to go higher there. You know a builder's using it, not to put up stands...

Interviewer: Oh, scaffolds.

Michael Kishel: Scaffolds; I worked with a scaffold part. Until it came to 1945 and January 18. But during the time, there were some people, some prisoners that wanted to run away. They caught them and brought them back. Everybody had to come out and watch hanging them. There were two men that were hanged that I had to watch. It was the most horrible thing, the horrible thing you could ever see. And then they played the music and they—terrible. Came January 18, we knew that the Russians are coming closer to the camps, and we had to evacuate. They send us out in evacuation. We walked towards an area called Gleiwitz (Gliwice) (ph) (c.857) different cities. We walked until we came to a place that we couldn't go any further. They load us up; we were in trains. There was one time, we stopped in a train, we couldn't go any—not left or right because the Russians had bombed the railroad. The cars could not go either there or here. They took us out, and we started to march.

Interviewer: How far did you walk to the train, _____ (c. 888)?

Michael Kishel: The train—we were loaded in the train from Auschwitz. But the train stopped in the middle, near Gleiwitz (c.888) a place, Nedeschlazen (ph), a place there, that the train could not go any further because the rails were broken. Then we started to walk on the roads. While walking we came into a place called Waldenburg (ph) (c.889). Today it belongs to Poland, called Waljick. They had no place where to put us to sleep, 'cause we were walking days and nights. In some places, they had the place to put us up in a school or another place. In this place, they did not have a place. But Waldenburg (c.873) was a mine, had a mine. I don't know what kind of mine, but the entrance to the mine was a big entrance what I say maybe 30 feet wide and maybe 30 feet high, and you had to walk and walk and walk. When we walked in, they closed the doors, and we were maybe 1000 people, maybe more. From the heat, a lot of people got—heat and hunger and everything; they collapsed. I had two friends that were with me. Although I was very poor in—at that time we walked out of Buna, it wasn't that bad because we had the—the situation was bad but not as bad as at Birkenau or in other places. They got wet—they made on themselves

and had to be cleaned up. They open up the gate in the morning; there was a lake from the water, from the snow was a lake. I took them over there; I cleaned them up. There were a lot of civilians that were also evacuated and I went to the _____ (c.887) towards the civilians, beg them for a piece of bread, a piece of this and a piece of that. I brought them something to eat and myself also. We stick all together the three of us _____ (c.890). I was—one of the first days on the road, we were walking in—I don't know where we were walking towards east or towards west, until we came to a place that was almost to the front with the Russians. We were in stalls, in places that farmers left, and we were there. The German army took us to the front to dig ditches.

Interviewer: Wait a minute. So you escaped from the---?

Michael Kishel: We did not escape. We could not escape. But all this time while we were with the Germans from the camp...

Interviewer: Oh, the Germans took you to dig ditches near the front?

Michael Kishel: They took us on the road. We were always on the road.

Interviewer: How many days were you, after you left Auschwitz?

Michael Kishel: Till May 8.

Interviewer: Oh, okay, all right. So you walked---.

Michael Kishel: So all this time, we walked. Where we were tonight, we were not tomorrow. Where every, let's say, we found a place that we could stay overnight, the Germans could stay with us overnight; then we stayed for a few days.

Interviewer: How many were with you?

Michael Kishel: We were a few hundred. Always less and less because they are falling.

Interviewer: All men?

Michael Kishel: All men. Especially when we—not only that it was hard to walk in the snow but we were walking schlauen (ph) (c.909), that is the area are a lot of hills. We had to go up hills and down hills, and we also had to carry or push the equipment of the Germans that walked with us. They had their backpacks, and they put it all on the wagons, and we had to push and pull. That was...

