United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Miles Lerman
July 17, 2001
RG-50.030*0413

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Miles Lerman, conducted by Joan Ringelheim on July 17, 2001 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

MILES LERMAN
July 17, 2001

Q: -- morning Miles.

A: Good morning.

Q: It's lovely to see you, finally.

A: Good to see you.

Q: Miles tell me, where were you born?

A: I was born in Tomashev Rovelski, which is a small town in between Lublin and Lvov.

Q: And when were you born?

A: In 1920.

Q: January?

A: Yes.

Q: 20th? Yeah. Tell me something. I want -- I want to get some idea about your family, and about living in Poland bef -- before the war, but if I would ask you, what is your first memory, the most prominent memory you have of your childhood, what would come to your mind?

A: Well, it's growing up in a small town, you know, and what would come to my mind probably most, would be the fact that I was the youngest in the family, and my parents were Orthodox Jews, and my older siblings, my brothers and my sisters, were kind of paving the way for me, which, you know, getting our parents to accept certain things that normally they would not. So, in Yiddish they call it the mizinik, that means the -- the youngest. I was fortunate, and privileged as a result of this, and --

Q: So tell me, you -- you have a brother Shlomo.

A: I had a brother Shlomo.

Q: You had a brother Shlomo, and he was -- he was --

A: He was --

Q: -- the eldest?

A: He wa -- he was the oldest.

Q: And when was he born, do you remember?

A: 1904.

Q: 1904?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And --

A: And then I had a sister, Esther, she was born in 1906, and I had another sister, she was born in 1908, and that --

Q: And that's Peshe.

A: Peshe.

Q: Yeah.

A: And then I have a brother who lives in Florida now, and he was born in 1910.

Q: And what's his name?

A: Jonah.

Q: Jonah. And were all the siblings prior to your birth, moving away from Orthodoxy?

A: Well, not all of them. My oldest sister Esther did not. But bear in mind that this was a period that the -- the coming out of -- of Jewish, young Jewish people, coming out of the O-Orthodox confines, you know, and embracing the culture and -- and the type of living that was, you know, in the process of developing. It was in the process of developing. So, it -- it is difficult to say what was the year that a break point came. It was more you have to deal with it, you know, in periods, in that case, perhaps. But it was an interesting period, it was a period where the transition from straight Orthodoxy, and you know, no questions asked, to you know, this is the Jewish law, and this is the custom, and this is what you do, came under scrutiny by young people. Young people wanted to embrace, you know, the customs and, you know, culture of the country, either that they lived in, or that was neighboring, you know, Poland.

Q: And did -- did this distress your parents, from what you remember?

A: Yes, it did, because they felt that we are wandering off, and we will wind up in a different culture, an-and to them it was a very, very major problem, no question about it.

Q: Did this -- did this mean that there was a kind of internal argument, in -- in the -- in the household?

A: It was not only internal, it was -- it was -- our -- our parents did not take kindly to the fact that, for instance, my brother, my oldest brother, you know, he was not kosher. This was unheard of in those days, you know. My older sister, Esther, she was perhaps a little more progressive than my parents, but religious, and following the rules and customs, you know, that she was raised -- she was brought up in. My younger sister was -- Peshe was desiring to make progress, but was not quite that courageous. But Jonah, he was the fighter.

Q: Right. And were you -- were you modeling yourself off of [indecipherable]

A: I was -- first of all, bear in mind that there was a difference between -- in my ye -- young -- my oldest -- my youngest sibling, and me, what there was a difference of 10 years. So, you know, it's a substantial difference. And I was the baby in the family, and -- you know, and -- and that's -- I pointed out to you the fact that I was the youngest, you know, everybody treated me with a little extra affection, and what have you. And I would say, when I look at it back, that my effort to embrace, you know, progress and, you know, and modern methods and -- and -- and stepping away from some of the Jewish laws was the most af -- most vivid. And my parents recognized it, and they tried, but they tried with me, not ano -- in the manner of laying down the law and no questions asked, but trying to persuade me, trying to do certain things, you know. But they realized that times are changing, and it will be a different world.

Q: Did you speak Polish and Yiddish in the house, or --

A: In the house, Yiddish.

Q: Yiddish.

A: With my colleagues, Polish and Yiddish.

Q: And did your parents speak Polish as well?

A: Yeah.

Q: They did?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: So when you grew up, were you growing up in a very mixed atmosphere, or because your parents were Orthodox Jews, it was very enclosed within the Jewish community?

A: They were two processes of growing up. One was the growing up at home, and the other one is the growing up at outside. At home my parents were Orthodox Jews. My father was a -- a lieutenant of one of the famous rabbis of those days, the Belzai rabbi that you probably heard about it, you know, the Belzai rab -- the Belzai rabbi was one of the major, major, ra-rabbinic dynasties of those days, and my father was a lieutenant there. This was something very unusual.

Q: And what does that mean?

A: He was very close to the -- the rabbi, and when he ki -- first of all, he supported him substantially. And when he came to Beltz, where the rabbi lived, is -- my father was called [indecipherable] Tomasheva, that was a big to-do. If the rabbi or his family, or his brother, who was the chief rabbi of Bilgori, which was a neighboring city, came to Tomashev, they stayed in our house. This is something extra, extra special.

Q: Mm. So your father was a prominent person?

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: And mother.

Q: And mother. So tell me about him. What do you remember about your father?

A: Well, first of all, you'll have to bear in mind that we are dealing about a period where Jews were confined to their own cultural environment. And my father, for in-- to give you an example, was very friendly with the township judge. But being friendly with the township judge did not mean that the township judge invited my father for dinner, or my father invited the judge for dinner. But they were very, very friendly, you know, and th -- my father was very respected. As far as our material position in town, I would say we were considered one of the wealthiest people, and this had it's impact also.

Q: And your father was as a -- a business person? He ran a --

A: My father, yes. My father concentrated on -- we -- we were millers. And some mills we owned, and some mills we leased and operated. But we were millers for generations, you know? And my mother was a very, very bright woman, very bright woman, very unusual woman, and she was running businesses on her own. She had a wholesale import, and -- an import business of tea, and coffee, and -- and spices, and you know -- it was a very large business. L-Large to an extent -- to give you it -- it's -- it will sound funny. When

salespeople came to town -- it's going to be difficult to describe it for you in English, because in English the -- in Polish there is a difference between male and female when you refer to somebody. In English you don't -- who is Joan Ringleheim, who is Miles Lerman? But in Polish is, this is -- you know, defined in masculine, and in -- in -- in -- in --

Q: In feminine.

A: In feminine.

Q: Yeah.

A: And salesmen used to come and ask who is this, but referring to it, you know, as a man, Jarket Lerman, you know. In other words, they couldn't believe that a business of this magnitude, of this size, is run and operated by a woman.

Q: So how did that happen? It's so unusual, it would seem to me, during that era.

A: Yes, yeah, yes. You have to bear in mind that for women to be involved in -- in the p -- in -- in -- in the task of earning a living was not unusual in Poland, because you have to understand that going back not too many years, not too many decades, it was the nicest thing. The best thing that could happen to a man is to sit and study Torah, and his wife was the breadwinner. But the breadwinner, she had a little stall, you know, and was selling a herring, or you know, or some flour, or some sugar, you know, and scraped out a living.

Q: Right.

A: This is not what my mother did. My mother ran a very, very large business. And it was difficult for th -- [indecipherable] I told you, it was difficult for them to conceive that a woman is on this level.

Q: Did she come from a family where they were business people as well, is this what --

A: Well, y-yes, my grandfa -- I remember my grandfather on the ma -- on the maternal side, he was at -- he had a -- he was mun -- he was in charge, he had -- I was gonna call it a factory, it was not a factory, it was a plant, where they were making wooden shingles, because wooden shingles were used, you know, for roofs, and this was th -- it's like having a -- a roofing business, you know. So, yes, they came from a business family, but not of the size, and not of the caliber that my mother developed.

Q: So the kids of the family, did they help in the milling business of your father? Didn't you help more with your mother?

A: Depends.

Q: Depends.

A: It depends. This was not the only business we had. We had a wholesale business of liquor, which is, you know, this -- this -- you needed special license for it. So, my brother, for instance, when he was in Tomashev, was in charge of the liquor business. My sister Peshe and her husband were in charge helping mother with her business. My older sister, Esther, and her second husband -- because she lost her husband at a very early age, were in charge of helping father with the mills. So everybody did something, you know, specifically, and mother and father were directing traffic, they were, you know --

Q: And you?

A: I -- I was in school. I was the youngest, you know, and my father died in 1938. Normal death, you know. When I say normal, it was not part of the Holocaust --

Q: Right.

A: -- it was 1938. And I came home, and the family decided now because I wa -- I studied in Lvov, you know, so the family decided that mother is going to need help, and you know, and there will be a reshuffling of who will do what, and they decided that I need to interrupt my schooling and stay home, which I regret very much.

Q: So let me go back to when you were a kid. Were you a very spoiled kid?

A: Yes, yes. I was not very spoiled, but spoiled.

Q: Did you like school?

A: I liked school, I was very good in school. I was not a very intensive studier, you know, but I had no trouble, I had good grades, and you know, I -- I'm a little bit of a devil. I was a little bit of a devil.

Q: I'm surprised. Was it a little bit difficult at home in some ways, being the youngest, because all your siblings were so much older?

A: No, this was -- my being the youngest was a plus, because everybody felt that they -- you know, I'm the kid, the kid brother, and they need to be good to me, and they need to be good with me, and they need to play a role in, you know, in bringing me up, because bear in mind that mother is, you know, the impressive person she was in the world of business, she was an extremely religious woman. She bought a shaitel, you know what a shaitel is?

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: The wig.

A: Wig. And you know, the maids that we had, had to run a very, very tight, and kosher with -- there's no question about it. Not only kosher, but a very, very carefully, you know, managed kosher home.

Q: Right.

A: So, in mother, as -- as busy as she was with her business, always -- the -- the -- there used to be a form of reading the Bible in a woman's way, it's what's called atsana varanay. Let it -- it's a Hebrew, say [indecipherable] let's go out and see -- to -- to study. My mother, as busy as she was, always, you know, you could find her when she was sitting and studying, you know Jewish customs, Jewish ways, Jewish stories. I have very warm recollections about it, it's --

Q: You were close to your mother.

A: Yes.

Q: Were you closer than your -- with your father?

A: No, I was closer with my mother, because my mother was home all the time, my father traveled a lot --

Q: Right.

A: -- on account of the flour mills, because they were all over eastern Poland.

Q: Did you all, brothers and sisters and husbands eat dinner together, or was this once a week, or --

A: Those that were home, yes, th -- but on Shabbas predominantly, not in the middle of the week.

Q: Right. So you would eat dinner with your mother, usually?

A: Ah, yes, yes.

Q: And you had a cook in the house, [indecipherable] maid, so --

A: Oh yes, we had a cook, and a maid, I mean th -- that -- my parents were very, very much wrapped up in --

Q: Right.

A: -- in a -- large businesses.

Q: And what sort of cultural life was there in town? Were there movies? There was theater?

A: Oh yes, yes. It was a small town, you know, but the -- you ask me whether there was a movie house, yes. Theaters used to come.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: You know, traveling theaters.

Q: Right.

A: But let me say this to you, it was a town where was in the process of reforming itself, and there were many, many young people, either my brother's age, or my sister's age, who really were carrying the ball to reshape the character of the community. There were Zionist organizations, there were sports clubs, you know. And all -- the -- if you ask me whether my father was in favor of my brother playing soccer, no. He would much rather have him sit and study, you know, the Bible, and what have you. But this was not the case, they were, you know, rebelling, rebelling in a -- in a gradual manner, but making their way into modern life.

Q: And was this happening all over Poland --

A: Yes.

Q: -- as far as you understand --

A: Yes.

Q: -- that this was a -- a big movement.

A: It was more even than Poland, I would say that we are talking about a period -- because I keep saying to you that I don't want -- don't want to define it for days --

Q: Right.

A: -- it was more a period of years, or decades. It was a period where Europe chain -- s-say it was described as the spring of Europe, you know, that there was modernization in every

aspect. In the aspect of doing business, in the aspect of culture, in the aspect of study, and in the aspect of Jews making their place in the non-Jewish society. And bear in mind that this was a period when Jews were ghettoized, but not in the sense of ghetto from the Holocaust, ghettoized means that there were sections of town where Jews lived, you know. And I would say that the process -- for instance, to give you an example. In our entire town there were three -- three people that graduated high school and went on to college.

Q: Wow.

A: I-It -- graduating high school was a high level of education. Predominantly it was public school, you know. So the progress came in this way, the -- politically, the -- the Jews started to assert themselves, to have representation in the house of -- in the parliament. Anti-Semitism was there, but anti-Semitism in a kind of segmented way. It -- it was not an anti-Semitism that was active every day of the year, but in the last few years before the war, it intensified substantially.

Q: So in your growing up, you were not feeling a great deal of anti-Semitism as a -- as a young boy.

A: I -- I was feeling -- the fact that I was Jewish, you know, I was different than -- I -- I had some non-Jewish friends, but very few, very few. Most of my friends were Jewish, and we -- for instance, I'd mentioned to you sports clubs. We had a Harpoyle and a Macarbie, these were two s -- Jewish sports clubs. And sometimes we participated in -- in soccer games where there was a representation of our town, then they were from the Polish sports clubs, and from our clubs. But I always -- we always felt that we are Jewish.

Q: No matter what.

A: We always felt that we are Jewish.

Q: When you had non-Jewish friends, did you discuss your differences, or was this simply not going to be a --

A: Well, no, we discussed it, but let me say this to you. We -- first of all, we kind of felt that we are intellectually superior to -- that -- you know, the object of study and working hard to learn more, was more, you know, in the province of Jewish life, because Jews always aimed for being more educated, because Jews felt that the only way, the only thing that will bring them into society is, you know, by being educated well, or being better educated. You know, for instance, for a Jew to be accepted to high school, he had to have much better grades, and had to be much better prepared than a non-Jew. So th -- are you asking me whether they were killing Jews every day? No. You know, we li --

Q: Well but -- yeah -- no, go ahead.

A: We lived in our town, we knew that we are different, we -- first of all, we knew that we are different, we had to be different because wi -- I couldn't eat, you know, because my -- my -- my parents would know that I had dinner with my non-Jewish friend in their house, they would be heartbroken.

Q: Did you -- did you find that difficult, that you wanted to eat in the house of your friend because you liked them?

A: I wanted to be the same --

Q: The same, yeah.

A: -- I did not like the fact that we were identified as them.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I wanted to -- there to be us. And it was a gradual process.

Q: Right. Did you -- when you had non-Jewish friends, were they good friends?

A: I recall two that were good friends, good friends, and I am certain that inasmuch as they could have had problems of -- of us being friends, they were my friends. There were bullies that were looking for an opportunity to get a Jewish kid, you know, on the way home from school, and beat him up, or push him, or bully him and what have you. They would probably come to my help.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you get trained in sort of -- what do you call it, not fighting --

A: Self defense?

Q: Self defense, yes.

A: Well, we had Jewish sports clubs, and bear in mind that this is what I've been trying to bring out to you, that I lived in a period where young people desired to leave the beta midrash, the yeshiva and to enter into modern schooling, you know, so in -- as a result of this, we felt that we need to do everything that modern life has. Be active in sports, be active in theater, be active in -- in debates, be active in -- in -- in discussions, and what have you. So, as a result of this, what I'm trying to bring out is that in the sports clubs, yes we studied self defense. You know, not karate or something like it, but first of all, we

were educated. You know, our organizational leaders. Don't let yourself, don't -- don't -- don't accept the fact that you are less, lesser, or weaker, or -- and what have you. And then the immigration to Israel began when I grew up, and my brother, my youngest brother, Jonah --

Q: Jonah, right.

A: -- who is here, after he served in the army, in the Polish army, because this was army in s -- serving in the army was by conscription. Right after he finished, he decided that he wants to go to Israel. And this for my parents was a big problem, because they went to the rabbe, and the rabbe said, "When the here will come, when the Messiah will come, we'll all go to Israel." You know, my -- for instance, there were people who suggested to my parents, you know, because as I mentioned to you, we were rather -- substantially, you know, comfortable, wealthy, that we should buy a large parcel of land, or a building in Jerusalem. So it was customary in those days, that the Jews didn't do anything without sharing it with a rabbe -- not a rabbi, the rabbe. Do you know the distinction between one and the other? A rabbi --

Q: How would you dis --

A: A rabbi -- a rabbi is a rabbi, a roof. A functionary in the community. The rabbe was the head of the dynasty, of the rabbinic dynasty, this, you know [indecipherable]. So any major decision that Jews had to make, you know, like, you know, going abroad with, you know, with a major investment, usually my father, or whoever it would be, would go to the rabbe, and ask for a brucha, ask for a blessing, you know? And ask for his advice. And when my father came to the rabbe to tell him that Jonah wants to go to Israel, and there are friends that are advising our parents to invest a substantial amount of money in Israel -- in Palestine in those days, not Israel. So, the rabbe's answer -- the rabbe's answer was, when Messiah will come, we will all go to Israel. Right now we should stay here, and we should serve God in a -- in a pious manner.

Q: But in spite of that, your brother left in 1934?

A: Yes, he was the strongest revolutionary in the family.

Q: Was he?

A: Oh yes.

Q: But that -- was that hard for you when he left? You were 14 years old.

A: I missed him.

Q: Yeah.

A: I missed him very much. He was, you know, he was part of the aggressively, you know, aggressive group that were asserting themselves, to make their way into modern society, and to accepting new ways. And most of all, going to Palestine, and building a -- you know, a state.

Q: Did he also f -- do you think that he believed that anti-Semitism was only going to get worse, that he couldn't live a life in [indecipherable]

A: There ne -- there was no discussion about that. Everybody recognized it, including my parents, including people that -- my parents equals. We all recognized that anti-Semitism is escalating, and it's going to get worse, and something needs to be done. But no one, no one, in his wildest dreams, has any idea what is coming.

Q: Yeah. Did you think about going?

A: Yes.

Q: To follow your brother?

A: Yes, yes. Yes, as a matter of fact, I started in junior college, a Hebrew junior college in Lvov, and my aim was to go to the University of Jerusalem to continue studies.

Q: So when you gra -- you graduated high school, obviously --

A: It -- it -- well, bear in mind, it was the -- I had --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- high school, but the -- the school that I am talking about was a junior college, a Hebrew junior college, which was a combination of the -- of the leedselm, you know what leedselm is? The le -- this is the last two years of high school, and college.

Q: So you left Hamishov --

A: Yes.

Q: The last two years of high school --

A: Right.

Q: -- to go to Lvov?

A: Right, right. And then came --

Q: And so what year -- what year was --

A: -- ca -- and I came home in ’38 when my father died.

Q: Right, right. So when did you leave to go to school?

A: ’36.

Q: ’36.

A: ’35 -- ’36.

Q: Right. And where did you live in Lvov? Why Lvov anyway?

A: Lvov was one of the largest cities.

Q: Right.

