

neutral because it is a hymn to G-d, without mentioning Christ and so on. So before we went to the classes we gathered in the corridors and we sang this. I didn't sing, but as I told you, there was nothing, it was neutral. But after the end of the school, there was a prayer, a Catholic prayer, "Ave Maria", but in Polish. There was also a neutral prayer, "Thank you, G-d, that you are giving us light of knowledge" and so on and so on. (Polish) This was also very neutral, but there was one prayer especially, the "Ave Maria", which was a typical Catholic. But I didn't attend the religious lessons. I was only happy that I didn't have to go.

Q: What about sitting in the class with a hat?

A: Yes, we had no hat, no hat in the class. That we didn't have either in the Polish or in the Jewish school. Even in the Jewish gymnasium we sat without hats.

Q: Not a hat, not a "yarmulke"?

A: No, not a "kippa", nothing. We put only...in the gymnasium we put on our hats when we said in the morning "Modei Ani", because we used to say the "Modei Ani" in the mornings. That was all. The only "tefillah" which we had in the gymnasium was the "Modei Ani" in the morning. Then we put on our hats, but besides there were no hats. When we learned Tanach we put on our hats. But not when we learned "Korot Ha'Ivrim" or the Hebrew language.

Q: In the Polish school when the priest came to teach, you went outside?

A: Yes, I went outside, I left the class for an hour or however much it was.

Q: You didn't have a rabbi instead?

A: No, we had Jewish religion, so we went to the other school, to the Jewish school. There was a very nice teacher. His name was Sokolovsky, I remember. It was a Polish name, but he was a Jewish teacher. And he taught us addition, but I knew much more

than we learned at that time because I was ten years in the "cheder" and in the "cheder" there too.

Q: What about fights with anti-Semites?

A: Oh yes. That happened. Oh, that happened. Especially on the street when we met some guys – I don't want to name the names. We used to name them. But they called us names too. And how! "Moishik" and "Goodwhy" and all the other things.

Q: But your education was that if you were in a fight, if you came home and said to your father, "I got a 'box'" or something like that, your father used to say, "Oksy, keep quiet and keep going down (?)", or if you got a "box", you give it back?

A: No, the father didn't say that you'll give back, but we gave back. We did fight. We weren't scared, so we fought back. As a matter of fact, on our street there was a very mixed company of boys. We played together. And girls. We played together. Just on our street - I don't know if it was somewhere else - but on our street there was a kind of peaceful co-existence, a kind. Of course with anti-Semitic actions from all these, who were anti-Semites. But the ordinary people. They behaved themselves quite well.

Q: When you were in Beitar, was it a background for more anti-Semitic occasions?

A: No.

Q: When you went with boys who wore their uniforms, did it make more provocations?

A: No. You wouldn't believe – of course, maybe I am exaggerating a little bit, and maybe there are many people who would say, "Ah, that is not true" because it was so and so. Maybe it was (?). I am telling how I saw it. For instance, on "Lag B'Omer", all the Zionist organizations, from the "Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair" to the Beitar, in their uniforms, with their flags and with their orchestras, went to the woods and...

Q: Together?

A: No, not together, but each for themselves. But they went to the wood and they came and the people had been waiting for them as they came back from the woods and they (?). Of course, maybe somebody, one shouted "Dirty Jew!" or something like that, but it was not so usual, it was not so usual. But this doesn't mean that we hadn't got very serious anti-Semitic excesses in Kalisz. I remember especially one where they had killed a Jewish boy just on the street with a knife and it was horrible. It was horrible at that time. The boycott was very unpleasant. But the Jewish youth at that time, they weren't afraid, they gave back, they gave back. There was another thing when, for instance, I went with my father outside Kalisz. My father very often visited Debresin, around, with whom he had trade relations. It happened very often that we were attacked by young boys who threw stones and so on.

Q: What was our father's reaction to that?

A: Well, he was like a Jew. It is difficult to say. He didn't like it, but he didn't react too strongly.

Q: He didn't fight back.

A: No. He didn't fight back. He couldn't. he was already...

Q: The traditional Jewish...

A: Yes. But we had very bad things in Kalisz, as a matter of fact. After Putsutsky's death.

Q: Did you feel better when you went to the Jewish school?

A: Of course I felt much better because I had Jewish boys and girls. We were boys and girls at that time, not only boys, so it was immediately better. The atmosphere was very well. There was very much friendship between us, very much. Of course there were groups, you know. One was in one group, one with in the other group. We had many very, very poor Jewish children.

Q: All of them were religious?

A: I don't think they were all religious, no. It wasn't a religious school.

Q: Yes...

A: No, not all of them were very religious, but they were Jewish. They didn't go to the "shteibl" every day. I mean their parents. I am now speaking about them. And even them, the students themselves – I have here one in Tel Aviv with whom we were together – they didn't come from very religious families. Just from Jewish families, traditionally Jewish families, but not religious.