Interviewer: Blanks _____ (c.918)

Michael Kishel: They had blankets. The Germans had blankets. We didn't have any. We just had a—what we had, a little jacket; the jacket to the pants what we wore. There was no such thing as winter clothes as anything. We had nothing. But we had to carry them. Later on, maybe there was some blankets. No, I don't think so. We were sleeping in our clothes, just like that, one next to the other. Our bodily heat used to keep us. We were pulling and pushing the wagons with their equipment, their packs with their guns and so on. This was a type of death penalty. Each wagon, there were no horses; we were the horses. Each wagon had about 15 or 20 prisoners. Those that were on the sides and the back were beaten up by the Germans to push, to go faster. Those that were in the front to pull, were beaten up why you're running so fast, to pull back. So no matter what, if you went to the wagon, you were a dead man. Well, I was having two friends that were close to that; not close to that but very weak. Carrying them, the smell and the vision that someplace over there is something maybe you'll find a piece of bread, was so great that you felt it. You felt it even not—you had eyes in your back. I realized that over there in the ditch is a piece of apple laying there. Who threw it away, I don't know. I left my two friends, and I ran over to get the piece of apple. The German that was beating up all the other ones saw me running. He says to me, oh you're running well. Good, come to the wagon. He got me to the wagon, and when I came to the wagon, to a side to relieve other ones; those that were beaten to relieve them. I was to the wagon, the guy says to me, stay here. He put his harness, you know they put in like on a horse because we had to...He says stay here. This is not so bad. I was there for--

Interviewer: Another _____?

Michael Kishel: Another, because I released him.

Interviewer: I see.

Michael Kishel: He says, stay here, this is not so bad. Because the German that was walking alongside him, maybe had a little heart. Maybe his heart weren't that bad. I was there and pulling that wagon, maybe for an hour or two. But the two friends of mine already said goodbye to me because they knew that if you're going to the wagon, you are through. When they saw me coming back, like the Messiah came, because they actually---; there were no organizers. Organizers mean somebody that can produce

something, somebody can leave something. They like praised me. We were still a group, and we were walking from one place to another till we came to a place that we were in front of the Russians, digging ditches to defend the Germans. Till it came almost at the end. The Germans were approaching, and we were remained maybe 50, maybe 100 of us on the road with the Germans, the German soldiers. They did not know what to do with us. The artillery was knocking so much and fire from all places. They wanted to leave us, but they were afraid that we will attack them. We were afraid that they will attack us at the last minute because what have they got to lose? Some of us guys, we were walking through on the road, many times you see water from one side to the other, and there's like a little bridge. Some of us wanted to help themselves; being that it's sort of the end of it, wanted to run away. They went into through that tunnel, to get from one side, hiding. But some of the Germans saw them going in. They went right in; shoot them in many of these places. So I was afraid to run away and see what's going to be the end. When the Germans—when we remained three of us, my friends, maybe three of us together and maybe another five or ten groups of three's or four's together. There were about five Germans, SS, guarding us. Slowly, they moved away. While they moved away, we saw some stalls; little buildings there, so we said we'll hide there. We went in there to hide, and every time the morning gets in closer and closer, we hear more shouting, more artillery, more this; and then it's quiet. We walked out, and you don't hear anything, you don't----. We start to walk down to a town. So from the mountain, we saw a town and said let's go down it. At least we'll look for some clothes because the clothes that we had, wet and this... So we got some clothes and went into a house, and we stayed there. We saw the Russians coming in. Meantime we started to get pails, so we're going to get soup. So we started to get, three of us, we got three pails of soup. Why three pails?---because we're always hungry. We were afraid who knows what's going to be later? We ate the soup. Later on came the afternoon; we start to eat the soup, it's sour. So the Russians still there. We spilled it out, this soup, and went for other soup. This what we used to do that, three times a day. Whatever we could eat up, and the rest we spilled out till we got the other one. We decided that we'll go home. I was from near Warsaw. They were also from northern Warsaw, and we went together by train, hitchhike by train, maybe two, three days. We came back to Warsaw. Then---

Interviewer:

Can you give me the friends' names?

Michael Kishel: I don't remember. One friend I remember, because one I missed. One friend was named—he had a number 126655, 665 or 655. His name was Yakov (Yacov) Evans (c.999). I think that's what he gave me. He told me that he has a brother in Uruguay, Montevideo. I asked people from Uruguay or Montevideo, did they ever heard a name like that. They did not find any name like that. I looked in the registration at the American Holocaust Survivors, at an American gathering, I did not find. Maybe, I think he gave me the name Evans. Maybe, the name is not right, maybe it was different. But I did not find him. In fact, after one week, I got liberated. After we got liberated, I went from Warsaw, from one end of Warsaw to the other because I had to take a train to go to Kaluszyn. And Warsaw was destroyed. So I walked from one end of Warsaw to the other end to get another train to come to Kaluszyn. When I came on the road to Kaluszyn, I met a guy, a Polish guy. He looked at me; he was scared because I looked like a dead man. I told him who I am, he says, your brother is home. That was the first good news I heard, that my brother is in Kaluszyn; May 15, May 20. I was sleeping and eating for two weeks. This is how I looked after two weeks gaining 15 kilos.