A: And it was a beautiful city, and my father’s sister lived in Lvov, and they were -- when I, you know, convinced them that I want to go to Lvov, and I want to study in Lvov, they came to realize that they are fighting a l -- a losing battle. They didn’t admit it, but they -- they realized it. So they figured at least let me be well educated, and you know, let’s pick the best of what is coming. And he had a sister in Lvov, so I lived with his sister, with an aunt of mine.

Q: So was this a -- a new awakening too, to be able to be in such a large city like that?

A: Oh yes, it --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- ma -- made a major impact on me. It was a cultural city, and it was a large city, and you know, in the youth, it was a wonderful youth. There were wonderful Jewish organizations, and I was -- I was very, very fortunate that I spent two years in [indecipherable]

Q: Right.

A: It contributed a lot to the shaping of me as a young man.

Q: Tell me a little bit about social relations between boys and girls, and -- and what was that like growing up, was there --

A: Again, I must repeat that this was a transitional period.

Q: Right.

A: And some of the people, you know, participated in it -- some of the young people, and some of the young people didn't. But by and large, we were the avant-garde. For instance, I was a member of the Shamare Atsyere. Shamare Atsyere was a leftist, you know, very progressive organization, but intellectual. You know, they -- we -- hebr -- knowing Hebrew was a must, otherwise you couldn't be a member of this organization. And they were to -- you know, my friends, boys and girls, you know, we -- whatever we were unable to do at home, you know, and I mean the lifestyle, and even the reading, you know, and what have you, it all took place in the organization, the organization shaped the youth, you know. And it was -- it was a small town, but a small town that had all the aspects of a developing community with -- in -- in -- in every manner. It -- it -- the -- to give you some silly examples, there were two cars in our community. Two cars that were privately owned. There were 30 telephones. 30 telephones in the entire community. And -- but there were many very fine institutions. For instance, there was a -- a loan society that didn't charge interest.

Q: Oh, loan.

A: A loan society.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: To help people, you know, if they needed a transition from a difficult period. And this was a wonderful institution. There was a Jewish bank, you know, that it was more of a -- it was a bank, it -- it functioned as a bank, and it charged interest, but it was more a beneficial society, you know. And so there were all kinds of organizations in town. There were the -- you know, the typical divisions between the Betar, the Shabotinsky group, and Shamare Atsyere. You know, we were f -- yo -- the -- constantly fighting with one ano -- not physically fighting, but discussing, and you know, and trying to mobilize and get more of the young people into our organization than into the other -- it was a major issue, you know. Where the one was a Revisionist, you know, Betar, over the one [indecipherable] Shamare Atsyere, it was a haloots, you know. All the organizations.

Q: And when you would sit and argue, what would be the major portions of the argument?

A: The major por -- is the ideology of -- you know, of how we should conquer Palestine, and should -- should it be -- the Shabotinsky was a -- you know, a fabulous orator, and he felt that, you know, the only way how to do it is by training Jewish youth to be physically able, and capable of handling weapons, and -- and what have you. And prepare like th -- fight like the rest of the world is fighting. The Zionist organizations felt that it was an intellectual process. We need to educate young people, you know, we need to take them

away from the Hassidic ways and methods of living, and bring them in -- into modern -- into, you know, Jewish philosophical debate, Jewish, you know, readings, Jewish classics. Bear in mind that the Yiddish culture, the Yiddish [indecipherable] came to be within a period of, I would say 50 years, 60 years. You know, when you talk about Shalomar [indecipherable] Farin -- are -- these names mean anything to you? You know, these -- they all --

Q: What's the last name that you --

A: Mandolere Mochais Farin.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: That -- he was one of the early ones, even before Shalomar Lachin, you know. So it was -- it was a -- a transformation in the making.

Q: Right.

A: You know, and I was very fortunate that I lived in that time, because it was a very creative period. It -- you know, 50 years before that, there were no questions asked. A young man needed to go to the Yeshiva and sit, and study, and -- and be pious, and wear the same attire that, you know, Jews were wearing. Not us. You know, we were already -- we were rebelling, and -- and I'll tell you a joke which will be reflective of this. Our way of demonstrating that we are progressive was, for instance, to walk around without hats, you know. Not to have a cover. But you never dared to do it in the presence of your father or your mother, because you would hurt them terribly. So I remember once walking with a friend of mine on the -- you know, on the -- on -- on the street, and neither one of us wore a hat, you know, because this was our way of expressing our rebellion. And suddenly his father came across, he didn't expect him, and he saw him without a hat. So he says, "Why are you walking around without a hat, with a," -- you know, "with a bare head?" So he said, "I'm hot." So he says, "If you're hot, why don't you take off your pants?" But it was a transitional period, and many of the young people of our town got involved in Zionist organizations. Quite a few went to Palestine, including of my brother, you know. And some of them became very, very active in Jewish defense. Some of them became very active in Hagganah.

Q: Right.

A: Including of my brother.

Q: Right.

A: You know. And they were the ones that prepared Palestine to be able to accept the immigration of -- after -- after the war of -- you know, after the Holocaust.

Q: Now, your brother didn't come back and forth, he -- he remained --

A: No.

Q: -- once he left, he remained there.

A: He remained there.

Q: Yeah. One more small -- small question. Did you start dating when you were a teenager?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Yes --

A: Oh, very much so.

Q: Yeah?

A: Yeah, that was part of the rebelling, you know, we were -- we were a group of kids, you know, nice kids, good kids, and absolutely, in the dating, and -- and going steady, and kissing, and hugging, and -- and what have you.

Q: Yes? You went steady?

A: Oh sure.

Q: Yeah?

A: Sure, absolutely.

Q: So this wa -- it wasn't just groups of kids being together, you were actually --

A: It -- it --

Q: -- focused on the one person --

A: -- it was being together --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- it was kids being together, but in the being together, it's like young people, you know.

Q: Right.

A: Without any question. I mean, we -- I would say that it was -- beginning with my brother's generation, it was a constant transition from the old Hassidic, pious, you know, very restricted manner, that the progress was made on opening the windows, and letting in fresh air.

Q: So -- so there was sexual experimentation as well --

A: Yes.

Q: -- which would have been somewhat different.

A: Yes, yes it was.

Q: Do you think Jewish young women, as well as young boys, or was more so among the boys you had --

A: No, Jewish young women and boys, that -- well, le-le-let me say this -- this to you, if you are referring to promiscuity, you -- if you -- if you went with a girl steady, you didn't want her to --

Q: You didn't want to have sex.

A: Right.

Q: Really?

A: You may have desired it, but you know, if she was going to be your steady, you wanted her to be pure.

Q: I see, and you -- I see. That's interesting.

A: So the dating was more in school, with non-Jewish girls, and --

Q: So you --

A: -- no dates, but --

Q: But -- sexual experimentation --

A: Right.

Q: -- would be with non-Jewish girls?

A: Right. Very, very seldom it happened with a Jewish girl. You know, th -- the -- these things were taken seriously, it -- again, it depends when we are talking about. Are we talking 1920, are we talking 1930?

Q: Well, 1920 you were a baby.

A: I was a baby.

Q: So we're talking the 30's for you --

A: Right.

Q: -- not what --

A: There is no question about it that by the time I grew up, and I was, let's say 15 - 16 years old, that our town, like many other towns were on a rapid path of transition.

Q: Of a certain kind of modernization?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: But it's -- i-it's -- there's something t -- is painfully ironic about all of this, because here the world seems to be changing in some radical ways, opening up to a kind of modern world, and then there is this huge machine of death that comes in the midst of it. It's so --

A: We didn't expect this.

Q: Of course not.

A: No one --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- no one expected it. Bear in mind that, you know, the -- the history was that Germany, in first World War, has occupied our -- the town where I lived. They -- they ran occupational force, but there was nothing, you know, that they would do to -- nothing. And another thing, the fighting -- the fighting took place on the front line. Once the front line moved 10 -- 10 kilometers, or 20 kilometers, that was the end of the fighting. So instead of having the Russian -- the Russian police, or Polish police -- you know, you had German police, but --

Q: No different.

A: And -- but in 19 -- [indecipherable] let me say this to you, I mean, we all had radios, we ordered newspapers, and we knew that in 1933, when Hitler came to power, that terrible things are happening in -- in Germany. Terrible things are happening in Germany. In Poland, the Poles aped, you know, many of the things that were happening in Germany. They started implementing laws, which were outright anti-Semitic. For instance, Jewish students that were in college, could not sit on the benches with the Poles, they had to be on the left side. And those who didn't want to be on the left side, stood in the back. You know, there were constant fights for, you know, equal rights, and -- and what have you. Poland was in the process of becoming a very, very anti-Semitic country.

Q: Was -- did -- so there was a great deal of nationalism, and a great deal of fascism that was beginning to grow --

A: Yes.

Q: -- in Poland in a way that you hadn't experienced before.

A: It -- well, bear in mind that -- you know, that it -- the love for Jews was never there. You know, if -- for instance, if you are talking about Poland was occupied, as you know from history, by Russia, Germany, and Austria. Austria was the only -- the only area where they were liberal and progressive, and they treated the Jews very well, and gave them opportunity to enter schools, and study. The Russian occupation was very, very oppressive. You know, the -- in the [indecipherable] they were, you know. And the Germans not as much, but w -- the Germans that we remembered were not Germans that we were afraid of, but when you started seeing what Hitler is predicting, you know, and we read Mein Kampf, and we knew --

Q: You did? You read it?

A: Oh yes.

Q: You read it in Polish or in German?

A: Polish.

Q: In Polish.

A: Yeah.

Q: And what did you think?

A: It was frightening. We knew that terrible things are coming.

Q: Did you actually read it from cover to cover?

A: No, no, no.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: No, but you know, major excerpts --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- and what have you.

Q: So did you, in your groups --

A: Discuss.

Q: -- you discussed this?

A: Absolutely, absolutely.

Q: And -- and were there people who thought that there was going to be a war, do you think? Do you remember?

A: Well, as far as war is concerned, yes we saw -- if -- it depends when. If you are talking, for instance in 1934 - 1935, Hitler started his expansionary programs, you know, and he entered -- in 1938 he entered Austria, and he occupied Czechoslovakia, and [indecipherable] you know, from the French. It -- it was all coming, and it was coming rapidly, and it was very scary. But you want to know something? You just don't pick yourself up and go.

Q: Yeah.

A: It wasn't that easy.

Q: No.

A: In particular in those days. You know, some people, for instance, I met them after the war, and I asked them, did they went in Palestine? Why did you leave? He said, "We knew what was coming. We knew that we have to build an independent home for the," -- you know, "for the -- the Jews." But on the other hand, in many cases people were, let's say, the only one, and they were parents, they were not well, and what have you. Picking yourself up and leaving, and uprooting yourself is a major issue.

Q: Right. Even for a very wealthy family.

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes.

Q: Did your brother write and say get out of there?

A: My brother was pleading. First of all, he -- he was more sensitive to the fact what's coming, because the German Jews started coming into Israel.

Q: I see.

A: So he was more aware of it. There were Polish Jews that lived in Germany that were pushed over the border, in the boneshin --

Q: Right.

A: -- for instance, you know there was a -- so for me to tell you that the onslaught of Nazism came unexpectedly, I don't think I would be telling you actual conditions.

Q: Right.

A: It was coming in that we saw it coming, but none of us, none of us had any idea about total annihilation. We felt we are going to have a bad time, we are gonna be in for a very difficult period, you know, something like, you know, the [indecipherable] in the end of the 19th century, maybe worse, you know. Believe it or not, but we were preconditioned to the fact that for one reason or another, destiny has designated a lot of suffering and struggling for us, you know. And it -- it was a difficult time, but I don't want to talk to you generalities, I want to talk to you specifics. Specifics is that in spite of all this, you know, life had to go on, life had to function. And the community had -- it -- it was a microcosm. Tom -- Tomashev was a microcosm of the larger being.

Q: Right.

A: For instance, if you talk about Wilno, Wilno had a very, very active, you know, cultural Jewish life, and you know, poets, and writers, you know, came out of there, it was that way. Wilno was described as Jerusalem of Lithuania. Or you talk about Warsaw. Warsaw was the capital of Poland. And you also had the emergence of a labor organized movement, a Jewish labor movement, the Bund, and the Communist party. The Communist party consisted -- members of the Communist party came from different walk of life, they came from poor working class, came from very rich. Some of my very dear friends, you know, and our parents were dear friends, they were members of the

Communist party. But it was a small group. The biggest group was the Bund. These were the Jewish unions, so to say, unions.

Q: Right.

A: You know, that became part of a -- an organization. The Bund was not in favor of building a home in Israel, the Bund was in favor of establishing our presence, and our life, and our privileges in Poland, in th -- Lithuania, in Czechoslovakia, and they played a major role, because they did more than -- than -- than expressed -- you know formulated, you know, ad -- and advocated the policy of fighting for our rights. They gave the Jewish laborers a sense of pride, a sense of being something special, of being organized as a union. It -- it [indecipherable] and, you know, Medem was the leader of the Bund, but there were poets and writers, that were very much in favor of th -- very much siding, like [indecipherable] for instance, siding with the philosophy of the Bund, that we have to fight for our rights, for our existence in Poland. And there were designers that figured that we are wasting our time, that the ti -- the place where to go and concentrate our efforts is Palestine, because this is the land -- you know, Hertzel was earlier, you know.

Q: Right.

A: But these were successions, and you know, it -- so what I'm trying to say to you, everything that I am talking to you about, did not happen from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

Q: Right, right.

A: It was a gradual succession.

Q: [indecipherable] we -- were you ever attracted to join the Bund?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No. I was a Zionist. The basic difference between the Bund, and the Zionist movement is the Bund, A was a labor organization. Fought religion, because they felt that religion is -- is opium for the masses. This used to be the slogan. And they fought -- they tried to ally themselves with Socialists, and -- pol -- Polish Socialists, which were on the [indecipherable] there was an organization of Polish Socialists, and they tried to align themselves with them. But if you ask me whether they were many wealthy Jewish people that became part of the Bund, perhaps. You know, it -- it wa -- this wasn't a matter of wealth or poverty. By and large, you know, the Jewish people in Poland were poor people.

Q: Right.

A: You know.

Q: Right. It was [indecipherable]

A: They were a small percentage, you know, that emerged as people of substantial wealth. Was there a middle class? Perhaps, but --

Q: Not big.

A: No, and -- and it -- the middle class that we are talking about is a pitiful middle class. Middle class is where, you know, they scratched out a living, you know, and perhaps maybe a little more, but by and large, the Jews were not wealthy.

Q: Right.

A: By and large as I described it to you, until the changes started coming about, the husband was the one that was -- saw himself as the scholar, and he needs to study the Bible, and -- and sit, and go to services three times a day, and -- and what have you. And the woman was the one that sit in the marketplace, and sell some beans, or -- or -- or vegetables, or --

Q: Right.

A: -- or you know, herring, and a -- it -- it -- it was politic.

Q: Let me just ask you one -- one more question for this section. When you went to Lvov to go to school, what -- what were you studying, what did you think at this point if the w -- if your dad hadn't died, and you didn't go back home, what would you have done?

A: I would have -- I would have graduated th-th -- the junior college, and I would have gone to Israel. I had the promise of my parents that they will permit --

Q: Really?

A: -- for this to happen, yes. Because, as I told you, it was my brother -- in particular my brother, and my younger sister, that paved the way for me, that --

Q: Right.

A: -- you know, won some compromises from our parents. Our parents were very, very war -- religious, very religious. But smart, and worldly. They knew that the direction is. They refused to accept it, but they knew that the direction is going the way we are going, you

know, to blend in, but no-not to get mixed in with society, but to be able that i -- study the language. There were many Jews that spoke a very broken Polish.

Q: Right.

A: You know, a very broken Polish. And this was, no way, we -- we felt even if to stay in Poland, we must be part and parcel of the community as such. We must have our representatives in parliament, we must educate our children in -- in we -- there's one thing I will want to tell you, that the Jews of the -- of Poland, and of Lithuania, had a tremendous sense for social justice. As I mentioned to you, they were loan -- a society to free -- a loan free -- interest free society. They were, in those days, to give you another example, they were -- to help a Jewish girl find a husband and get married was a big mitsveh. My mother was known that she always tries to find a match, you know?

Q: Right.

A: And she arranged the wedding.

Q: Really?

A: She arranged the wedding. But it was a sense of social justice, a sense of helping people. And this was not only my mother, there were all, you know, many people in town that did that. There were many -- there were many customs there that need to be understood. For instance, there were beggars that were going from town to town and stopped, and asked for a fenegar, or a few pennies, and what have you. Friday night, they came to synagogue. It was an established custom that the synagogue -- th -- the people that belong to the synagogue cannot go home without taking a noyrech, which means a guest. And -- and he was seated at a table, you know, and he had Shabbas with us. Th-This was a very, very noble thing to do. There was a place, it was called the hagdish. A hagdish was a place -- a poor -- a -- a -- a -- a poorhouse, where these traveling beggars, you know, when they came, could come in and they got a bundle of straw, you know, and they could sleep. They didn't pay anything for it.

Q: Right.

A: This was done by the cultural society of the community, and by the gemeni, which was the organized Jewish society, you know? We were of sorts, we always had a certain degree of self rule, you know, between ourselves.

Q: Right.

A: To give you an example of self rule, if there was a dispute between two Jewish people, between two Jewish businessmen or what have you, it was customary not to go to court, but to go to a dintorah. They went to a -- to a rabbi -- not a rabbe, a rabbi, this was the

functioning, and they both presented their case, and -- and he pass judgment, and whatever the judgment was, this was it. So what I'm trying to say to you is, in the small towns, and I'm talking about Tomashev as a microcosm because the same thing applied to Zamosc, and it applied to Lublin, depending how large it was, and what particular part of economic life is in one place. If there were a lot of forests, there were sawmills, if there was a lot of --

Q: That's okay [indecipherable]

A: -- if there was a lot of agriculturals, there were flour mills, you know, the mills were normally settled, you know, in -- in -- in the areas where there were good col -- large agricultural, you know, teran -- terrains.

Q: Miles, it interests me that your parents, who clearly had a -- a very set idea about religion, and the importance of religion, were also very open, and smart enough not to alienate any of you children, who were moving in another direction. Cause there are different ways of handling these changes.

A: Well, you're not -- my brother -- you're not -- didn't have it so easy.

Q: You had --

A: I had it easy.

Q: I see.

A: He paved the way for me.

Q: Yeah, right.

A: He paved the way for me. He's a wonderful guy, he just wrote a book, you know, that --

Q: Stone Pillars?

A: Stone Pillars.

Q: Yes, I read it.

A: You know, and --

Q: It's -- it's wa -- quite wonderful.

A: It's very interesting.

Q: Yes, it is.

A: Because, you know, he talks about a -- an aspect of life that is hardly known here.

Q: Right.

A: You know.

Q: Right.

A: For instance, you asked me a question before, how did you, interact, with your friends, with your girls, and was there promiscuity, and what have you. Well, we were human beings, you know? Kids and dogs, they s -- weren't any different than they are today. But this difference that, you know, my predecessors had the fear of religion, you know. Dating girls was not accepted, you know. So depends of the period that you are talking about.

Q: We're going to change the tape now, we've come to the end of the tape.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: Miles, I wanted to go back to one question that I -- I think you moved away from a little bit. What were you studying? You were studying in order t -- when you went to Lvov -- in order to be able to go to Israel's -- I mean Palestine, so that you were studying things that would be related?