Q: The language in that school between you was Yiddish?

A: No, we spoke Polish and then we tried to speak Hebrew. Very often we tried to speak only Hebrew.

Q: Many Jews in Kalisz spoke German at home.

A: No, I don't think so, I don't think so because Kalisz belonged to Russia. German wasn't so popular. It was in other parts of Poland, in Galicia, which was under Austria. There they spoke German at home, but not in Kalisz. Also we had quite a great German minority in Kalisz. (?) But they didn't speak. Most of the families they spoke, as a matter of fact, Polish.

Q: In '38, when many Jews were deported from Germany, do you remember Jewish refugees coming to Kalisz?

A: I remember it perfectly well because the Jews of Kalisz...it was near Kalisz, it was in the Zbaszyn. The Zbaszyn at the German border, it wasn't far from Kalisz. I can't tell you exactly how many kilometers, but it was in the same "vovedship", the same "machoz". So the "kehilla" in Kalisz organized immediately ahead for this and brought them. In the house of my sister they had kept one of the refugees who came. So, as a matter of fact, we did our best to help them. I remember it very, very well.

A: Absolutely. We, I mean a part of us, we didn't see any future for us in Poland and our aim was to go to Palestine. When I left...after the war, when Israel (?) started and I left my home, the "matara ha'sofit" it was to come to Palestine.

Q: What about your communist friends?

A: Well, I had no communist friends, as a matter of fact. I had communists in my family, but I had no communist friends.

Q: Because you know you were at the age that was exactly comfortable for communism.

A: I will tell you. Communism, as it was presented at that time to us young people, was a very human ideology. It was an ideology of brotherhood, it was an ideology of social justice, of equality and so on. That we liked, but I personally, I didn't believe in it. I liked it, but I didn't believe it. I didn't believe that that was something that you can really fulfill. That's why I was not attracted. I had one colleague in elementary school – he belonged to the communist youth and he wanted to recruit me, but I refused. I stayed with my Zionist, religionist ideas. That was my ideology, but I was always for social justice and I didn't like capitalism. Especially I didn't like capitalists.

Q: And yet you say that your father came from a background that his father was a landlord.

A: That's true, but he was, my grandfather was a landlord, but my "mishpacha", I mean the children of his children, were all poor people. All poor people.

Q: What about your father's family, because you said that your mother had many brothers and sisters?

A: Well, my father's family was also relatively numerous.

Q: Most of them were in the area of Kalisz?

friends, even one who was here in Israel, died only two years ago – he was arrested in connection with this. We were going to the owners of the Jewish shops and calling them to close their shops in solidarity with us. Not all did, but that's what we made. We made such actions. So we knew very well what was going on. I remember how I listened to all the Hitler speeches and I will never forget the speech in '39, when Hitler was this famous face (phrase), that if the Jews are going to start a war, it won't be – I don't remember exactly – it won't be the end of Europe, but it will be the (?) of "Yiddishevolkes". Then he said it. You know what the (?) means? The "hashmada". I will never forget it. It was in '39. I listened to all his speeches. Even during the war I listened to his speeches. In Romania when I was.

Q: As a child, I asked you if you felt Polish, you said, "Yes, I loved the Polish culture." You remember yourself going with the Polish flag on the Independence Day?

A: No, no Polish flag with Independence Day, but we used to go on Independence Day, but with the flag of our school, but we participated in this. Of course. We participated in this because all schools participated. We didn't like too much the government of Poland, "Endex" and all the others, but we were loyal to the state.

Q: When you sang the Polish hymn...?

A: The Polish hymn, of course.

Q: But when you sang it, you felt related to it?

A: In a way. Of course, of course. But more when we sang the "Hatikvah" or the hymn of the Beitar. In my case. Or the "Techezakna".

Q: Did you see yourself in Palestine at that time? You thought that was the place you belonged to?

Q: Did you hear stories about what was going on in Germany?

A: And how. As I told you, I was very interested in politics, so we followed the developments in Germany and we knew what was going on. Not only in Germany. In the Soviet Union, too. If somebody from the Jewish community tell you today that eh didn't know what was going on in the Soviet Union, don't believe him because the Polish press and the Yiddish press wrote everything about all this, what was going on, all the trials in the Soviet Union. But we knew very well what was going on in Germany. I don't know if you know these things, that the Polish Jewry organized a boycott of German merchandise. I will never forget when there was a big assembly in the great Jewish synagogue. I don't know if it was at the end of the boycott. There was some occasion to make a kind of broadcast and I will never forget the "tefilla" at that time and the "Shma Yisrael" in the synagogue. I remember it like today because I was there. So we were very active in the anti-Nazi action, whatever it was, whatever it was. We organized protest meetings. We, I mean the Jews in Kalisz, organized protest meetings.

Q: You participated in them?