Interviewer: This _____(c. 029)?

Michael Kishel: Pardon me?

Interviewer: I don't know, all the ones that are marked, you want to go into the archives?

Michael Kishel: Yes. I'll give you all those pictures that you want, and you'll give—you'll send them back to me.

Interviewer: Right, right.

Michael Kishel: This is my brother and his wife.

Interviewer: So you went back to Kaluszyn?

Michael Kishel: I went back to Kaluszyn and I found my brother. We was staying there for about a month, and we had to leave because before our arrival, one Jew was killed by the National Army, National Polish Army. They claimed that he was a Russian sympathizer, and they had to get rid of him. At the same time, there was a few people that were hidden in villages and forests came back and worked at the factory that they made, originally they made sheepskin jackets. The family name is Berman. Because of the fact that this person was killed, they had to leave the town and since then no Jews

live there any more. We left us—my brother and I—we left for Lodz, we're staying there for a few months. Then we went back to Germany to Landshut (ph) (c.059), and from Landshut we emigrate to America.

Interviewer: What year did you _____ (c.060)?

Michael Kishel: In 1947.

Interviewer: Now, can you tell briefly what happened to you _____? (c.068)

Michael Kishel: Well, the other family members that were first—at the time when there was the liquidation. The first liquidation was in September 25, 1942, was my mother, my sister, my mother's sister, my aunt and her mother. Some other cousins and my father's relatives, my father's brother and his family were all in the market. They were all sent to Majdanek, I'm sorry, not to Majdanek, to Treblinka.

Interviewer: They all _____?

Michael Kishel: They all perished, yeah.

Interviewer: Did your father _____?

Michael Kishel: My father was killed, was killed in Kaluszyn on Yom Kippur night, 1942, September 21.

Interviewer: Was he killed, was the whole committee killed then?

Michael Kishel: No, the whole committee...They were just sent for him. Before he was killed, the SS sent for him to come. When he went to see them, they told him that he's arrested. Later on they sent to inform the other members of the Judenrat that they should inform the family to come say hello to him, because they're going to send him to Warsaw. When my brother and I came to the jail where he was supposed to be, to call at the window, calling Father, Father, we are here waiting for you, we didn't hear any reply. But staying there for about 10 minutes, 15 minutes and waiting for his reply, we heard shots which was in a square nearby. We went over there, and then we found our father dead. It happened once before that the SS came once and arrested my father; took him to Warsaw. He was sitting at that time, he was in jail. In Warsaw together with Chernakoff (c. 101), the leader of the Jewish community in Warsaw. Of course, when he came back, he told the problems what the Warsaw has, and that no matter how bad we have it, that they have it worse. There were many ways that the Judenrat in our area communicated with one another. They did help each

other in many ways but there was—but they could never be ahead of the Germans what their plans were—to realize what they want to do. They were always trying to think that only with this law, only with this special thing that the Jews have to do, this will be it. No more and no more; and everything now will be good and good and good.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you want to say ____ (c.111)

Michael Kishel: At the moment, I don't know.

Interviewer: You came to the United States, and you met your wife ____ (c.121)?

Michael Kishel: I came to the United States. My wife originally is from Poland. Her family emigrated from Poland to Costa Rica in Central America. She was in Costa Rica. By chance, she came to New York on a business trip with other people who are my relatives. I meet my wife that time on that trip, and I felt that she's a nice person for me to meet again. We met a few times, and we decided to get married.

Interviewer: And you got married over here?

Michael Kishel: I got married with—I got married in Costa Rica. Going to Costa Rica to marry her. It was in January 9, or is it 8?, 1949; January 9, 1949.

Interviewer: And you had three ____?

Michael Kishel: We have two daughters, and we came, of course we came to live here. We lived in Brooklyn, and then we lived in Queens; and since then I lived there.

Interviewer: You live in Queens?

Michael Kishel: I live in Queens. I have two daughters.

Interviewer: Are you retired?