A: Of sorts, yes. First of all, it was a junior college, where Hebrew was a very major part of it. And the arrangement was that one who graduated junior college in Lvov, gained a year in the university, could enter on the second year of the university immediately. So this was of sorts a program to make it easier for students who intended to study in the Jerusalem University. It was cheaper, it was easier, they didn't have to leave home. So this was of sorts an in -- an inducement.

Q: Oh. And --

A: And the studies, they were -- they were the secular studies, the normal studies like anybody else, plus the Hebrew.

Q: And were there things like agriculture being taught?

A: Theoretically. The-theoretically. I'm serious about it, th -- what you are talking about is a different thing altogether, this was the kibbutzim.

Q: Right.

A: They were -- they were the people that young men and women, who were planning to go to Israel joined Hasharah, it was called, where they lear-learned to -- to plant, to cultivate, to chop woods, you know, and they -- the -- bear in mind that a good many of these young people grew up in -- in a non-physical world. Do you know -- am I expressing myself?

Q: Yes, yeah.

A: In -- it was the Hasharah where they were exposed to physical hardship. You know, they were exposed -- first of all they were taught a love for the soil, a love for planting, and -- and reaping. It was more than just a training school, it -- it was a training school in many ways. It was a process of refurbishing, redoing the mentality of the young people.

Q: And what was your favorite subject?

A: My favorite subject?

Q: Yeah.

A: History.

Q: Yes.

A: Yes.

Q: And any particular part of history?

A: No, history. I -- I -- I love history.

Q: Oh.

A: I love history. When I -- when I read a historic novel, I don't read the story. I -- I like to understand the -- the surrounding of it, what made it, what brought it about, and how did it affect, you know, the outside of it.

Q: So you like structure.

A: Yes.

Q: You like to understand the structure of something.

A: Right.

Q: So had you been able to continue with school, you think you would have focused on history?

A: If my father wouldn't have died, I had another year and a half to graduate the -- the -- the -- the seminar, what we called. And I would have gone to Israel, to the [indecipherable]

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Because, you see, my going to Israel was a two fold one. Number one, I wanted the education, you know, as a Jew, because my brother influenced me a lot, and as a young man, when I look back today, I was a very -- he -- he -- he educated me. He brainwashed me, if you want to use this terminology. And I was a very ardent believer in th -- in -- in the Jews have no choice, this is the only way, is to go to Israel, to Palestine, and build a home. A -- a Jew -- build a Jewish homeland. Build a Jewish homeland. Now, I -- I'm ke -- I'm coming back to the Tomashev, and I ke -- use the terminology t -- a microcosm. Tomashev was a very vibrant community, I have very fond memories of it, in every possible way. The fact that, you know, the doors opened for me, you know, culturally, historically, intellectually. I didn't sense it at that time. At that time I was excited with the issue of the day. I was excited with a soccer game that I participated in playing, or -- or a

ping pong game, or -- or what have you. And this was all -- you know, these were all things that took us away from the synagogue, and took us to the outside.

Q: Right. Was your father sick for a long time, did you exp --

A: No, no. He was not. He had high blood pressure, and had the stroke, and he didn't come out of it.

Q: I see. So that was a big shock --

A: Oh yes.

Q: -- for the family.

A: Yes, yes. He was a very, very loving father. Very loving father. Di -- di -- no -- you're smiling. The -- you have to look at life as it was. They were people that were bitter, and as a result of this became bitter with their children. They were bitter they had poverty, they were bitter on their, you know, being persecuted as Jews, they were bitter that they didn't marry right, because this was not a time where marriage was, you know, by a boy finding a girl, it was matchmaking. All these things, you know, had played a role in how the community functions. But I must tell you that my recollections of the community are very good, because when I look back at it, you know, and I look at all these things, you know, like making sure that no Jewish girl remains an alteh moid, an -- an old maid. You know, very nice. It affected -- there was a poor house where a person could go in and go to sleep without any questions. Very nice, you know. It -- it -- it affected Friday night, that no man could remain without being fed. These are things that, you know, speak to you. They give you the quality, you know. And then I started -- I am coming back to the breakthrough. Reading the poetry, bre -- reading Bialek, read -- reading, you know the Chonyahofsky. I-It was a new world, and it was an exciting world. I remember we used to si -- recite by heart, you know, poems like [indecipherable] you know [indecipherable] the city of Florida, you know, and what have you. So all in all, my recollections of those day, taking into consideration the restrictions, the constraints, and the situations as they were, my recollections are good.

Q: Right. Do you remember the funeral of your father?

A: Yes.

Q: Was it a big funeral?

A: A very big funeral. What I remember specifically, it was not customary in nower -- in those days, that if a Jew died, that they should be necrolog -- necrology, it -- they should be in -- in the paper, the -- you know --

Q: Oh, an obituary.

A: Obituaries. My father had three quarters of the paper full of obituaries from all over Poland. And this was not customary for -- well, for those days, for Jewish people.

Q: So that must have been very moving to the whole family.

A: It was, it was.

Q: And the funeral was a very traditional Orthodox funeral?

A: Very much so. Ver -- an Orthodox funeral. Th -- in those days it was customary that the body was washed by a special group, and dressed in white linen, and he was carried from -- carried to the funeral -- to the cemetery.

Q: In a pine box? No.

A: Not in a box.

Q: Carried with the -- in the white --

A: Carried -- he wa -- it was like a -- al -- it -- it -- i -- a -- a -- like hard tree boards, you know, tied together, and it was an honor to carry the -- the ti -- the -- to carry the deceased, you know. And people walked over, there were usually eight people that carried them. And when he was -- when the -- the body was brought to the cemetery, there were within -- within the grave, there were sideboards, but the Jewish law called for that the body must -- the body must lay on soil. And this conflicted with the laws of Poland. The laws of Poland were that you had to be in a box. So what they did is they built the -- the sideboards, and then -- and headboards, but before they started covering it, they pulled the boards out. That's breaking the law, but they d -- what I'm trying to say to you, that a religious law, to Jews, prevailed, always prevailed.

Q: Were there speeches at the funeral, or not?

A: No.

Q: Oh no, just prayers.

A: Yes, there were, before it -- before he was put in the -- in the -- in the grave, but of a religious nature.

Q: Right. Now, your father was what, 56?

A: And my father was 56 years old.

Q: And your mother was a little younger, or --

A: My mother was three or four years younger.

Q: Right.

A: You know, but my mother perished.

Q: Yes.

A: In the Holocaust.

Q: Yes, I understand. How did -- how was she after her husband died, was this -- it must have been a very difficult time --

A: It was a very difficult period. It affected us strongly, you know. You know, we were -- used to know the Jarket Lerman, the strong, the assertive, the decision maker, the p -- the power in the family.

Q: No more?

A: Nope. She was -- she was very -- she was broody -- she was brooding, you know. It affected her very strongly.

Q: So they were an extremely close couple, I gather?

A: Oh yes. Close, but bear in mind, you are talking about a Hassidic couple.

Q: Has -- yes, right.

A: You know. I don't remember seeing my father kissing my mother.

Q: Or holding her hand.

A: Or holding -- well, holding her hand --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- I don't remember that.

Q: That's interesting. But clearly, given her response --

A: Oh, very much so.

Q: Then it was something --

A: They had a wonderful, wonderful life together. But it was a Hassidic life, you know.

Q: Yes. So, do all of the -- the brothers and sisters who are home, get together after -- a few days after the funeral and decide --

A: Yes.

Q: -- that you do need to come --

A: Yes, yes.

Q: -- you can't continue with school.

A: Yes.

Q: Was --

A: Well, Mother predominantly, because she felt that, you know, that she liked me a lot, and as far as my brother is concerned, you know he was in Israel, you know, and Shlomo, and Esther and Peshe, they were married, they had their own families, you know, and what have you. So she felt that I am the closest to her, and she will need me. And it was a decision that family made, and --

Q: Right. Did that disappoint you in some way?

A: It did, because I very much wanted to graduate, I wanted to go to Israel. I was hoping that I will prevail upon my mother, you know, to invest in Israel, and --

Q: Ok -- s-so you -- so you come home, and you live at home now with your mother --

A: Yes.

Q: -- I gather, right? And you take over what?

A: I, at that time, took over -- assisted mother in her business --

Q: In her business.

A: In her business.

Q: And so what's happening to your father's -- the mill business, what was that --

A: My oldest brother.

Q: Shlomo.

A: Shlomo stepped into it.

Q: I see.

A: Yeah.

Q: And Esther, and Peshe are --

A: Esther was in the flour mills all along. Esther lost her first husband a few years after they got married. And she remarried, and she had two children with her new husband, and she was always in the flour mills. But one was in Beljets. By the way, one of our mills was right across the street from the death camp of Beljets --

Q: Unbelievable.

A: But, you know, I am talking -- I'm jumping ahead of myself.

Q: Jumping ahead, yeah.

A: But Esther was always, Esther and her husband, Yoshu, they were always involved with the flour -- with the flour mill business. And one was in Beljets, one was in Zamusc, one was in Tomashev, one was in Daszhisk. You know, so this was a big business.

Q: Mm. So you have, what? A year, two years before the war starts?

A: Two years.

Q: Two years. Was this --

A: Two -- a year and a half to be exact.

Q: Yeah. Was this difficult for you, to make this switch to be [indecipherable]

A: I missed -- I missed my town. I missed Lvov, I missed the life in Lvov, because it was a very modern life already, with, you know, theaters, and --

Q: Right.

A: -- you know, operas, and ballets, and it was a -- that -- it -- it was a -- that -- th-the life, you know, that -- you know, modern -- modern people have appreciated, and, you know, I could afford it, I could afford the tickets and what have you. It was great life, wonderful, and I had good friends in school, wonderful, wonderful people I -- you know --

Q: So your life became somewhat smaller again, in a certain way, yes.

A: Absolutely. It -- it -- no, I -- I wouldn't say it became smaller, because when I came back, I was more assertive, and mother recognized that if she wants me, she cannot fight me, you know. So I was very active in working with mother, but I was very active in the community. I was active in our -- our sports club was the Harpoyle. I was active in the sports club, I was active in Shamere Atsyere, you know, and we -- I brought you some pictures out -- i-it's amazing, you know. You will see a group of people, you know, like you'd see a group of people here, young ones today, but wonderful, wonderful, and some of them are really -- you could sense, you could feel that they are the future leaders of -- of the -- and -- of the community, or the Jewish people.

Q: Right. Did you like business in some ways?

A: Yes, yes, but I didn't permit it to swallow me. I liked it very much, but I didn't permit it to swallow me. No, I had a sense for business.

Q: Right. Clearly.

A: If you asking me whether I was the scholarly type, always to -- to live on books, and -- and -- no, no.

Q: In terms of hearing about what's going on in Germany, in 1938, in November, there's Kristallnacht, there's The Night of Broken Glass.

A: Right.

Q: You heard about this. Was there any repercussions in Poland, where you were?

A: As I told you before, first of all, Poland itself was in an escalating process of anti-Semitism. The leader of the Polish government, who was most benevolent, was Pilsudski, and after he died, the right wing organizations took the upper hand in Parliament, and took the upper hand in the country. And you know, again the same story. They were afraid of Germany as much as we did. And their fear expressed itself by finding victims, you know, by looking for scapegoats. And anti-Semitism escalated substantially, very substantially. And these were not good days in Poland.

Q: Was there any kind of pogrom right after Kristallnacht?

A: There was -- there was a pogrom in Pshittik.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: One pogrom, but Jews resisted. The Jews resisted, but there was a pogrom, and one Jew got killed there.

Q: But in Tomashev?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No. But, for instance, it was customary before the boys went to the army, they had to go and, you know, be checked out whether they're healthy, whether they're suitable, whether they're fitted. So the boys from Tomashev, and the surrounding areas used to come and this was kind of like a -- a bachelor's party, you know, so they went into the liquor stores, and bought liquor, got drunk and started beating up Jews. We in Tomashev didn't take too kindly to it, so we organized -- even my brother, in his youth, you know, organized defense. And when they started beating up Jews, next time the Jews were prepared for it, and they got their portion, and they'd stopped it. So it was a normal, ongoing life. It wasn't all peaches and cream, it wasn't all wonderful things. There were, you know difficulties, there were sadness in it. But also, health. I'm not talking about physical health, I'm talking commununal health.

Q: Was there talk about war, about Germany attacking Poland in '38 - '39?

A: Yes, yes. Because first of all, Czechoslovakia was invaded already. Austria was invad -- not invad -- invaded -- invaded by -- invited, but invaded. So i-it was clear, without any question in Hitler, you know, Hitler and Goebbels, you know what they are, remarks, public -- public addresses, they talked about expansion, you know, labensurround, which means they needed space to expand, you know, to be able to live, and to allow the -- the Third Reich, which they were hoping that will last a thousand years, to establish itself, not -- th-the -- there -- the signals -- the signs were there, without any question. The signs were there that we are heading for bad times, but no one -- no one had any inkling of what was coming. I'm talking about a massive annihilation.

Q: Did the -- did the Polish government say we can defeat the -- I mean, was -- was there a kind of propaganda, yes?

A: There was empty talk, sure, sure. I remember two days before the Germans invaded Poland they were -- you know, there was a dispute over Dansik. Dansik was a -- a free city, you know, that was near -- it was a port city, a free city. So you could see young

Poles going on the streets, we will smother them with our helmets, we will throw the helmets at them. You know, empty talk, you know, bravado, and what have you. But we realized that we are dealing with a formidable enemy. It was an enemy -- to describe it to you, the Poles had cavalry. You know, riding, you know --

Q: Horses, right.

A: Horses. And good cavalry, a good army, but this cavalry had to fight tanks. How does cavalry fight tanks, you know, so --

Q: At what age wer -- was one s -- wer-were boys supposed to be conscripted, 18?

A: No, 21.

Q: Ah, 21. So you were not at that point yet.

A: No.

Q: Fortunately. So what's the first experience of war in 1939 for you, do you remember?

A: Well, it was -- it came unexpectedly. I -- I mean there were -- you know, that -- feuds -- there were the discussions, and -- and the Polish minister Farnafayas, who went to Berlin to try to negotiate something, and they would have -- in my opinion they would have been very good collaborators. The way the -- th -- it prevailed at that time, the Socialist party is, among Poles, weakened. The -- the extreme right party got stronger, and you asked me what was the first impact of war? Totally unexpected air raids, killing and burning. Killing and burning, you know, homes. Our home was burned the second day of the war.

Q: Wow. And where were you?

A: I was at that time, when the war broke out, the biggest problem was to get gasoline, you know, to have -- so we had -- the Polish army retreated, and there was -- two officers were in Poland with a car. And I made them an offer, because in our business, we also had a wholesale business of gasoline. It's like [indecipherable] you know, everything of [indecipherable]. We had many businesses.

Q: Right.

A: So we have gasoline, and we had it stored in a warehouse. I offered them, you know, to fill up their car, and to take four or five containers, and I should go with them, and they were -- they -- they backed up without realizing that from the other side, the Soviet Union will come in, you know. So I was not home, and I came home a few days later, and all of Poland was occupied already. And I found Mother. The house was burned. A major -- the

store was burned, and the whole city was badly damaged. Two of my colleagues that I grew up with were killed in the bombardment, you know. It was sporadic bombardment that -- not that there was any specific reason to bombard Tomashev. It was not a -- you know, a military center or anything, it was a community.

Q: Right. Do you remember your -- your impression as this young person, who's lived a rather privileged life in many ways, coming back into --

A: I was very shaken, very shaken. Very scared. And I know one thing, that I will not stay with the Germans. So I moved forward -- because I came back, I told you, when I w-went with these officers. And at that time, when the Soviet army came in, a good many people looked to them as liberators, because, you know, they -- they were talking about freedom of the individual, and no anti-Semitism, you know, that it's against the law to be anti-Semitic and what have you. So we truly believed that, you know, they are the defenders of right, and good, and so I went to Lvov, because Lvov was the city where I studied, and I -- I knew the city. And I took mother with me to Lvov, and then my sister came, and then my brother came. So it was turmoil, it was turmoil. Our town was occupied by the Germans. In our town, the border between the occupation that wa -- they carved up Poland into two half, was about 20 miles south of -- of our town. So, my mother and my sister left Tomashev because it was burned down, and they were, in the beginning when they came in, they killed a few Jews, just without any reason. So the signals were bad, and we felt that being with Russians is going to be, you know, a way of surviving, not having all these things in a Communist regime, but surviving.

Q: Now, Lvov is about what, 120 kilometers?

A: More or less, yes.

Q: From Tomashev.

A: From Tomashev.

Q: So how did you go from one to the other, and what did you take, one place to the other?

A: Took nothing.

Q: Nothing?

A: There was nothing to take. I --

Q: Because the place had burned down.

A: You know, sure. I c -- I think my -- my older brother, Shlomo, gave me some of his clothing, because where he lived, and my sister Peshe lived, this was not bombarded, so

they remained. And I got some clothing from them, and I -- and I went, and I took Mother with me.

Q: And how did you go, you walked?

A: Partially walked, and partially on -- on trucks, you know. It -- it -- because the military, the -- the Soviet military units were only about eight miles from us. So the minute we got into Ravaruska, which was the next town, you know, the -- no, there was a small one, Lubicha, a small one in between. But Ravaruska was already a town more or less the size of ours, maybe a little bigger. And there we had people that -- customers, they used to buy from us, and -- and what have you. So, it wasn't in two [indecipherable] so to say. We got into Ravaruska, and to catch our breath, and collect our senses, and from there I said to Mother, "Let's go to Lvov, because this is a large city, and we'll be able to function better."

Q: Now I know this is going to sound stupid, but do you have money? Do you have banks in other towns other than Tomashev? I mean what are you -- you're coming into a place where the --

A: The only thing what we -- what -- the -- the -- the question is a good question, no we didn't, because whatever was it -- in -- in -- in our home, including, you know, jewelry and what have you, this all burned down. The jewelry, I think, was found by somebody and they refused to rec -- to admit that they found it. And mother and I came in with practically nothing. But how did we survive? In Lemberg -- in Lvov, there were several factories that we bought stuff from them. There was a candy factory that we bought candy from them. There was a factory of lachmas, which is a blue color that you put into -- into whitewash, you know, to paint houses. So, at that time, b-before the Russians establish themselves, there was an in between period, a hiatus. So the fact that we dealt with them, and we knew them -- so they gave us s-some of the m -- some of the manufactured goods at hard cost prices from before the war. And this was the war, and everything jumped a thousandfold. So in -- we -- this gave us a good start, and we have managed to establish ourselves.

Q: So they gave it to you on a loan because you didn't have anything to --

A: Sure, we didn't have anything.

Q: -- obviously, so then you paid it off.

A: Of course.

Q: All right.

A: But the object was to get it and to take it out from the factory, because as [indecipherable] the factory [indecipherable] 10 times as much.

Q: Yeah. So where did you live?

A: We got an apartment.

Q: So you didn't go to your father's sister? Not with --

A: Not with Mother, because you know, she didn't have an enormously large apartment.

Q: Right. So did you rent a place?

A: Yes.

Q: You did?

A: Yes.