A: Yes, I participated. I told you, I was at this assembly and so on. The same thing, we at the gymnasium protested against introduction of the ghetto in the Polish universities. We made a strike against that we...

Q: You are talking about the "numeros clauses"?

A: It wasn't "numeros clauses". This was when they made the ghetto in the universities, that the Jewish students had to sit separate from the others.

Q: At the big benches.

A: At the big benches. Our school took part in the strike. It was a strike – all the Jewish shops closed and so on. I remember we participated in it. Even some of my

A: Yes. They were from Blaszkki, near Kalisz, because my grandfather lived in Blaszkki. He didn't come to Kalisz. But from my mother's side, almost the whole family was in Kalisz. But from my father's side, most of them went to Lodz. My father had only one brother and four sisters, so they were six at home. The older brother stayed in Blaszkki and he took care of the land. He was, as a matter of fact, a kind of Jewish peasant. He went with the plow and so on. We used to go there because...my grandfather, he sold one of the villages and he stayed only in the second one, Kurki, and we used to go there for vacation. I liked very much this life on the land. Very much. I took part in the "ha'sif shel ha'tvua" and all the other things. We went with the cows.

Q: Next week is Tu B'Shvat. Do you remember Tu B'Shvat?

A: Of course I remember Tu B'Shvat. Last time we were here, it was exactly Tu B'Shvat. That we planted the tree at the home of our friend in Moshav Avigdor, but she told me that it didn't grow.

Q: But in Poland you remember Tu B'shvat?

A: Of course. We used to eat "perot" from Palestine. That was Tu B'Shvat. We didn't plant trees.

Q: All your brothers were Zionists?

A: Not my oldest one. He was politically neutral. He wasn't interested in politics.

Q: Your father was a Zionist?

A: No. He was a kind of "chassid", of the rabbi from Alexandrov.

Q: Your father believed that we all will go to Palestine when the "Mashiach" comes?

A: Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely. But he wouldn't be against if we had gone there. That I am sure.

Q: The only thing that you said was economically problematic for you was that it was a problem to pay the fee to school.

A: It was in general very difficult. We had very difficult conditions after '33.

Q: After '33?...

A: No, between '29 to '33 it was difficult for everybody, but especially after '33 it was difficult because my father had lost a lot of his money because many of the "melc" to which he delivered, the "tvua", went bankrupt, "pashtu et ha regel". And eh loost a lot of money and it was very, very difficult, but then my brothers started to earn money. My sisters were...As a matter of fact, even I, later – I wouldn't like to mention it, but today I can say – We all contributed to the household. All of us. And especially, not the oldest one, but the younger brother, Yitzchak. He was the "parnassa-giver", as you say in Yiddish. But we weren't poor. That's what I want. We didn't suffer, we didn't starve, but it was difficult.

Q: You had enough clothes and shoes?

A: Yes, with that it was little bit so and so, but in principle we had enough.

Q: In principle, but...

A: In principle we had what we needed. In principle. There was no abundance of it, but we were able, as you say in Yiddish, "bekuved".

Q: "B'kavod".

A: Yes.

Q: But today, if you think about it, you were quite poor. You said you didn't even have enough gas to heat.

A: Yes, there were periods when we hadn't got the money to pay for the gas, but there were periods when we had. You know, it was up and down. But if I compare my standard of living with the standard of then, it is like, as you say in Polish, like day and night. My standard of living today and Poland then, it would be considered that I am a rich man.

Q: But the comparison needs to be to others at that time. With your neighbours, your friends, your relatives.

A: We had an enormous misery among the Jews in Poland, but not only among the Jews. Among the Poles, too. If you know, Ronit, how Polish workers, or these who hadn't got any work, I mean, the unemployed – how they lived, in what conditions, how the Polish peasants lived. Today it is unimaginable. You can't imagine this, what a misery it was. So if I compare myself with them, we didn't belong to this strata, to this category. But if I compare myself with the rich Jews, I don't belong to them. We were what you call today maybe lower middle class, but lower. I would stress this word. The lower middle class.

Q: The lower part of the....

A: The lower part of the lower middle class. No, maybe not so much, but anyway it was the lower middle class.

Q: You worked so hard during the week, you were an excellent student, you were a tutor, you learned "Gemara" with your father. When Shabbat came, you had to go with your father to the synagogue and to the "shteibl". You didn't have time for yourself.

A: But after the noon, if it was the summer, we went to the river because Kalisz is on a very warm – not today, but at that time the river was wonderful. So we used to go. It was a place which was called the "Island" at the river. It was every Shabbas we used to go there, and especially during the vacations we were there almost every day. Don't forget that we had wonderful Jewish clubs. There were clubs which had their marina, if you want to call it, at the river. There was one club where there were assimilated Jews. It was called "Key W 30". It means the club which was founded in '30. There were the assimilated Jews who belonged to that. And then we had the Maccabi marina