Michael Kishel: I am now retired. I was since 1948, when I came to the first States; I got a job as a messenger in a shipping company. This gave me a lot of—a big break as I learned English, I believe well. I also went to night school; for about six months I went to night school whatever it was. Then I went for about six months to—can you imagine you get so excited that you're missing a word?—went to high school. I believe that I learned the language well. To my writing, I could say is perfect, as good as any American-born, although I believe that I have an accent. I'm not ashamed of it. Then after learning, working for the company which is a forwarding

company dealing in—arranging shipments for customers overseas, who actually introduced me to that job because they were clients of that company. They gave business to that company to ship for them to Costa Rica merchandise. Through them, I got the job, and I worked there for almost two years. Then we started to go into business and to provide my relatives in Costa Rica, who are importers, with samples of textiles and different kind of materials; and this is how I got into the export business which was called... In 1948, I went into the business, and we called Kishel Brothers Trading Company. Later we incorporated, became a corporations. Of course, our name was known in New York and a lot of companies in the States. We had a very good name.

Interviewer: You _____ (c.183)?

Michael Kishel: Yeah. We had a very good name, my brother and I, very well-known in the trade of textiles and clothing, cosmetics and anything that my customers wanted, we had. We exported merchandise to South America, to Central America and even to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Lebanon. I retired in 1988, after my brother got a few times, heart attacks. We decided that business is not going to be better. I said to myself that I would rather go out of business than be taken out. That's what I did, and I'm very happy for it. After all the things that I recall and think of what happened to me, what make me so lucky? (End of Tape 2)

Tape 3

That someone was behind me, and that was my father. I always felt that he is watching over me, and whenever I was in the biggest—I came out, I came out with flying colors. All right, it doesn't mean that I was always the winner, but even when I was beaten up, but I came out alive. A separate story about my father is written in the story that I gave about how the ghetto works which you will see it. I will just mention one particular instance of my father, what happened in 1940. Sometimes in 1940, the Germans came with an order that the Jews, Kaluszyn must supply 150 men to be sent to Biala Podlaska (c.12). This is a town on the way to, before Brest Litovsk (c.13) which there is a work camp, and they will have to work there. Of course, nobody wanted to go there as everyone already knew who the Germans are, and what they are, and what their stories are. But who can say no to the Germans all the way? With all kind of work and all persuasions, my father was—persuaded them to take only forty—from 150 to knock them down to 40. But only 38 went there. As soon as the young boys came to Biala Podlaska (c.19), they had a very bad

experience. Of course, it's not a bad experience; they never had any other experience because they were young boy, and there were no such things. They were forced to do certain types of labor. They were not used to it, they were not accustomed. The accommodations, the life was very hard, food was very mean and bad. From the letters that they wrote, was very alarming to their parents. Of course, those letters came back to the Judenrat. My father, being that he's under practically all the arrangements, all the things to get things done, he took a trip to Biala Podlaska (c.26) to see if he could bring the boys back by himself. He had to receive a permit from the county Germany, from the county Germans, to go there, as Jews were not permitted to go by train. When he came there, he got all the story from the boys, what they were doing. He could only see 12 of them. The other ones, either they were at work, or they weren't allowed to be seen. He was talking to the Germans in that camp, to release them, to let them go home because we need them at home; we have industries that work for German, for the German Wehrmacht, for the German army. For the nerve to tell the Germans to let them out, he got so beaten up that he could not do anything and luckily he came home, was in bed; laid in bed for about two weeks, till it came back to him. Seeing the conditions that were there in Biala Podlaska (c.37) he decided that he must do something; he cannot leave those boys there. He went to the authorities in the county again with a story that why don't they give us a paper that we need those boys in a factory that is producing products for the German army, like the sheepskin coats which the Germans need for winter clothing and other things. This helped. Again he made a trip to Biala Podlaska (c.43) with that letter, and he brought the boys back. As you can sometimes see Moses going out of Egypt? Well, Moses came back with 38 people from that camp! That was my father. For this I believe that to same the heimel (ph) (c.46) all the time whenever I had it—was in a jam, whatever I couldn't do anything, he was behind me and brought me out. As you can see, there are two pictures. One is with the synagogue standing and around it are bombed-out houses which was done in 1939 when the Germans fought in Kaluszyn. The synagogue remained during this time until 1941 when the Germans destroyed it and took away the bricks to make an airfield.