Q: And -- a nice place, a simple --

A: A nice place, it -- di --

Q: Not like what you had.

A: Not like what we had. It was a small -- a small -- it was a room with a very small kitchen. With a -- with a small -- small set up. But for Mother and I it was enough.

Q: But now your -- your brother Shlomo came, and Esther came, and -- and Peshe --

A: No.

Q: Peshe came.

A: Esther -- Esther remained where she was, because Esther was in an area where it was right on the border, but it was the Russians, you know. So they were there, but Peshe came, you know and it -- it was a matter of trying to organize ourselves, to find a place where to sleep and, you know, and how to -- how to earn a -- a -- to buy a l -- a loaf of bread.

Q: Right.

A: We went from extreme riches, to extreme poverty.

Q: It's a big --

A: It's a transition.

Q: A big transition.

A: And a difficult one.

Q: Yeah.

A: But i -- the -- the good name that Mother had, and the reputation that Mother had, was very helpful with these businesses that were in Lvov, you know, for us to bounce back a little bit.

Q: And how was her mood now?

A: Sorry?

Q: Her mood? How -- was she coming out of depression, or --

A: Very depressed.

Q: Very depressed.

A: Very depressed, very depressed. And, you know, she couldn't take all this, you know, and I -- I am very, very glad today, that -- at the opportunities developed in a way that I could be with her, and I could steady, and I could be of help to her, because I loved Mother very much, I -- she was a very special lady. Very special lady.

Q: I don't -- I don't know the ti -- the times well enough. Wo-would you talk to her about her feelings, or did you simply try to [indecipherable]

A: We just tried to do.

Q: Yeah.

A: You just tried to do.

Q: Right.

A: You know, again, you know, you are talking about days when a mother and son didn't embrace and kiss. I kissed her hand.

Q: Really?

A: Oh yes.

Q: In the old fashioned way of kissing hand, yeah.

A: Yes, yes, when I came from out of town, shook hands, I kissed her hand.

Q: How interesting. And your sisters, how were they? W-Was there more affection between mother and daughter?

A: There was more affection -- no, affection there was -- you're talking about visible affection?

Q: Th -- yes, physical affection --

A: Yes, yes.

Q: -- I didn't mean feelings.

A: Bet -- between sister, yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes, absolutely.

Q: Did your mother have friends?

A: Mother had friends, but I am trying -- I am thinking what to tell you. Mother had friends, but these were not friends that they went to play golf, or you know. These were friends that were similar in -- in -- you know, in their -- in their religious -- in the degree of their religiosity. Friends that, you know, that were also at least middle class, you know, at least middle class, with whom they had something in common, you know, and -- neighbors, you know. Are you asking me whether there was an organized Jewish social life for religious women? Not quite. Not quite. Fr-Free time was for prayer, for -- for study, and you know. And there wasn't any free time. There wasn't any free time.

Q: Right, because you had to work so hard.

A: Right.

Q: But did you immediately go back with the friends that you had from school, was there ano -- a re --

A: Oh, I -- we picked up --

Q: Yes.

A: -- well, first of all, the turmoil was all over --

Q: Right.

A: -- in, you know, some as I told you were killed, you know, from the bombardment. Some went into Russia immediately and some remained in pol -- in Lvov. And I had no trouble regrouping and finding my friends, and finding some of my friends, and -- and I made new friends, young people made new friends easily. The object was to grow in into a new system, to a new society. A society that, you know, perfomra advocated, you know, wonderful things. But it was far from it. It was far from it. Now, believe it or not, but when things settled down a little bit, there was many people, many Jews that felt that they want to go back home. Many. They want to go back home, they -- because you know, the -- the mass killings didn't start yet. We are talking '39.

Q: Right, right.

A: You know, the mass killing -- the actual mass killing started in '41. In between '39 and '41 there were sporadic killings, there were brutalities, there were catching Jews and taking them to work, you know, to dig ditches, and what have you. But there was not the onslaught, you know, the -- th-the massive process of annihilation was not there yet, you know.

Q: So there were people who were in Lvov who decided to go back to --

A: Right.

Q: -- where the Germans were occupying in Tomashev.

A: Right. And another thing is that the Russians suggested to the -- those that came and stayed there to take Russian passports. And the Jews didn't want to take Russian passports because they were hoping that, you know, things will straighten out, and they will be able to go home. So the Russians gave them passports with an 11th paragraph, that this is what it was called. And this is -- 11th paragraph was a passport of not trustworthy people, that they could not live a hundred kilometers -- less than a hundred kilometers from the border. And then, after awhile, it was the first massive tran -- ex -- th -- th -- the first massive transport of Jews from Poland, and Poles from Poland. Poles even more so, to Siberia. And my brother and his family were taken to Siberia. My sister Peshe was taken to Siberia. And Mother was on the train already, to be taken to Siberia. But when I came back from work, and I found out what is happening, I went out to the rail station. And there was a general from the KGB. And I walked over to him, and I say, "I have a complaint." You know, general of KGB didn't know what it means to have a complaint. I

was naïve, you know. I said I have a complaint, and he said, "What is your complaint?" I say, "Why did you take my mother away?" I am a citizen of Lvov, I have studied in Lvov before the war, she lives with me, and you have no reason to take her away." So he looked at me, and looked at me, and he said, "Do you know where she is?" I say, "No, but I know the transport." So he went with me, and we knocked in the boxcars, and calling her name. And finally I found the boxcar and I took her out, and took her back home. Of about 120 people that were, you know, e-expedited -- that -- do you know, exported, two people came out. One was a grandmother of a officer of the KGB, he escaped to Russia 20 years before that, and my mother. And I brought her out, you know, to -- she would have survived.

Q: If th -- if she had gone, yeah.

A: Right.

Q: But who was gonna know?

A: Who was know -- who -- who was -- who was to know at that time?

Q: And the -- the -- I think I'm not exactly clear about why these particular people were sent. They were considered to be --

A: They were considered not trustworthy.

Q: Trustworthy people.

A: The excuse was that they are not trustworthy people, and they are taking to Siberia to help build the -- the Russian effort.

Q: And where --

A: Anyone that -- I'm sorry.

Q: No, no, go ahead.

A: Anyone that the KGB, or the Encoverdaire, which was called at that time, did not consider trustworthy, you know, for turning the new terrains over into an established Communist regime, were shipped off. Many Poles -- many Poles were shipped off, and -- and perhaps in a more cruel manner, because these were the former police, the former judges, the former -- you know, the Polish intelligentsia. The Soviets felt that the intelligentsia is the most dangerous for them, because these are people that, you know, are thinking, and -- and they will eventually form resistance organizations, so they felt that the best thing to do is to ship them off to Siberia.

Q: Were they actually in box -- in boxcars, or --

A: Boxcars.

Q: So they were in an open space?

A: No, no, no.

Q: No, they were sitting in -- they were sitting in a --

A: Boxcars -- boxcars -- closed boxcars, like the boxcar that we have in the museum.

Q: I see, no -- but no chairs, I mean this was --

A: Yeah. But not with a hundred people, with lesser amount, and with a stove inside, you know, and a bucket, you know, for --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- necessary -- you know, for physical needs and what have you.

Q: So all of this must have been just crazy, maybe --

A: Terrible.

Q: -- for your mother, also, because --

A: Terrible, terrible.

Q: -- everything is sort of --

A: Right.

Q: You can --

A: But I brought her back and --

Q: Right.

A: -- you know, she calmed down, and you know, and I got a good job, you know, and so we were able to manage with my earnings.

Q: And you were working where, in the railroad?

A: I was working at -- no, the railroad I was working at a time when the Nazis came in.

Q: Uh-huh, okay.

A: I was in the supply -- in the su -- in s -- in the office of supply, state office of supply.

Q: Ah, for the Russians.

A: Yeah.

Q: And what does that mean, Miles, what does that kind of a job --

A: In Russian it's called snubjoinya. Subjoinya means to supply.

Q: Right.

A: Where i-if s -- if a factory -- let's assume a factory that was manufacturing suits, I'll give you an example, needed the material, they couldn't buy it directly, they had to go through the state office of supply, they got a material. They needed lining, it was a different story. They needed buttons, it was a different story. The same thing goes for any other. Let's say food supplies. They had -- everything had to go through the office of supply, it was a very peculiar way of running a -- an economy.

Q: And you were -- what -- what was your job in this?

A: My job, I was like a -- th -- a -- a -- the maseetsala channika -- I'm saying it in Russian, a -- a vice chair of a department. A vice -- a vis -- a vice manager -- a -- the assistant manager of a department.

Q: And how did you get this job?

A: I needed the job, and you know, I wanted to do something, you know, that you can use your head a little bit, I wasn't interested you know, in -- in -- in going out on the farm and working, and what have you. And th-the fact that, you know, they knew that I am educated, and I will learn the Russian quickly, th -- they -- they also wanted an educated cadre, you know, to work for them, and they wanted an educated cadre which will promote, and will help them, you know, implement, you know, the Communist regime.

Q: So your sort of Capitalist background didn't bother them, in this case?

A: No, th -- well, it -- I needed to be careful not to tell them too much about it, because when you went for a job, you needed to apply -- you applied for the job, and you needed to write your life history.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: This was a common thing, no matter what you did [indecipherable] an application with the life history. They needed to know immediately who you were, you know. So, with the life history, I had trouble.

Q: So you fudged it a little bit.

A: Fudged it. Fudged it.

Q: Right. Now, your mother is also working in some way, or not at all at this point?

A: At this point, y -- b --

Q: -- we're now --

A: -- we are talk about a period where the factories were already nationalized, and it was -- you couldn't get any more. In other words, the -- the -- the -- the gray market period is gone, and --

Q: So are we talking 1940 now?

A: We are talking 1940.

Q: Yeah.

A: The beginning of 1940. And this went on, you know, with intensification, until it -- June of 1941.

Q: Right. Now, yo -- your mother then, her life is really i -- in -- more radically changed, because she doesn't have work to do. So it's -- so you're supporting her.

A: I s -- I was supporting mother, she -- she kept home for me.

Q: Right.

A: You know.

Q: And Peshe is in Lvov?

A: Peshe was in Siberia by then.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And my brother was in Siberia. And --

Q: Did they go on their own?

A: No.

Q: No, they were sent. They're sent in that --

A: That was -- I told you, in that transport.

Q: And that's -- same transport.

A: And that -- mother i -- for instance, to send packages to my sister and to my brother, you couldn't do it from Lvov. Don't ask me why, but you couldn't do it from Lvov, you had to go to Kolomia. And Kolomia was a hundred, 130 kilometers from Lvov. So, for Mother to send a couple of packages to my sister and to my brother, it was a two day effort. You know, get on the train, go to Kolomias, stay in line, send the package, come back. So this she did.

Q: Oh my.

A: It was not easy.

Q: Yeah.

A: It was a difficult time.

Q: So, you earned enough to pay the rent, to ba -- purchase food.

A: Yes, no I earned enough.

Q: Yeah.

A: Di -- judging by -- by those circumstances, at that time, this was a pretty good job. A pretty good job.

Q: Did you feel comfortable with the Russians, and what they were ch -- what you thought they were trying to do at this time?

A: I -- I -- I felt comfortable because first of all, bear in mind, I was a product of Shamere Atsyere. I was a product of, you know, leftist leanings. And, you know, I did not believe that -- you know, these stories that revealed themself later, that they are so brutal, and they are so, you know, authoritarian, and so if -- so far away from what they were preaching. They were preaching one thing and doing another.

Q: But you didn't believe it at the time?

A: No.

Q: Your experience was not that, either.

A: My experience wasn't -- wasn't like this, and you know -- but I knew that they are -- it's not a liberal system, but it -- to make the comparison between Poland, of what we started, you know, feeling and experiencing, said so the heck with the wealth, and the heck -- heck with the material comfort. At least here, you know, I am an equal with equals, and you know, I'm doing a good job, and I'm getting compensated, and perhaps later I will be upgraded, and so on and so on. So for all practical purposes, I was satisfied.

Q: Were they asking you to join the Communist party? Was there any pressure?

A: Not that easy. Joining the Communist party was not so fast. First of all, it -- it was a gradual thing. And they -- you needed to prove yourself I -- at your word, and -- at meetings, because on every -- every workstation, there were political meetings, and you needed to stand up, and you know, praise the system, and praise -- praise what's going on. Getting into the Communist party was not an easy manner, and I wasn't too anxious for it. I was still hoping that -- you know, that somehow things will settle down.

Q: Right.

A: Still didn't think of Germany as a country of mass killers. You know, we figured, you know, we had Pshittik, the pogrom of Pshittik, so they had the -- the -- the Night of the Broken Glass. And everybody -- most people believed that the terrible things that you heard abo -- from Hitler and from Goering and from Goebbels, that it will blow over. Human nature is such that you look for hope.

Q: Right.

A: You -- for the slightest thread that you can catch, this is human nature. Human nature does not accept the formidable.

Q: Did you hear about what was happening in Poland? The yet -- the establishment of ghettos, since --

A: Not yet.

Q: You hadn't heard anything?

A: No. No, there were no ghettos yet. The ghettos started in 1940.

Q: Right, but we're in 1940. That's a --

A: Yes, in 1940.

Q: '40 [indecipherable]

A: Yes, we heard that Jews are being isolated, and -- but again, isolated, but not for mass killings, you know.

Q: Not for that, right. And there's -- is there talk of -- is Germany going to attack?

A: Yes, there is talk. First of all there is talk that, you know there are sporadic killings, and that the Germans are very brutal. And that the SS is a political party, it's not a military party, it's a political party. We heard all these things, and that's why we felt that being in Russia was, you know --

Q: [inaudible]

A: -- a wonderful thing.

Q: Yeah, right.

A: A wonderful thing.

Q: So, your perspective on what's happening is you're going to live your life in Russia now, it's a --

A: Absolutely.

Q: Right.

A: We had -- at that time, if you are talking about 1940, it was a matter of accepting wu -- one of two evils. But this was not an evil, you know. We functioned.

Q: Right.

A: You know, we were able to, you know, to -- there was a little bit of a gray market, you know, and if there was a possibility to buy something and sell it -- even clothing, you know, that -- there used to be an open market, you know, it's -- it was called pochawk. But people were selling their own stuff to -- to improve on their living, because --

Q: Right.

A: They didn't earn enough. These were war years, and they were difficult years, but not terrible years. The terrible years were in Germany, and Poland, occupied by Germany.

Q: Right.

A: And the real terrible years started in 1941, when they invaded Russia.

Q: So -- actually we don't have that much time on the tape. Cause I was going to ask you what that first one -- what that -- happened in June, in 1941. So 1940 is going on, and in January you --

A: Of sort -- stabilizing itself.

Q: Right.

A: Going -- of sort -- stabilizing itself. In other words, as you mentioned before, I accepted the fact that I leave in a countr -- I live in a country where there's a Communist regime, there's no private enterprise, and you'll need to -- we got to know them, and we got to know their weakness, and we used to laugh, you know how, you know they wear six watches, six wristwatches, you know, and -- and how corrupt they are, very corrupt, terribly corrupt system.

Q: And as a Jewish person, you're feeling okay?

A: Yes. Qualified, but yes.

Q: And what's the qualification?

A: The qualification is that we knew that anti-Semitism in particular, you know, in the country, is strong, but we didn't feel that we are being, you know, that we are in danger. And mind you, this is in time when the entire -- when the -- the entire Jewish population that it crossed the border either legitimately remained, or was shipped to Siberia.

Q: Right.

A: You know.

Q: Right.

A: But we didn't look at Siberia as a annihilation place, and it wasn't.

Q: And it wasn't, right.

A: It wasn't. You know, people that went to Russia, inasmuch as Stalin was a terrible, terrible, you know, paranoiac brutal killer, you know, Jews were not mass murdered at that time. They were shipped to Siberia to -- you know, to -- t -- to the slave labor camps, and what have you. It was a difficult time, a bad time, but not a horrible time.

Q: Now, since there's a certain kind of normalization because war is not yet upon you again, right, is -- are there theater groups, is there culture --

A: Very much so.

Q: Yes.

A: The cultural life in Lemberg was at it's height.

Q: Really?

A: Oh, tremendous. And I must tell you, you know, they were terrible in, you know, equipping the army. They were insane in slaughtering off their generals. They slaughtered off -- between 1932 and 1940, they slaughtered off the best of generals that they had. Marshall Bleecher, you know. But in spite of this, in arts, opera, ballet, fantastic, fantastic. Not good, fantastic.

Q: And were these inexpensive enough so you could go?

A: Very inexpensive.

Q: Really?

A: Very inexpensive. This was one thing. Rent was pennies. Radi -- television was pen --

Q: Theater, movies?

A: Streetcars, pennies, movies, theater. Pennies.

Q: Really?

A: This was all pennies. Clothing you couldn't get. Shoes you couldn't get. But culture, tremendous. I mean it.

Q: Yeah. No, no, no, it's -- it sounds quite wonderful in [indecipherable]

A: Well, it was exciting for young people, and this was the way young people said hey, so what is it? And there were even those that said to me, why did you ever -- what was so

special about your parents that you should have have everything, and we had to scrape to make it -- to -- to scratch together a living? And it was an argument.

Q: Right.

A: It was an argument. But the Bund, the -- the -- the organization that, you know, developed, and educated, and united the -- the working masses of Poland, were considered enemies of germ -- of -- of Russia. And the two leaders of the Bund organization were executed by the Soviets.

Q: Even though they're pro-worker?

A: Pro-worker, but not Communists. So what I'm trying to say to you is, it is very difficult in -- today, in normal life, to understand the abnormality of the time.

Q: Right.

A: On one hand I am telling you that I had a fantastic cultural life, and on the other hand, you know, they -- they soldiers were walking around with rags around their feet, because they didn't have boots.

Q: And how do you understand this disparity? Stupidity?

A: Stupidity. We laughed about it. Stupidity, perhaps the fact that it was poorly organized, very poorly organized. Singing hallelujahs to -- to the party, and to Stalin, were so abnormal, so horrendous, so large, and -- and th -- that it -- it -- you could sense that it's phony.

Q: Uh-huh. But it seem -- it seems -- the disparity seems so odd, to be able to organize, and have a whole cultural life for a population, and not be able to organize shoes, unless it was harder to get material.

A: No. It was hard to get material, and people did everything possible to excel in the foy -- in -- in the field of ballet, athletics, because they got to a -- a -- a s -- a very special level. The Soviet Union took care of those that they needed as a picture to the world. Their athletes, their -- their singers, their opera singers, their actors. You know, these were th- the ones that they show the world, we are a cultural society, and we are -- but we are availing this to the masses, where in your case, you have opera, you have theater, who goes there? The wealthy. The middle class at best.

Q: Right, right. And this transforms something.

A: And they were not wrong with this argument.

Q: Yes, yeah.

A: What they didn't tell you is that, you know, these were the years where Stalin started already eliminating, you know, his opponents, and he was very paranoid about it, and he saw enemies in everybody and anybody. And, you know, Trotsky was no longer in Russia, Trotsky -- Trotsky was killed already, in Mexico. And th-they were the trials, the infamous trials in -- in Russia. But this was in Moscow.

Q: Right. This wasn't where you were. Alright, I think we should take a break now, and the next tape we'll start with June of 1941.

A: Okay.

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

Q: Miles, wer -- we're gonna -- we're gonna go to the war, June 1941 in a moment, but I wanted to just go back to your name for a moment, because I realized that this -- and there's some noise -- at the start of the interview, I didn't ask you the name with which you were born, which was Shmoil. Can you just give us a sense of sort of a history of this change, from --

A: It's th -- well, it's a progression of changes.

Q: Yeah.

A: It's -- my Hebrew name is Shmoil. The pet name for Shmoil is Shmeelek. And then we dropped the s and it became Meelek. And from Meelek, when I arrived in the United States, in Ellis Island, and I registered as Meelek, he ask me why don't you make it Miles, and you're gonna be famous, like Myles Standish. I said, "You got a deal."

Q: Myles Standish, huh? Okay.

A: I -- I think Myles Standish is with a y if I'm not mistaken.

Q: Yes, it is, that's true, it's different. So he didn't know how to spell.

A: Probably not.

Q: All right, thank you. 1941, June, the Germans attacked the Soviet Union, and the worst is about to come. Where we -- where are you when the Germans attack?

A: I am with my mother in Lemberg, in Lvov, and the attack, it's totally unexpected, and Lvov is stunned. And within two days, within two days, the Germans were in Lvov.

Q: And is there much -- is there much fighting?

A: And there's an awful lo -- well, to begin with, there was a lot of -- the order were to evacuate anything that you possibly could, including machinery. It was three days, not two days. And whole factories were loaded on trucks -- on trains, including the workers, and send into the depth of rud -- into deep Russia.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah. It was turmoil, it was fear, when they were moving so ferociously, and so, you know, w-with bombardments, as I explained to you before, and with heavy artillery, and then they were -- they entered Lvov without damaging anything, because the Poles did not oppo -- not the Poles, the -- the Soviets did not oppose, did not resist -- did not resist

the entrance of the -- of the Germans. And the Germans came in and Lvov is a city that will go down in infamy because the Ukrainian nationalists implemented the pogrom, and it was thousands of Jews that were taken from the street, from the houses, from offices, and taking them to the brigitky, which was the jail of -- the famous jail in Lvov, and slaughtered. At that time, I was -- this -- this was -- I'm telling you something that's three, four days already, but not [indecipherable]. And I worked already, at that time, on the railroad, because the tracks from Lvov, deep into Russia were wider. And from Lvov going westward, they were narrower. So, wounded soldiers and -- and -- and equipment needed -- that needed to go westward were tran -- had to transferred from one to the other. So the Wehrmacht, an officer came down, and he asked people to go to work, you know, and we figured going to work, it's going to be the best thing. So I -- I worked at that time already at the railroad, and I had a -- a document that I am essential to the efforts of the [indecipherable] the German army, and I should be left alone.

Q: So this is within the first few days?

A: First few days, probably no -- no more than a week.

Q: And the Ukrainian Nationalists came in within those first few days and rounded up --

A: The Ukrainian -- the Ukrainian Nationalists, first of all, Lvov is a city that is partially Polish and partially Ukrainian. The vicinities for sure, you know, the agricultural vicinities for sure. So the pogrom that the Ukrainians initiated was with the acquiescence, with the permission of the Germans, but not with the participation. This was purely done by Ukrainians. The Ukrainian police, volunteer police, and volunteers in general. And I remember going back from work, and with a -- with a friend of mine who lived in -- in my building, Adonik was his name. I don't remember his last name. And we were stopped by a Ukrainian, and he wanted us to take to -- to the brigitky, and it must have been an angel from heaven, a man, a -- a Ukrainian stopped, and he said, "These people have a -- a document that they are employed by the Wehrmacht, you have no right to touch them." So he let me go. I would have been killed. I am sure, if he would have taken me into the -- to the confines of the jail, I would have been killed like many, many others.

Q: Yeah. And they were rounding up Jews only ?

A: At random.

Q: At random? Anybody?

A: At random, at random. Jews, and political officers of the army if they could find them.

Q: And did you see this as an attack on people who they thought may have been working with the Russians?

A: No.

Q: Or this was simply --

A: This was purely a pogrom.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: This was purely a pogrom.

Q: And how long did this last [indecipherable]

A: Four days, five days. But it was terrible. It was the first mass slaughter that I have experienced.

Q: So what did you see?

A: We didn't see anything.

Q: It was --

A: We -- all we heard is, you know, the machine guns, you know, because the -- the brigitky, the -- the jail that I am talking about, were in center city.

Q: Uh-huh. So they would bring people there --

A: Into the yard, and into the interrogative itself, and I don't know what was going on there. All you heard is the machine guns. And then, you know, th-they took Jews with open trucks, flat trucks, to take the -- the victims out to the cemetery to bury them.

Q: And did you see these trucks with dead bodies?

A: I did not.

Q: You didn't?

A: I did not. I was told about it --

Q: Right.

A: -- because when -- this experience shook me up, so I went in , we had in -- in the basement of our apartment building, each -- the each one, each tenant had a little apar -- a -- parted off a little, you know, a little -- it's a warehouse, call it, you know.

Q: Storage -- for storage?

A: Storage.

Q: Yeah.

A: And tha -- we had firewood there. So I was terribly shaken up, so I went in there, and Mother built, from the firewood a false wall, you know, just with the openings for breathing, and you know, and I was there for about two or three days.

Q: Cause you really thought you would be -- that the paper would only protect you so much?

A: Right.

Q: And what's happening to your mother? Di -- did she not --

A: At that time, not. At that time they were taking men only.

Q: Oh, men. And primar -- excuse me -- primarily young men?

A: Yes, yes. And of course, leaders -- leaders of the giminda, the -- the Jewish, you know, th-there was a -- inasmuch as the Soviet Union, there was a -- it was a cultural committee that were considered the giminda, because the giminda, you know, they're liquidated when the Russians came in.

Q: Was there anyone else hiding in this -- in this basement, where the storage, besides you?

A: Yes, there were others, but each one sat in his own --

Q: Place.

A: Right.

Q: And you didn't speak, of course.

A: No, of course not.

Q: And did your mother come down and bring food?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: So what in heaven's name were you thinking during these two or three days?

A: Terrible. Terrible, terrible, terrible, terrible. I was sorry that I didn't take Mother, and we did not advance into Russia, although I didn't know what happened to the people going into Russia, but I -- later on I -- I learned that most of the people, you know, they got to some places, in sibere -- Siberia, and you know, central Russia, because they needed, when they mobilized their manpower, they needed substitutes to work in the factories. You see, all of it was not a matter of, you know, protection. It was a matter of serving their needs, but their needs at that time were such that it helped, because the people were immediately employed, they immediately got bread, you know. They -- they could eat, they -- they could exist.

Q: And the Russians were not going to shoot them. That -- well, the point was not to shoot --

A: Right, right, the objective was not to shoot them.

Q: Right, right. What made you not go off your mind in those few days?

A: I often wondered. I often wondered, because the -- the first encounter, you know, with mass killings, was so horrible, I cannot begin to tell you. It was outright frightening, and it's no use being the hero. I was frightened.

Q: Did it feel like the world was collapsing? How does one under -- I mean it --

A: It felt that the dark days are coming up on the Jewish people, and it will go from bad to worse. Still --

Q: Not mass murder.

A: I didn't have the slightest idea what is waiting for us.

Q: So what did you think when you were sitting there, if you were -- if you were doing this, contemplating what does it mean that the Germans are allowing the Ukrainians to grab people in the street and clearly killing them? What does that -- what did that mean to you?

A: When it happens --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- you are concentrated on --

Q: That.

A: -- on --

Q: No?

A: -- you know, on -- on what's going on. You are concentrated on that, as you would say. You were not trying to rationalize, you were not trying to find rhymes or reasons whether that's correct, or incorrect, whether it's proper, or improper. It's almost like an animalistic feeling, of trying to protect itself, and trying to escape. And your mind went blank. I couldn't tell you. If you ask me how I reasoned, or -- I don't remember it.

Q: Right. Did you sleep?

A: Too much.

Q: During those few days, you did sleep? Why do you say too much?

A: Because, th -- the sleep was a form of -- a form of -- of burying your pain. Burying your fears.

Q: And you think you shouldn't have done that?

A: I -- I don't know what I should have done. At that time there wasn't much to do. There was a need to -- we needed time to organize. We needed time to even think in terms of resistance. We needed time in terms -- people, for instance, that looked Aryan, you know, blonde with blue eyes, needed time to get Polish documents, needed time to find some kind Christians, you know, that would give you a hiding space. It was all new. It -- it came down like a -- a poneratseras.

Q: So what enabled you to leave this hiding place? Your mother comes and says they've stopped, what?

A: That, yes. That things are normalized, and you know, traffic is -- because th -- for the first few days there was no traffic. The only things that you saw is you saw German military vehicles that were advancing forward. You saw the Ukrainians, you know, trying to round up as many Jews as possible. To tell you whether I knew how they went, whether they went by lists, or just at random, I couldn't tell you that. I know if they would have taken me, it would have been at random, because I was not politically active. I was not, you know, a Communist -- a member of the Communist party, I was not a Communist leader, I was not a leader in my immediate vicinity. So it wasn't a d -- random thing.

Q: Right. So you go back, and you're living with your mother in the apartment.

A: Right, and keep working, right.

Q: And you keep working in the railroad now.

A: Right.

Q: For the Wehrmacht?

A: Right.

Q: Do they pay you?

A: They paid very little, but the thing was that it was a good job, because they gave a piece of bread, a little marmalade, a little bit of artificial butter, you know, from --

Q: [inaudible]

A: -- so at -- as far as the job is concerned, in those days it was a good job.

Q: And your mother, how was she eating, what is she doing?

A: Well, it -- I had a problem with Mother that no matter what -- for instance if I brought home some kielbasa, she wouldn't touch it. I can tell you that one day -- but she n-n-n -- knew that I need to eat, and I need to -- so I remember once coming into the house, and mother was, you know, with the fire at -- a fire hook, she was kind of poking under the stove. I say, "Mom, can I help you, what are you looking for?" So she was a little embarrassed to tell me, so I say, "Mom, what is it that you need, let me -- let me," -- so finally I walked over, and I took the hook from her, and I started poking, and what do I pull out? The kielbasa. She would -- didn't want to touch it with her hands, so she pushed it under the stove.

Q: And she was cooking it for you?

A: Yes.

Q: But she wouldn't eat it.

A: No.

Q: No way.

A: Of course not.

Q: So then what did she eat, some bread?

A: Well, it -- it -- bread, it -- at that time, bread was given out, it was rationed, but they were giving bread, and we -- as I told you before, my job, you know, with the Russians, was a pretty good job, and I was able to save up some things.

Q: I see.

A: So I went down to the market and bought something, you know, some greens, and some fruit, and you know.

Q: So -- so currency didn't cha -- how -- what currency were you using? What were you getting from the Russians?

A: From the -- from the Russians?

Q: Yeah.

A: Ruble.

Q: Rubles.

A: Ruble. Rubles.

Q: So, the Germans come in --

A: Chervinsa.

Q: Chervinsa?

A: Yeah.

Q: And the Germans don't change the currency, you can go down the --

A: No, no, no. Th-The -- immediately currency was new currency.

Q: So were you able to switch?

A: Wait a minute. Let me go back for a moment. I think that for a little while, the rubles were going on. And then they gave a period that within 10 days, you can submit a mart -- maximum amount I think was 500, or 5000, I don't remember any more. But there was a process of exchanging this for new, local currency.

Q: And where were you keeping your money, in -- in the apartment under the mattress?

A: Somewhere under -- of course, not in a bank.

Q: Right, right.

A: Not in a bank.

Q: And were you able to -- if you remembered, were you able to exchange most of he money that you had?

A: I remember -- I don't remember details, but I remember that I somehow met a guy who was buying up these rubles. Whether he was going into Russia, or whether he believed that the Russians are coming back, I couldn't tell you. But I know that I was able to dispose of it at a rate of exchange that was ridiculous, but I got currency that I could deal with.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah, I want to tell you something, Joan. It's 50 years.

Q: Yeah.

A: It's getting hazy.

Q: Yes, but you have a lot of details, so if you can't answer, at least the question's on the table. And you have a lot of details, so --

A: Okay.

Q: Yes, fine. So you are working --

A: At the railroad.

Q: At the railroad station. Is there -- do you see a kind of leveling off of brutality, or do you now begin to see rules for the Jews?

A: No, no, we see a stabilization of sorts. We didn't know how it will go, but it was the Germans that appointed a Jewish leadership, a Judenrat, and they even created a Jewish militia, you know, just to keep order, no weapons, you know, and all what they did -- for instance, if they wanted -- if they -- if they ordained a random -- a -- a ra -- you know, a -- a policy -- if they wanted, for instance, large amounts of money, they went to the Judenrat and they gave them 48 hours to come up with it. If not, they'll kill hundreds of Jews. This is one thing. The other thing is that -- bear in mind that Lvov had several hundred thousand people. There was a need to establish some kind of an order. Even for killing, you needed an order. Do you follow me?

Q: Yes.

A: So it was the Jewish Judenrat, and the Jewish militia, the Jewish police, that implemented that order. Little did we know that these policemen will be forced later, to participate in, you know, in shipping off the Jews to the -- God knows where.

Q: Now, a ghetto was not formed immediately.

A: No.

Q: It takes a number of --

A: Takes awhile.

Q: Takes a few months.

A: Yes.

Q: So is the Judenrat and the militia formed before the Jew -- the ghetto is formed, or around the same time?

A: It is -- I don't remember the details of it, but I can tell you that the location of it was very much in a densely Jewish area.

Q: I see, already.

A: You know, a rat -- the Rappaport, a Shlamitchla, you know, this was a densely Jewish area. And this is where they established it.

Q: And that's where you were living as well?

A: And that's where I was living.

Q: Okay, so you didn't -- when the ghetto is formed, which I think is November, December of '41, is that --

A: At that time, I was already in a slave labor camp.

Q: Okay, so you are -- I see.

A: I don't remember. I know that they have kept constricting the ghetto area.

Q: Right.

A: They -- first of all they established the ghetto, and they -- and the first one wasn't so bad because they -- all they wanted is the perimeter around it to clean up, and of course

people were given 48 hours, you know, and take what they can carry with them, and go in. And there was a matter of getting these people located within the ghetto, you know. And this was in the beginning, you know, people felt you are invading my privacy, this is my apartment. So this is where the Judenrat and Jewish police, you know, played a very constructive role, you know. Very constructive role, helping, you know, and -- and demanding from these people that they should make place. That -- there were several rounds of constricting the ghetto. I did not get to any of them, so --

Q: So you're out s -- much sooner, you're --

A: I beg your pardon?

Q: You're out of that situation.

A: I -- what I recall is I recall the Germans coming in, the pogrom, this was something that I'll never forget, it was a terrible, terrible thing, and it was thousands of Jews that were killed. And what I do remember is the settling in, as you said, you know, things have settled in for awhile. People had to go to work, they came in, for instance, the Germans organized an arbitesont. That means a -- an unemployment office, where instead of going out and catching, you know, people, they send a message to the arbitesont that today we need 3,000 workers. And the arbitesont had to, you know, supply them. In the beginning, they were people that went there because at the end of the day they got a quarter of a pound of bre -- a pound of bread, you know. So people needed to work, y -- to be able to -- t-to survive, and to get some bread, get some -- some fruit, get some vegetables. And -- but what I'm -- you asked me the question, I do -- I did not live in Lvov any more when the first co -- for the second round-up.

Q: Right. So how does it happen that you're taking -- taken to Viniki slave labor camp? What -- what happens? You're still working --

A: Still working on the -- on -- a -- on the railroad, and on the way home, there were SS men standing with Ukrainian police, with a truck, and stopped people, and -- and asked them for documents, for th -- th -- th -- a shine -- a -- a document.

Q: Right.

A: And I was quite certain that document that I have is -- has -- carries the protection. So when they asked for the document I gave it to him, so he tore it up, and he said, "Get on the truck." And within a half an hour, we were about 60 or 70 people, that were brought to Viniki. Viniki was a -- had a small labor camp. What they had is they had a gulag of labor camps spread between Lvov and Kiev, and the object of it was to build a better highway, to enable the advancement of the German mechanized forces. So our job -- the Viniki group, our job was between Lvov and Viniki, to build a highway. So the first s -- gravel that we got is they took us into the Jewish cemetery -- Lvov had a beautiful Jewish

cemetery that was 200 or 250 years old, big magnificent, magnificent, you know, mausoleums. Marble, you know, expensive marble. And our job was to dismantle it, break it into -- into gravel, and load it up on trucks that were going for the building of the road between Lvov and -- and Kiev.

Q: That must have felt --

A: Oh, horrible.

Q: -- horrible.

A: Horrible. In the process of doing it - -and I'm very proud of this, we got started organizing, and when it came to a very beautiful mausoleum, what we did is we dug the -- dug the -- the grave, put in the stones, and covered it with -- with dirt, you know.

Q: So you could protect it.

A: To protect it.

Q: And they didn't see?

A: They didn't see it, and we didn't -- you know, very few of those that did it, survived. Most of them got killed, sooner or later, because this is where the killing started, already.

Q: In that cemeter -- in -- a-as you were doing this work?

A: No, no, th --

Q: Oh.

A: They -- le-let me say this to you. As they entered, they were always cases of individual killings, killing five people, six people. But there was no -- this was not an annihilation process. For the time being it was a punitive, or a process to scare them, to scare us, or a process to -- s -- th -- you know, force us to surrender gold, or to surrender money. But it was not the implemented, final solution. This came later. This came, I would say in -- in the Lvov area, somewhere about a couple of months after the Germans came in. In Barbiare, you know, when the Soviet -- when the German army -- when the not -- when the German army move forward, and they conquered Kiev. In Barbiare there was already the first killing. The Einsatzgruppen. This was the beginning of the Einsatzgruppen. But the Einsatzgruppen were only on the Soviet occupied territories. In -- in the territories of former Poland, they were no mass -- at that time there were no mass killings. Individual killings, yes.

Q: So whatever was formerly Poland --

A: Yes.

Q: -- which was where Lemberg, or Lvov was --

A: Right.

Q: -- that -- that -- it didn't happen there?

A: Not -- not yet.

Q: [indecipherable] not yet, right.

A: N -- it was brutal, they were -- th-th -- you know, beating us, forcing us to work, and in some ca -- not in some, in many of cases, they made fun, you know, of us, and we had to -- they gave us toothbrushes to clean -- to clean a sidewalk, you know, and things like this. They cut off the beards from religious people, but still no mass annihilation. Killings, brutality, beating, cruelty, but no mass annihilation. The mass annihilation came later.

Q: Miles, before you were taken on the truck to go to Viniki, w-were you in a situation where you have to wear the -- the white --

A: Oh yes, absolutely.

Q: -- the white armband with [indecipherable]

A: A white band, a white armband with a Star of David.

Q: And that was a number of months that you wore them, do you think?

A: About three months, I would say.

Q: And what did that -- what did you feel when you --

A: Felt so littled -- so belittled. So morally devastated, you know, to -- t -- first of all, you were no -- you were not a human being. There were some SS men, they were not on assignment, they just walked, they walked the street, and if you walked on the sidewalk with them, you know, he hit you with -- you know, with -- you know, with his hand, or with a -- whatever he carried. He -- "Du schwine," you pig, "get off the sidewalk." So, you know, they -- we were treated in a terrible way. Dehumanized, totally dehumanized, and this was the feeling, that we are -- there were many suicides, I -- I presume you know that. In -- in Lvov, there were many, many suicides.

Q: Yeah?

A: Oh yes. Of people who just didn't want to participate in it. Didn't want to be part of it.

Q: Even though there's not mass killing, it just is too -- it's too much.

A: The d -- the degradation, the dehumanization. The treating the people like animals. But I had Mother at home, and she couldn't work, she -- you know, she wasn't cut out to work, she -- she -- at that time, and Mother was -- 19 -- 84 -- 16 -- 40 -- 56 - 55 years.

Q: Right.

A: You know, and whatever I -- you know, I could do to, you know, to bring home some food, and to protect her. I had a girlfriend in Lvov, and she was wonderful, she did everything she could. She was blonde, blue eyed, so sh -- sometimes she could smuggle, and go after, you know, the designated hours, y-you know, because Jews were not allowed to -- to be on the street after six o'clock in the evening. So she -- when I was taken away to Viniki, she, for awhile, took care of Mother.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And in a short while after that, it started, the mass annihilations started, and Beljets was opened, and they started emptying the --

Q: The ghetto.

A: -- the ghetto in Lvov.

Q: Did your mother know you were in Viniki?

A: My mother knew that I was in Viniki.

Q: How did she find out, do you know?

A: I was working on the road -- I told you we were working on the -- the -- first of all on the cemetery, and then I -- we started working on the roads, you know, the gulag that was set up. And a guy that I knew, he was a friend of the parents of my girlfriend -- and I asked him, I said, "Do me a favor and go to Lucia and tell her that I am in Viniki." So from him, Lucia, my girlfriend learned it, and she told Mother. And about six weeks later, they started the first shipments to Beljets, and I don't know whether it was the first or the second shipment.

Q: Uh-huh, that she was on. And did Lucia go on that?

A: No, Lucia survived, and she came without an armband, with this guy, and she told me Mother was taken away.

Q: Oh. That must have been just --

A: It was horrible.

Q: And by then did you know what it meant?

A: By then we knew it. B --

Q: You did?

A: B-By then we suspected, and -- and still I want to tell you that everybody hoped that he will -- he will survive. Somehow he will survive. This desire of human beings, you know, to evade the worst, it's unbelievable.

Q: Now, Lucia was able, because she could pass, to come to Viniki?

A: Yeah, but I have learned later that she was apprehended, and she was taken to slave labor camp of Janofska.

Q: Uh-huh. Oh. [indecipherable]

A: Yanofs -- do you know about Janofska?

Q: Yes.

A: Janofska was a very, very cruel camp, a soflager, and most of the Jews fr-from Lemberg went either to the death camp of Beljets, or to Janofska.

Q: So in some strange way, you were fortunate to be in this work -- this gulag rather than Janofska [indecipherable]

A: Well, I was fortunate because, you know, being there, you know, they -- they didn't -- this was the time where they didn't empty labor -- labor camp. This was a slave labor camp, this was not a killing camp. However, when typhoid broke out in our camp, and when people started getting high fever, every morning he used to come in, the SS man -- what was his name, I don't -- I -- I can see him, but I don't remember his name. H-He -- Hegler? Something like it. And everyone who had fever, and -- he asked the guys to load them up on a -- a -- a -- it was like a -- a pushcart, but with soft tires. And he shot them, and they took them out to bury them. And the camp -- aga -- even in camp, there was a time where [indecipherable] to regulate itself, to settle down, because I often wonder whether it wouldn't have been much better if we would have kept them in turmoil. I often

wonder that. And yes, a good many would have been killed, a good many would have been maimed, but in turmoil, when 200 people are working with 10 policemen, and they disperse, some would have been saved. And wise -- why human nature is such to submit, I don't know.

Q: It's hard to organize turmoil.

A: It's ha-hard to organize turmoil, exactly. Exactly.

Q: So, are you living, when you're not working, in a barrack of some kind?

A: Yes. Barracks with the same bank -- th -- the bunkbeds like you see in -- in -- in Auschwitz, and we had Ukrainian police -- there were three SS men, and the rest were Ukrainian police, and they took us to work every morning, and we had to go, and march and sing, and --

Q: Sing?

A: Oh yes, all the time.

Q: What were you have -- what did you have to sing?

A: German -- German songs. Or they used to, you know, make up songs that they were in German, but, -- you know about us, that the Jews are the fault of the war, and the Jews caused the war, you know.

Q: And you had to sing them?

A: Absolutely. Always when we went to work we had to sing, and if not, they were terrible, they asked us to run, to drop, to get up, to -- in particular when it was rainy, when it was muddy. Terrible.

Q: And what clothes do you have? You have the clothes when they took you out [indecipherable]

A: Our clothes, we did --

Q: That's it.

A: -- we didn't have stripers.

Q: Right.

A: We did not --

Q: So the same clothes that you came in with?

A: Yes. Same clothes, and the clothes of those that were killed, or died, because you know, not all of them. What I want to point out to you is that in camp, in Viniki, which was a slave labor camp, the difference between the poor in the villages, and the kids of -- th-the kids or parents of wealthy families, was that the wealthy and the city people died first. They couldn't -- they -- they were soft. You know what I mean when I -- you know what I mean when I say they were soft?

Q: Yeah.

A: The villagers, and the poor people were more ardent. They were more used to hunger, they were more used to filth.

Q: It's an interesting oddity, isn't it --

A: Yes.

Q: -- that when pressed, and when things get worse --

A: Right, a-absolutely.

Q: -- they have a -- a way of surviving.

A: Right. They -- their -- their -- their level of resistance was higher.

Q: Right. So who are you in that circumstance?

A: I -- in between.

Q: You're both a city boy, and be --

A: In between, in between, but young.

Q: Yes, you're 21, or 20 --

A: 21, right.

Q: 21 years old in Viniki, right.

A: And I knew at that time that Mother is gone. I didn't hear from Lucia, so I assume she is either in a camp somewhere, or gone, and then I found out that she is in -- she was in Auschwit -- in Janofska.

Q: Right. So --

A: And then I lost trace of her.

Q: So what -- do you have friends there, in the camp?

A: Oh, we formed friends, yeah, absolutely.

Q: You formed friendships.

A: As a matter of fact, this is the camp, you know, if you remember, you know, we were preparing an escape, and the elders of the camp called us, and asked us, "Who gives you the right to buy your own freedom at the price of those that will be killed, who will not be able to escape?" This is the camp Viniki, this is where it transpired.

Q: Viniki. Now, explain something to me, you say they're elders of the camp. Now is that something that the Germans constructed, or it just happened to be --

A: Just there were some people --

Q: They were -- yeah.

A: -- that they naturally were considered, you know -- I remember there was a professor of the University of Lvov. There was a former textile manufacturer. You know, people of statue and respect, and not youngsters, you know.

Q: And how did these --

A: It's a self evolved leadership, so to say.

Q: Okay, now, how did they find out? Somebody goes and says there's these young guys here --

A: We were -- we -- we started up with a few, three, four that we started talking about it, and we realized that we are going to do it, that we need about 25 or 30, assuming that if it doesn't work when we disperse, and a third will get killed, half will get killed, and half will survive.

Q: Right.

A: So, there are no secrets, you know, in particular between young people who have been incarcerated, and you know. So i-it became known that a -- a group -- they didn't know who, that a group is planning an escape. And then the elders started looking into it, and

they found out who the group was, and they summoned us at night, when everybody was asleep, to come and talk to them, and we came, and the question was very simple, you have no right to buy your freedom at the price of others. And we recognize that they have a point, and we listen to them. And it wa --

Q: You did?

A: Yes. And it was a wrong thing to do.

Q: And you -- and you said that to them, that it was wrong to do?

A: No, we -- we -- w -- when they said it to us, they said go home and think about it.

Q: Right.

A: But when we talk about it, and when we talked with each other, we said they -- these -- they are right. Maybe --

Q: They are right?

A: Yeah, 30 will escape, but we were about 200 people there. The rest will get killed. So we decided not to do it, and it was mistake, it was a terrible mistake, because two or three months later, that was the end of Viniki.

Q: Was it clear at that time that the Germans would take an escape out on the rest of the population, if you actually -- let's say -- that -- that --

A: Yes. One of the things that they have established from the beginning, is that mass retribution for single disobedience of a single resistance, of stealing something, stealing some food, or something, always mass retribution. This was a common thing. In camp also, mass retribution, all the time. But in that time, what I am talking to you about, this was probably in the beginning of '42, that i -- the cemetery was emptied already, and we ran -- they moved us down, like a hun -- a hundred -- we finished a hundred feet, move to the next hundred feet. Finish a thousand feet, move to the next -- at that time I was assigned a job to roll -- to ride a steamroller. You know what I am talking about? The steamroller that presses gravel --

Q: The gravel.

A: -- into space. And I was the only one of the entire camp that was allowed at night to remain un -- with the steamroller, because I had to protect it. Everybody else went to camp.

Q: Went back to camp.

A: Right. And this --

Q: So you're alone?

A: Alone.

Q: With the steamroller?

A: Yes.

Q: You and the steamroller?

A: Right. But I'll tell you, it -- it -- good things came of it, because when they started -- when they started transporting Jews to the death camps of Lvov, and you know, and -- and -- of Beljets, and -- and -- and other camps, some people broke the little windows in the boxcars open, and threw children out, or youngsters got out. So quite often, people knocked on the door, and specifically I remember th -- a fellow that later became one of the best partisans, one of the best sharpshooters that we had, Moishe Lot, he died three years ago. He came, knocked to the door, he was stark naked, stark naked. He said, "Let me in, I am very cold, and I want to go in with you tomorrow to work." So I took him in, I gave him something to eat, he warmed up, and I gave him some clothing, and in the morning he blended in with the group, and went to camp. Went to camp because he had no place to go.

Q: Right.

A: He had to smuggle into -- to the labor --

Q: Into the slave labor camp.

A: Right. I remember a girl who knocked at the door another night, and it was -- she must have been 17 - 16 years old, beautiful girl. And she was dressed. And she said mother threw her out of the -- of the boxcar. And I asked her whether she knew where the boxcar got, she said, "Yes, we knew that we are going -- we are being taken somewhere to a -- a fa -- a faniktudslager, right.

Q: And she knew that?

A: Yes. And she again wanted to go into camp, but I said, "Look, you don't look like Jewish, try to maybe smuggle." She said, "I'm tired of it. I'll go into the camp, and whatever will happen, will happen."

Q: So there were men as well as women in this camp?

A: In our camp there was a very small group of women, and they were mostly in the kitchen.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Oh, maybe 15 - 20 women.

Q: Out of the 200 or so people?

A: Yeah, maybe less.

Q: So was she able to -- to go in?

A: She smuggled in, yes. But bear in mind that very few of us survived.

Q: Yeah. Right.

A: You know, the only ones that survive is the ones that found a way of breaking out from camp, and the --

Q: Right.

A: You know, as I the -- the -- the people that were in camp, were assigned to work positions. When I was finished [indecipherable] an area, I had to go back to camp, and you know, be in the quarry. So one day in the quarry, we were working, we must have been 70 or 80 people, guarded by Ukrainian police. Two Ukrainian police needed a handful of people to go further out in the quarry to look for harder -- a harder stone, because some of the stone was of a calcium composition, and some of it was like marble. So we were four people -- five people, and we were taken by two policemen deep into the quarry to -- to dig some of that hard stone. And we -- by eyesight we communicated, you know, and at one point, we jumped them, and we killed them, and we got away with a rifle and a half, one rifle intact, and the other one broken. But we were able to -- to fix it.

Q: How was he killed?

A: With shovels and picks.

Q: Real -- all of you just bashed him --

A: Yeah, the two -- yeah, w-we jumped on one and the other, you know, because they were grabbing the rifles, but by the time they were able to grab the rifle and position it, you know, we attacked them with picks and shovels.

Q: Is this something that you had, in some way, talked about?

A: No.

Q: No, you just looked at each other, this was an opportunity.

A: Oh -- oh, this was at a time when we started getting news that there are people that are running into the woods.

Q: I see.

A: We didn't know who, we didn't know where, but all we heard is that people are escaping from camp, and going into the woods, they are going to organize themselves. So when we killed them, we didn't know the area. I told you before about the villagers, and the city people? The villagers were fortunate because they knew the forest, they knew the area. We were fortunate that one of the five was -- Moatcha Stralliska, you know, was a -- a -- a village -- a -- a -- a peasant -- a village boy. And he knew the area. And we escaped, and we -- in daytime we got into the field, it was -- where we lay in the -- you know, in between the stands of -- you know, wheat and corn, whatever was growing there. And at night we got into the woods. We didn't know anybody, we didn't know where to go. But slowly, you know, you're going -- we discovered that there are some Jews here, there's some Jews there. Within a period of six to eight weeks, we were around 200 - 250 people, various ages. Some women, some children. So what we did is we separated the young, the ones that were able to fight, and we -- and we had with us, you know, the -- the -- we called it, you know, the -- the ghetto. The elderly people, the children, you know, the drek commando we called it.

Q: Drek?

A: Commando.

Q: The drek commando, I see.

A: Right. But we kept them, we kept them in food, and we kept them safe.

Q: And these were people who had escaped from the ghetto?

A: Escaped from the ghetto, some of them escaped from a hiding place. Some of them escaped, you know, from camps.

Q: Camps.

A: All kinds of things.

Q: Right. And this was just happenstance, that you began to find each other?

A: Pure coincidence.

Q: And you were, in the beginning, five guys?

A: We started -- we were th -- when we came in, as five.

Q: [indecipherable] these guys.

A: But there were already people in the forest.

Q: Now, I want to a -- bef -- I -- I -- I want to obviously get into the details of that, but I want to go back to something. When those elders call you together, is that two or three months before your actual escape?

A: Yes.

Q: And why did you say that at that moment it was stupid that you listened to them? Why was it so stupid?

A: Because if we wouldn't have listened to them --

Q: Mm.

A: -- if we wouldn't have listened to them, we -- about 30, or maybe 40 would have either escaped not being noticed, or would have escaped, and would have been noticed and shot at, and some would have been killed, but the rest would have survived.

Q: So you're saying a larger group would have gotten out?

A: Right, right. This is all, you know, if and when and if and when. But the fact is that the people that were in this camp, sooner or later, were transferred to Janofska or to Auschwitz, and were killed. Or to any of the death camps, Treblinka, to Sobibor.

Q: The five -- the five boys of you who did escape, were these five also part of the 20 or 30 who had been thinking about it earlier?

A: No, not all of them, one. One was them. Because bear in mind, I told you before that we moved a hundred feet, a thousand feet.

Q: Right.

A: You know, at one point we caught up with a -- with a group from the -- from Kroshenko, from another gulag.

Q: Yes.

A: When I say gulag, I'm talking about af -- a -- a labor force, established, you know, to handle a stretch of the road. So at that time, w-we have met with another group. Am I clear?

Q: Yes, yes, yes.

A: This was Kroshenko. And the forests that we were in were called the Hanachofsky Lassiter Hanachova forest.

Q: Forest.

A: [indecipherable] Hanachov.

Q: Now this is not an area, of course, that you're familiar with, only one guy of your -- the fu --

A: Yeah, but there were others later, when we started grouping together.

Q: Right.

A: Most of the escapees were people that knew the area.

Q: I see.

A: They knew some peasants, they were hoping that they will go in, and perhaps the peasant will help him, maybe he'll hide him, maybe he'll give him some food.

Q: Right.

A: You know.

Q: Now, let me ask you something, that circumstance of jumping the two guards and killing them, you have been in a situation of being brutalized now, for a couple of years. Not -- and you've watched brutality. You yourself have never killed anyone, or been in a --

A: This was the first time.

Q: This was the first time. What -- what happened to you --

A: It felt good.

Q: It felt good.

A: Felt good, let me not tell you anything else, it felt very good, it felt very good.

Q: And did you all have the same -- do you think --

A: I can only tell you how I felt. I believe so. I believe so, because we were bitter, we were mistreated, we were innocent, our families were murdered. We were on the brink of being murdered, there was no law protecting us.

Q: Right.

A: Nothing. Everything was against us, the law was against us, the -- the -- the government was against us, you know. Everybody was against us.

Q: And did you feel that you had crossed a line in terms of being able to do things you hadn't done before because of --

A: I don't think that we were philosophizing.

Q: Yeah.

A: We didn't have time for that.

Q: Right.

A: We were hunted, and you know, we had to do everything possible to protect ourselves, and we started organizing, I told you, weapons was a major problem.

Q: Right.

A: You know, the -- we -- it was very difficult to get weapons, it was dangerous to get weapons, and when you got them, you had to pay horrendous prices for it. We were not strong enough yet to -- later on it was different, because we used to go into a village where German -- the German sup -- food supplies were stored. And we took what we wanted, killed the -- the two or three policemen that were there, four the most, and burned the rest of the -- poured gasoline on the top of the sugar, and -- and the flour. But later on we got smarter. We took as much as we could, and we traded it with the peasants. The peasants had weapons. The peasants -- you know, when the Russians were treated, or the Poles were treated, they buried rifles, and -- and you know, hand grenades. So we dealt with them.

Q: I see.

A: We traded.

Q: So let's go back to the beginning. It takes you about five or six weeks, yes? To get together --

A: To get organized.

Q: Get organized. So how are you -- what's happening? Are you walking in the nighttime and sleeping during the day so you're not seen? Or you walk whenever you can?

A: In the forest -- in the for -- the Germans did not go into the forest.

Q: Oh, that's what I was wondering.

A: They did not go into the forest. If they -- there were several times when they made round-ups. So what they did is they enc -- encircled a certain area, and bombarded it heavily with artillery. Or send in Ukrainians, but they themselves very seldom went into the forest, and when they went in, they didn't come out.

Q: So that's why they didn't go in.

A: Right.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: However, there were Ukrainian Nationalists, the -- the -- we called them banderofsa, from Bandera. They were much more dangerous than the Germans, because they knew the forest better than we did. And they were well -- well armed, they were well equipped. They knew the forests, and the most important thing, if any one of them got injured, all they needed to do was to bring him back, and put him into any peasant, and the peasant would take them. With us, if somebody got injured, you know, unless the -- we -- we knew that the -- the peasant is trustworthy, we couldn't -- we had to keep him with us.

Q: Right.

A: And medicine was a big problem. Medicine and weapons was the biggest problem, not food.

Q: I was going to ask, not food?

A: No, because food -- we -- we were robbing. We went into a village, and you know -- and we told them that we are confiscating. You have three cows, we'll take one. And --

Q: That was good of you, you left two.

A: Right.

Q: And you took one.

A: No --

Q: So you would take a cow?

A: Yes.

Q: And then kill the cow and take [indecipherable]

A: Sure, sure, sure. But as time went on, we became bolder, you know. I am not telling you that we engaged the German Wehrmacht in open warfare because this is ridiculous. We were not equipped for it, and we were not cut out for it, and it wasn't called for. But, as time went on, you know, we -- as I told you how we got -- you know, we surrounded their food depots. You know, when we needed clothing, we went in, you know, to wealthy peasants and we got what we wanted. Normally we did this about 20 - 30 miles away from where we stayed, because it was dangerous to do that. We lived by the power of our -- of our weapons. What we did, for instance, is, you know, we made sure that the surrounding area has a misconception of how big we are, and how strong we are. We used to place a few people in various parts of the woods, and ask him to relieve salvos. And the news in the for -- in the villages was that the partisans are occupying the entire forest, and they have thousands of people there, you know, fully equipped. You know, to misinform them.

Q: Right.

A: We used to go down, and we had some peasants that we trusted, and this is where we kee -- kept our wounded. But medicine was a big problem. And these were the days when penicillin were not known yet. So the biggest item was iodine. And we used to use -- as runnners, we used to use little girls. You know, 12 years old, 14 years old, they were fabulous. One of our girls was caught outside of Lvov with two liters of iodine. Now, when the police saw a girl with two liters of iodine, they knew that she is from a partisan group. And they promised her that they will take her to her parents, and they will -- they gave her clothing, and they'll give her food, and this, to -- to reveal where we are, and she refused. So they started torturing her. She refused. They finally killed her. So ya --

Q: We need to stop the tape. Hold -- hold that thought.

End of Tape #3

Tape #4

Q: We ended the last tape with you talking about the young 12 year old girl whose name was Leah.

A: I think so --

Q: And -- yes, you think it was Leah?

A: -- I think it was Leah, I don't remember.

Q: And she was caught --

A: With two liters of di -- iodine. And they tried to interrogate her, and promise her all kinds of things, and finally -- she didn't reveal where we are, and finally they started torturing her, and they tortured her to death. But what I want to tell you is that the role of women in the underground was very necessary, and very important. Because first of all, if you -- if we needed to make contact with someone about negotiating a purchase of weapons, or about getting some medicine, or about getting, you know, someone who is very sick into a hospital, you know, we needed women to do that, because men were circumcised. If a man was caught in town, all they needed to do is ask him to drop his pants, and they knew that they have a Jew. Now, people like Leah, people blend -- in particular blonde women, blue eyed women, well there were many of them, you know, and spoke a good peasant Polish, or Ukrainian, you know, were precious because they could do these things that -- much easier. So they played a very, very important role, and with -- you know, being on guard at night -- they were on guard at night. I -- I have nothing but admiration for the con -- conduct of women at, you know, during the partisan years.

Q: How did you find out that this happened to Leah? How did the information get back to you?

A: That she was caught?

Q: And -- and killed.

A: She was caught outside of Lvov, that was a small village. And in the village, that, you know, the people knew that, you know, the do -- the Ukrainians -- the -- the policemen were either local, or they grew into the community. So, you know, the --

Q: So people knew it was [indecipherable]

A: Of course, of course.

Q: So e-explain to m -- explain to me if you can -- I-I -- I know that this -- this is a process, so it's a little bit difficult to explain it, ha -- the kind of structure that you have, once you have these two or three hundred people, there are children, there are women, there are elderly. There are young -- young, strong women, young men --

A: Okay, there was a fighting force, and that's a big word.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know, I don't want you to come away from here is that we commanded, you know, an air force, and tanks, and -- this was not the case. We had an antiquated weapons, with a meager amount of ammunition, every bullet counted, every hand grenade that you had, you were not sure whether when you will throw it, whether it will explode or not, you know, and -- but slowly, slowly, we started coo -- you know, i-invading small police outposts and villages.

Q: But wait a minute, wait a minute. I want to go back a little bit. If you have two or 300 hundred people, this --

A: Okay, all -- all --

Q: -- league of fighting force is like what, 50 guys?

A: Of sorts.

Q: No women. No women are going to be shooting. Is that --

A: No, women were -- were not -- women were used as runners.

Q: Right.

A: Women were used as nurses. Women were used as -- you know, mending clothes and stuff like this.

Q: Mm-hm, okay.

A: No -- no shooting.

Q: Okay.

A: But for guards at night, if we come back -- came back, and we were tired, and we wanted to lie down to sleep, they -- they were guards. They --

Q: With guns?

A: Yes.

Q: Yes.

A: Yes.

Q: So --

A: Not all of them. There is -- she just died, Hannah Hochberg. She was a tremendous, tremen -- oh, we made a mistake, we should have had her with us in the fighting force.

Q: Really?

A: She was a dynamo, a dynamo. And she always argued don -- don't -- just because, you know, we are different sex, doesn't mean that, you know, we cannot participate, but --

Q: So there were arguments in the group between the men -- the women wanted --

A: Absolutely.

Q: -- the women wanting to fight.

A: Absolutely, and some of them did.

Q: And s -- and some of them did?

A: Not in our --

Q: Right, yes --

A: Not the --

Q: -- in other groups.

A: In other groups.

Q: Right.

A: You know. So what I'm saying to you is, you ask me did -- di -- the division up, the elderly people, the women, the children. We call them the ghetto, or the -- the drek commando, you know. They were wonderful people. They were our -- our uncles, our aunts, our -- not my uncles, but there were parents there, you know. So our job was too keep them with food, you know, and with supplies. Now, if there was a case where we

learned that Germans are trying to surrounder us and what have you, we moved them out first. And they were difficult because they couldn't move as rapidly.

Q: Right.

A: You know, but we moved them. We never abandoned them.

Q: And that put you all in a -- it was a more difficult group to be in if you had --

A: Absolutely -- absolutely. And then there's another thing that you have to bear in mind. Having weapons was the most important thing. People came out of the ghettos, a good many of them came -- came with their s -- wi -- with their shirt on their back.

Q: Uh-huh, right.

A: And there were camps, there were partisan units that did not accept people without weapons. There were partisan units that unfortunately came with weapons, but before they reached us, you know, there were Ukrainian units that intercepted them, took their weapons and killed them. We were in good working relationship with the akar, with the armia kryova, with the Polish akar, and the reason for it is because this was an area where before the war Poles were considered colonizers, you know, occupants, you know, that they were sent in by the Polish government to Polonize the area. And the Ukrainians ha- hated them, and the Ukrainians burned their villages and killed them. And they needed us as allies. So in our area, I know that there are stories that there were places where akar were killing Jews. There were cases like this, not in our area. In our area, we were allies. One time I remember, there was a case where they were plotting to take our weapons away, and we discovered it, and -- so we had to show them whether. We told them, if this is what you want, we are going to be on our own, and when the Ukrainians will invade your villages, you will be by yourself. So --

Q: They backed down.

A: Right. So what I'm saying to you -- you ask me about what did we do with the -- with the elderly. We kept them not far from us, almost adjacent.

Q: In what -- I mean, in what way were you living? In tents, just outside, blankets --

A: No, dug-ins. Dug-ins, yeah, with --

Q: You would dig --

A: Dig -- dig --

Q: -- trenches?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: Dig basements, and cover them with leaves, with branches --

Q: Really?

A: -- and soil on the top of it. You know, it -- in the wintertime it was cold. Sometimes, when it was relatively quiet, we used to go into a village, and camp in village. But when we on -- when we were in the village, we did not allow the villagers to go in the direction of the city, because we were afraid that they will betray us, you know. Another thing that we have played a role, which in my opinion was very, very important. The Gestapo implemented an order that every peasant who will -- every -- every Pole, or Ukrainian who will deliver to them a Jew, will get a liter of vodka, or five kilograms of sugar. And there were those that did it. So one day we found out that an Ukrainian from a village, Potanachufka, delivered to the Gestapo a mother and a daughter, that's a young girl eight years, or nine year old. And of course the Gestapo took them and killed them. So we went -- went in that night to the village, knocked at the door, took him out, slung him up on a tree in the front of his house, as a sign, this will be the reward for anybody who will turn Jews over to the Gestapo for a liter of vodka or five pounds of sugar. That was the end of it, they didn't do it any more. It was a time where life -- life wasn't worth much. But, you know, what you have to do, you have to do.

Q: Right, right.

A: When they started attacking Polish villages, we, with the Poles, started attacking Ukrainian villages. You know, I told you about this guy that came to me when I was on the -- when I was on the steamroller, Moishe Lot? He turned out to be one of the best sharpshooters that we had. A young fella, you know, from a peasant family, small town -- very small town family, and one time we had an encounter with the Ukrainian nationalists, with the banderoftis. And he crawled out to very, very front, and killed their machine gunnist, and brought back a machine gun.

Q: Really?

A: Do you know what a machine gun meant to us? It was a fantastic thing, you know? So there were days -- days of good feelings, and there were days of sad feelings. Me give you a -- another moment with -- has not to do with f -- with fights. We came back from an engagement where we were fighting an Ukrainian group, I mean of -- all partisans. And it was a b -- we lost a few guys. And it was very, very tiresome, because we had to escape, we had to run, and we had to counterattack. It -- it -- it was not one of the best days for us, it was one of the bad days for us. And we came in, and one guy says, "Fellas,

do you know what is tonight? Tonight is Yom Kippur." We didn't have prayer books, and we were not that terribly [indecipherable] but one guy who remembered the prayers, stood up, and started singing, you know, the Kol Nidre. Jay -- Joan, I'll never forget that. I'll never, never forget that. It was so emotional, you know.

Q: For me, too, if you tell [indecipherable]. Tell me a little bit about the command structure, and --

A: The command structure, our -- first of all, I told you that we were fighting hand in hand with the -- with the akar -- with the armia kryova. The commander of the -- all the forces was a -- a professor of the polytechnic [indecipherable] from Lvov. And his pseunonym was Polcovnik Proch powder -- gun powder. He was the main commander, and the rest was, you know, it shifted constantly. You know, sometimes, it -- it -- Lot's brother-in-law, Meisel, George Meisel was in charge of a group, sometimes I was in charge of a group, sometimes we joined together and we subjugated our command privileges. We didn't play army, I mean it -- it -- you know, it wasn't the objective. But it had to be organized, it -- and -- you know, when a guy went out with a -- with a group, either for food, or for weapons, or to attack somebody, or to burn down a village, you know, there had to be command. There had to be command. There was one guy among us, he was from -- from this area, and he was a true peasant. He was fantastic. We came back at night to the forest from an -- we called it aktia, from an action. He took off his shoes, and walking with the bare feet, he felt his way to find the paths back to our woods, in the dark. I -- I would say that a good many of us are alive today on account of him.

Q: So, are you saying that all of these different groups were in fact part of a larger --

A: Larger group.

Q: -- group.

A: Where Polcovnik Proch, Colonel Proch was in charge of.

Q: Was -- was the -- was the overall -- right.

A: He decided, you know, on major things, on going to, you know, burn down a village, or to go down a village and stand side by side with the Poles and fight. There was one guy who was even a volksdeutsch, you know, and -- and in the village, he was considered a collaborator of the Germans. And he was with us, and a good guy, and I don't -- I don't remember any more his name, believe it or not.

Q: So how would you get orders to do something? Would there be a runner from whe -- wherever the command [indecipherable]

A: An order was -- and order was given that we need 25 guys, or 15 guys, to go and do this and this and this. First of all you took volunteers. If you didn't have enough volunteers, you appointed, you designated. For instance, to go down and take care of this peasant who delivered the mother and the daughter to Gestapo, for this, only volunteers, and only -- there were too many volunteers for that, you know, so --

Q: So how was it chosen?

A: We decided that thi -- this one, this one, this one, this one goes.

Q: Uh-huh. And you were part of that group?

A: Yes, yes, and I'm very proud of it. Again, I feel very good about it.

Q: Right. So, one could be a commander one day of a particular action. It wasn't as if you had a general that stayed as a [indecipherable]

A: There -- there was no generals and colonels.

Q: Right.

A: It -- it -- it was -- for instance, I mentioned to you George Meisel. George Meisel was looked upon, you know, he was a brave -- he was a good shooter, and you know, he was looked upon as good material for leadership. I often, you know, when I needed another team, I asked his team to join me.

Q: So wi -- did you actually have teams? That thi --

A: Yes.

Q: I see.

A: Yes.

Q: That you stayed within -- sort of?

A: Right, right.

Q: So tell me something. Arms were difficult to get, bullets, each one was very important --

A: Right.

Q: How in heaven's name did you get trained to do this? You've never shot a gun before.

A: I can tell you that among us were kids, you know, that wer -- came out from Haider -- you know, from -- from -- young kids --

Q: Right.

A: 17 - 18 - 19 years old. They never in their life touched a weapon, leave alone used it, became the best sharpshooters, the most courageous guys to go into fire. The most courageous. And the courage was not only, you know, t-to go into a -- take care of a peasant. We dealt with a well organized underground -- Ukrainian the banderoft is well-organized, well equipped, knowing the forest, knowing where to go, knowing the peasants clauses too, you know. These were formidable opponents, and we fought with them. We fought with them. Now, as far as the Germans are concerned, when they -- when we came upon them, you know, we took care of, we took them on. But only if they were in small groups. The time when we really went after them is when the retreat started rapidly, when the Soviet army was already 50 - 100 miles away.

Q: Right.

A: We used to be on both sides of the road, and if a small group came on, we took care of them. The -- we got to a point where we forced them to put signs on the highways that no German is allowed to travel less than a foursome, and equipped with military --

Q: Because they knew what would happen?

A: -- with -- fully armed.

Q: So you still haven't answered my question. Were you -- was there training in shooting, or di -- wi -- simply you were given a gun, and you said --

A: No, when -- the first time you were given a gun you were taught what to do with it.

Q: Right.

A: Then, if we had ample -- there were times when we had ample bullets, so we trained for sharpshooting.

Q: I see.

A: We trained -- sharpshooting was very important with us.

Q: Right.

A: Because we were not an army, you know. It is a group of people -- do exactly, you know, and anybody that tells you that -- whether it was Bielski, or whether it was another, that

they were an army, they were not an army. They were partisan groups that we didn't trust, higher up in -- in the -- in the forest of Belarusa. There were many Russian partisans, well organized, who have gotten drops, military drops from Russia. Some of them were good and took in Jewish partisans, some of them didn't. There was no unified form.

Q: Right.

A: There was no unified order. Every day was a day of it's own. Every day had it's own dangers, every day had it's own downers, and it's own uppers.

Q: So there -- there couldn't be an overall strategy.

A: Couldn't.

Q: Strategy was intermittent.

A: This --

Q: And you're talking about sharpshooters because all you could do is take out one person or two people at a time.

A: Yeah, but it maked a big difference, because when they attacked them, and they saw that four or five are killed, they pulled back.

Q: Right, cause that's a lot for them.

A: Right.

Q: Yeah.

A: So it -- these were days, and tom -- in -- in my memory, these were my days of glory, because being -- you know, dismantling the -- the -- the cemetery of -- of Lvov was very depressing, very painful. I mean, I felt that I am destroying a history of Lvov. And there, you know, whether it was, you know, attacking, or defending, or getting even, it -- you lived by the power of your gun. I didn't intend to survive. There was no one who hoped to survive. The idea was to fight, and die on your feet, instead of living on your knees, so to say.

Q: So that was the real aim?

A: The aim, it was to get even.

Q: The purpose was to get even.

A: To get even, absolutely.

Q: But when you had elderly, and children, the young women in some way could have defended themselves, but the young and the old could not have done it.

A: They couldn't have.

Q: Does that mean that you had two purposes, in some --

A: Well, no, whatever our lot was, their lot was.

Q: Right.

A: You know, our lot was their lot. I mean, if we withdrew, they withdrew with us, you know. Some of the elderly, you know, knew the peasants well. They served a purpose.

Q: I see.

A: They knew the peasants from before the war, they dealt with one another, although not always -- sometimes the peasants forgot all the [indecipherable] sometimes, in most cases. You know, but in some cases, an elderly guy went down, and he came back with a piece of cheese, or with a piece of that pork belly, or th -- you know, and what have you.

Q: Did -- did you find s -- through -- it's two years of being in this [indecipherable] over --

A: 23 months.

Q: 23 months, okay, almost two years. Did people straggle in during this course of two years, or did you stay pretty much stable?

A: People straggled in -- no, people straggled in, but it was less and less as time went on, because more and more Jews were killed off, and the communities, the Jewish communities were wiped off. The stragglers were basically people that were hidden by peasants, and for one reason or another, they have to leave the hiding place.

Q: And was -- as far as you remember, did it just happen that you became a f -- in a sense a family camp as well as an armed camp, or did you sit down, you guys, and you said, we can't -- we have to take these people in, we can't just say no to them.

A: Look, they were family.

Q: But people did say no. Other groups said no.

A: Yes, they w -- there were -- there were cases --

Q: So you had to make a decision.

A: There were cases where some groups said we will not -- we are hindered, you know, and we will not be able to function, having them with us. Were we the noble people that saved them? I don't know what it is. I don't know how to describe it. A good many were related, a good many were from the same village, from the same town, you know. Although being from the same village and the same town doesn't necessarily always make the difference between good and bad. It just happened so. It just happened so.

Q: Tell me, were any babies born? Did women -- were women and men having --

A: You are touching -- you're touching on a -- on a very sensitive thing. Yes, babies were born, and they were done away with the minute they came out.

Q: They were.

A: I'm ashamed to tell you -- not ashamed.

Q: You couldn't -- you couldn't have survived with the babies. And what happened when -- did the mother's know this was going to happen?

A: Yes.

Q: They did?

A: Yes.

Q: And how did --

A: It was --

Q: Was it an --

A: It wasn't talked about, it was a matter of delivering the baby, and making sure that the baby is not delivered alive.

Q: And who did that?

A: Women.

Q: Women did that to the babies?

A: Yes, women. Sometimes a sister, sometimes a mother. We didn't have any 90 year old people with us when we [indecipherable] elderly, you know.

Q: Yes, yes, they were 50 --

A: They had functions.

Q: Yeah.

A: This was one of the functions.

Q: That's quite a function, isn't it?

A: Yes, it is. Well, there weren't any 10 - 12 babies a day, you know.

Q: No, no, no, no, I understand.

A: But there were cases.

Q: So that also means that either peop -- women were coming in pregnant, or they were allied with --

A: No, they became around --

Q: They became pregnant in those circumstances.

A: Sure, sure, sure. Look, we didn't declare, you know, a standstill on sexual relations there.

Q: Right.

A: We were young people.

Q: Right. And did some of the women get hysterical when this happened, when -- they couldn't bear it? Do you remember circumstances --

A: They usually were taken into the elderly camp, you know, when they were quite advanced, and didn't come back until they came back, so --

Q: So you didn't know.

A: Not that they were that far away from us, but you know, I didn't know, perhaps maybe I didn't want to know.

Q: Right. And of course there was no chance for abortion, there's no -- there isn't -- there's nothing, right?

A: As I told you, medical -- the -- we -- we happened to have -- in our group we happened to have a guy who was a half a dentist. He was a --

Q: Half a dentist.

A: -- a -- a technologist.

Q: I see.

A: He was a technologist.

Q: Right.

A: He was the doctor, you know. We di -- but when -- later, when we got stronger, when one of us got injured, we put him in a ve -- in a -- we had some peasant homes designated --

Q: Right.

A: -- and we told them point blank, we are entrusting him with you, or her with you, and God help you if something happens to him. True. They were afraid of us. They really thought that we are an organized, you know, 42nd battalion of the third army.

Q: Right. Sometimes that's better than actually the real army.

A: Right.

Q: Tell me something about iodine, why was iodine so important?

A: A disinfectant.

Q: Mm. And that was the best thing you could get your hands on?

A: What medicine did we need? We needed, for instance, let's say if you had stomach trouble, so there were elderly people that knew the jolad -- the -- the -- the different growths that grow in the woo -- in the forest, that takes care of it. The injuries that we had was a bullet penetration. You needed to prevent the infection, and iodine was the best thing.

Q: Did this half doctor, half dentist ever operate?

A: Wa -- oh yes. Oh, yes. Operate. Cut it a little bigger, and with a pair of pliers, which was boiled in hot water, pull it out.

Q: And were people given liquor, or did they --

A: Liquor, that was a different story, liquor, everybody was sick for liquor.

Q: They were?

A: Every -- sick for liquor, you know, everybody came declaring that they are sick --

Q: Oh, because wanted liquor --

A: -- because they could get the -- I'll tell you a story with liquor. We were told that about 30 miles away from our settlement where we were, that there is a home -- there's a food depot of a -- of th-the German -- of the German army. And it's manneded by a few, like elderly Germans, you know? So we went down there, and it was winter time, and went down with a sleigh, and with a horse, and we came in, and we loaded up. We took some flour, we took some sugar, I remember. And then, you know, we saw large kegs, we asked the guy, "What is this?" He says, "Schnapps." So we took a keg, and we rolled it on the sleigh, and we brought it back to camp. And the commander, Proch saw -- saw the -- the keg, he got ballistic. So finally he asked -- he was terribly upset, you know, because it's dangerous, you know, that it -- you getting drunk, you get loud. So finally he ordered the keg to be half buried. You know what I mean by half buried?

Q: Put it in the ground with half of the --

A: Half -- half the amount.

Q: Yeah. Oh, you mean -- you mean throw out half of it?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: The keg half buried. This is the keg, bury it that deep.

Q: Uh-huh, okay.

A: Okay. And it was for medicinal purposes, and for the purposes of rubbing yourself, because this was a good disinfectant. So, all of a sudden, everybody claimed that he has lice, he has mites, he has this, he has that, and they need -- they need th -- some liquor. So finally he got tired of it, and he br -- he m -- he broke a part of it, and spilled it in the ground. But --

Q: Did you -- wou -- did you go after liquor, too?

A: Oh, hellow.

Q: And what --

A: This is where I learned to drink.

Q: Is it? And how did it f -- how did it function, it dull -- it dulled you in some way? Or it -- it's made y --

A: First of all, it takes away fear from you, you know. It kind of -- it's a false courage, but it gives you a courage. And you -- you ability of -- of making s -- quick, sane decisions decreases tremendously. There -- there shouldn't be any liquor on --

Q: Yeah.

A: You know. If I would have been Commander Proch, I would have, you know, destroyed the barrel completely, you know. But on the other hand, if I would have been with Russian partisans, if -- if Commander Proch would have tried to break a barrel of liquor, they would have killed him.

Q: Let me ask you a question about relati -- the relations between men and women in the camp. A -- in -- insofar as you could observe or experience, were women and men together because they cared about each other? Were the women going to men because they thought they would be more protected? How -- how --

A: Both.

Q: Both.

A: Both. There were many, many cases where beautiful women from outstanding families, before the war wouldn't have looked at -- at a given guy. And she became his girlfriend, because she felt that he is protected, better protected. Absolutely. Absolutely. And it -- I -- I'll tell you one thing, it's very difficult to be in judgment on these things.

Q: Absolutely.

A: You know, very difficult to be in judgment. It was a matter of trying to survive, it was a matter of trying to take revenge, it was a matter of defending yourself, and defending those around you, or counting on this, that those around you will defend you. You know, even on going out on ac -- on action, it always depended with whom you are going, and

who is your back-up, because if you had good back-up, you had a better chance to come back home.

Q: Right, right. No, and I'm not asking the question because I'm judging, it's a matter of trying to figure out what the social relation -- how they -- how they really functioned.

A: Some of it was natural --

Q: Right.

A: -- that they, you know, either that, you know, were girl -- girlfriend and boyfriend from the small town where they were, or they got to know one another in -- in the forest.

Q: Right. Now, w-would it also be the case with some of the women, if they were the girlfriend of a particular person, would feel protected from the other men? I mean, what --

A: Yes, yes.

Q: So that -- because men would n -- then not [indecipherable]

A: No, she was just -- no, no, no. Sh-She was his girl.

Q: So no one else would touch her.

A: Absolutely.

Q: Right. So a women who was not connected with somebody was vulnerable in some way?

A: L-Let me say this to you. Yes, she was vulnerable, but the sexual promiscuity was quite -- quite there. Th -- look, what else was there? The life was threatened. Sometimes you were hungry, sometimes you were cold. When you felt the urge, man or woman, wha -- what is it?

Q: Right. I'm not -- n -- but I -- I'm wondering in some situations women feel a kind of vulnerability that they don't want to --

A: It -- it was not an animalistic -- if you ask me whether it was an animalistic order, that, you know, a man went out and grabbed a girl, no, no.

Q: Right, it was something else.

A: Either she was his girlfriend, or -- or neither one of them were attached, and you know, but if -- if a woman was the girlfriend -- I'm using, you know, that Moatcha Stralliska as

an example. He was a very common guy, he was a very crude guy. He was a wonderful fella, you know, and as a companion in battle, you couldn't have asked for a better one. You couldn't have asked for a better one. So he wound up with a girl. You know, as a matter of fact, they live together, you know, until today.

Q: Really?

A: Before the war she would have never, never, never considered him as her mate. And th- that -- you -- you have to bear in mind that it was a -- a life where every hour was danger, th -- I'll say it to you, that the danger of dying wasn't such a big deal, so -- so what is it? Everybody dies around you. The object is not to. The object is to defend yourself. The object is, you know, to demand a price for your -- for your being killed. For instance, it was an accepted omen, an accepted formula that the last bullet is never used on the enemy. The last bullet you always use -- was used on oneself. This is not heroism.

Q: Right.

A: This is instead of falling into the hands of the enemy and being tortured, and being, you know, that -- at -- abused, and -- and beaten, and -- an-and what have you, and then be killed? So the last bullet, if the situation was such, if the -- often, you know, we went out, and if a guy got injured, and he couldn't -- and we couldn't get to him, so he stayed and waited on, you know, as close as the Germans or Ukrainians would come to him, and then he killed himself. Let me lighten it for you, and tell you again a story that you will get a chuckle of. We, as I told you before, were staying in the forest in dig -- in dug-outs, in -- in deep basements, you know, with a stove inside, it was warm. You know, you could undress and sleep comfortably. But as far as physical needs, to go to the toilet and what have you, you have to go outside. So what we did is we took a plank of wood, and we tied it, or nailed it, you know, if we had nails, most cases we tied it between two trees, so a person can sit down, and, you know, do whatever he needs to, and come back. It was very cold, and as a person moved his bowels, it froze. And -- let me finish the story. And so it kept on, you know, freezing, and normally when -- you know, when you move your bowels, and if you have a hard surface, it creates like an ice cream cone, a reversed ice cream cone. So this kept growing, and growing, and growing until it reached the level of the plank. And one of the guys got up at night, you know, no one wanted to go out at night, but when you couldn't hold it any more, so -- and he ran out, and sat down on that plank, you know, to do -- to move his bowels. But as he sat down, that frozen point of the accumulated bowel movement penetrated his buttock, and he was bleeding. Until today, he is known as the partisan who was injured by a pile of shit.

Q: Oh my God.

A: Oh, did we have fun with it.

Q: Oh my goodness. [indecipherable]

A: So it wasn't all -- it wasn't all terrible. It was -- it was pretty terrible.

Q: It was really pretty terrible. But tell me something, the people who didn't have -- to go back to the more terrible again, you know, that's quite a story. The people who didn't have guns -- the kids didn't have guns, elderly, they didn't have guns for everybody. What was going to be their situation, if God forbid, you were surrounded, and you couldn't get out? Were you going to shoot people?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No.

Q: You weren't going to do that?

A: No, no, positively not, positively not. I cannot tell you that every single person in our group had guns. Sometimes guns were taken away from the rightful owner, if you send out a group for a serious mission. But in most cases, you know, to take away a gun from a person who ha -- the gun was everything that one could dream of. You couldn't -- you didn't dream of gold, you didn't dream of diamonds, you -- you dreamt of getting a gun with bullets. This was the only thing. But I can tell you that after the 23 months, when the Russian army advanced, the [indecipherable] army advanced, and I remember that the first battalion who encountered us was an -- a battalion commanded by an Ukrainian major. And he ordered that we surrender the weapons, we had to surrender the weapons. This was an accepted -- and he said, "Who are you?" And we told him we are partisans, and we are Jews. So he says, "Jews? Jews fight in Tushkient on the -- on the black market." This was the greeting, you know. And this told me that I have nothing to look for in the Soviet Union, and I better go home. And when I came home, I found an empty town, 11 people left alive.

Q: Of the whole town?

A: Yeah. And told by some of my people that I knew from before the war, "Miles, you better get out of here, because if you won't get out, they'll finish you off." And I did.

Q: So, insofar as you know, how many of these 300 people of your group came out, do you think?

A: It wasn't three, it was about 250 - 260. I would say 150 for sure, if not more.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. If not -- yes.

Q: And did you simply disperse?

A: We -- when -- once the weapons were taken away from us, and once -- you know, we followed the army -- some immediately volunteered into the Soviet army.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Some of them, like I, wanted to go back to our hometown. And some of them, it settled in -- in Lvov, or settled in -- in -- in Vlochov, or -- or what have you. It was everybody for -- for his own, but let me say this to you. I hope you will understand me right. Most of the people that I am talking about were villagers, because the -- the -- the crème de la crème did not survive. They did not survive not because they were crème de la crème, they were too soft. They didn't know how to -- you know, to resist, and -- and what have you. So, when the war was over, everybody seeked his own level, his own intellectual level, his own level. I must tell you that my sense for admiration and love, and you know, and camaraderie with these people, that whenever they have a simfeh, you know what that is, a -- a Bar Mitzvah, or a wedding, or a [indecipherable], or a funeral, of people that I was in the forest with, no matter how I busy -- I -- busy I am, it gets right out, and I'm there. Special feeling. There's a spe -- there -- I have people in [indecipherable] you know, we are better than family. Do I have a lot in common with them? Frankly no. You understand what I am saying?

Q: Yes, yeah.

A: But, what difference does it make?

Q: But there's something else. There's something else.

A: It's much more -- it's much important, much stronger.

Q: And how have you been able to be in touch with each other? I mean, what was -- what enabled you all to find that you were in Vineland, or this one was --

A: Well, when --

Q: -- did you know each other's last name, I mean, how di -- did you know each other --

A: In some cases yes, and in some cases, no. In some cases yes, and some cases no. I'll tell you the truth, I meet sometimes some women in particular that were young girls, were children in camp, I don't remember them. They remember me, but I don't remember them.

Q: Yes, yes.

A: You know, because I was always active, you know, I was always, you know, leaving, and you know, in one form or another.

Q: Did you have, in the camp, a sor -- a semblance of a little school for kids? Did somebody teach --

A: No.

Q: -- no

A: No.

Q: So no one did that?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No. In the ghettos, yes.

Q: Yes.

A: In -- in -- in the ghettos, even if it was illegal, there were secret schools.

Q: Right.

A: But in the forest, no. Songs.

Q: You did sing?

A: Oh yes. Oh yes.

Q: And did -- was there some religious observance of holidays? I ne -- know that you talked about Yom Kippur, but --

A: Only -- only high holidays. Only important holidays. You know, and frankly, you know, those were days when young people had very little feeling for religion.

Q: Right.

A: If anything, it was anger and bitterness.

Q: So it got worse, it got [indecipherable]

A: Anger and bitterness, simply wa -- if there is a God, why is he permitting it?

Q: Right. Now, some -- someplace you said that water was a more difficult problem of yours than food.

A: By all means. By all means. Food, first of all, you can go three, four days without food, and you will live. You can't go three, four days without water, and function. You get crazy. And when the Germans tried to encircle us, and bombard us, they kept pushing us, pushing us, and one time we were not aware of wh-where we are retreating, and we retreated on an elevation. It was almost like a mountain. This was not a mountainous area, but you know, at -- a high elevation. And we were without water. And we were without water for two and a half, three days. And I can tell you I remember seeing people urinate and drink it. And -- you know, and we were told not to do it, that this can create insanity, you know. And finally we came to recognize that this is a very bad situation, that we will tr -- we will die, not being killed, but die. And we broke through. Meisel was at that time the commander, you know, when I -- and I joined up with his group, and we broke through, and we lost two people, and we got out of this area. But water is a terrible -- och, thirst, I can't begin to tell you how vicious it is. You know, you -- your tongue gets parched.

Q: But you're in situations where water is not free flowing, so how was it that you took care of water, even when you weren't being [indecipherable]

A: There were streams.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: There were streams, and l-look, we were not that finicky, you know, that it must be boiled, and this and that. There were streams, and if not, we used to go and bring water, and carry water, keep a -- keep a -- you know, a bucket, or a bowl, and you know, the -- the living conditions were very primitive, very primitive. We washed ourselves, we [indecipherable] a lot, you know, whenever we came to water, you know, we used to shave our armpits, and our pubicle, you know, and make sure that -- we used to use kerosene for instance, you know, to prevent -- there is -- I don't know how to call it in English, it's a -- an insect that buries itself in the human skin.

Q: Lice, lice.

A: No, not lice.

Q: No, not lice. Something else. Ticks?

A: Mende.

Q: Mende?

A: Mende veshkey.

Q: Uh-huh. So you would shave pubic -- women and men would do this in order to -- to be clean?

A: Right. The pubicles, and the armpits.

Q: Right.

A: And sometimes even the hair. Hair not so much.

Q: So sometimes you would shave the head?

A: If it was badly infected, yes.

Q: And what was the effect? This was itching, and [indecipherable]

A: Drove you crazy.

Q: Really?

A: Drove you crazy. And the only way how to get it out is by squeezing one at a time.

Q: So did that mean other people would come to you and they would squeeze like -- like monkeys?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah. These we --

Q: Do y -- go ahead.

A: These were pretty days, but they were not pretty days.

Q: No. Do y -- you know, I don't know that [indecipherable] that anybody can answer this question, but d-do you, when you look back on who you were before you escaped and became part of the resistance, and then who you are afterwards, do you s -- do you come back to sh -- Shmul?

A: To Shmoil?

Q: To Shmul, or is -- is -- is this person a very different person?

A: No, no, I -- you -- a person never becomes a totally different person. A person broadens his horizons so becomes more tolerant or less tolerant. Becomes nicer, or becomes uglier, but a person doesn't change. I believe that people are what they are, and they remain what they are. Did I go into the underground knowing that I will survive for 23 months? No, didn't expect it. But as I told you, I wanted to make sure that whoever wants my hat, will pay for it, and pay for it dearly. Now, this sounds like bombastic talk, you know, and I don't want to be bombastic with you. The struggle for survival was purely natural, almost animalistic. Almost animalistic. Human nature is to survive. Let a plane fly by and start dropping bombs, you know, you will be the first one to run, and I will be the first one to run. This is human nature. But to come back to the question that you are asking me, whether this changed me, oh yes, it made a tremendous impact on me. I grew up in a home, in a gentle home, and a respectful home, and a -- a soft home. You know what I mean by a soft home? And the experiences, and they were experiences that were pretty ugly, pretty ugly. All kinds of things. And yet, there were moments of glory, and moments of feeling proud. Now, I told you a minute ago that I don't want to sound bombastic, and I am not a deeply religious man, but I truly believe that it was almost destiny, if there is such a thing, that put me in this path, and I am very, very grateful that I have the opportunity to do the work that I am doing, because it gives meaning, it gives purpose. Do I go back to the days of Shmoil? Very often. And not necessarily in sadness, sometimes --

Q: Right.

A: -- in glory, sometimes in happiness. But I go back to the days of Shmoil. I think of my mother very, very often. Very often.

Q: And when you think of your mother, you see -- feel yourself as Shmul?

A: Yes, because it's connected. And of course, with mother I was in the difficult days also. I am more -- father died a natural death, so whether he was young, or whether he was old, it's immaterial, he died a natural death. Nobody robbed him from us. My mother, my sister was robbed from me. That was taken by force. My sister's children, wonderful kids, wonderful kids, but so were others, you know. I'm not an exception with that. So there were days of feeling very depressed, and very down, and very almo -- n-no pity. No pity on each other. No pity on myself, but just days when it got to you. And days when we came back from a mission and it was successful, days of glory. When I came back from this village that night, I felt so good, I can't begin to tell you.

Q: Did you sleep well that night?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. There are people that say, "How can you talk about it, when you took somebody else's life?" I say, "This is taking the life of a -- of a -- of a creature that had

no right to be on this earth." Because if we wouldn't have done what we had done, there would be other women and children.

Q: Right. Did you also have nightmares?

A: Still do.

Q: You still do? And the content of those nightmares?

A: There -- they're crazy.

Q: What, being chased, or --

A: Being chased, fighting, and you know, running and not making any distance, and you know, trying to load the -- the -- I had the Russian peppashah, with the round disk.

Q: What's a peppashah?

A: It's a hand gish -- a hand -- a --

Q: Oh, oh, oh, a handgun? Yeah.

A: -- a automatic handgun that I -- that th -- the disk is full, and I can't load it in, and all kinds of things.

Q: And are those the same kinds of dreams you had when you were in the forest?

A: Dreams are dreams, you don't make an appointment to have a dream. Dreams take you back 30 years, 40 years, two days, an hour ago, you know, and it gets all mixed up, you know. But I am active at night, very active. Ask Chris, she'll tell you. I talk, I talk Russian, I talk Polish, I --

Q: Really?

A: Yes. I yell.

Q: Are you rested in the morning?

A: Sometimes.

Q: But sometimes it's just exhausted you. Tell me something Miles, or Shmoil, when you went back -- I now don't know exactly what to call you, when -- when you went back to Tomashev, and you realized that your family is gone, and the town, essentially is a cemetery --

A: It was a very painful moment --

Q: Did you --

A: -- very painful moment. I -- believe it or not, but in the forest, I did not think about the fact that our people are being annihilated. I thought about fighting, about surviving, about killing as much as I could, you know, to come out on the top of it. When I came into Tomashev, and I saw the town, it was a cemetery. I felt that I'm walking on tombstones. I didn't need that friend to tell me to leave because I am in danger, because you know, there were many, many people that came back, including Chris, you know, that came back, and you know, the extreme -- the extreme right wingers took care of them.

Q: Right, right.

A: I didn't need it, I -- I couldn't -- I couldn't breathe the air there, I -- I choked. You know, it was a beautiful community. It was a community that offered everything that cultural life and a cultural society has to offer. Everything, you know, in all these old-fashioned traditions. When you -- at that time when I looked at them, they sounded silly, you know, to marry off a -- a -- a nitwit, you know, with another nitwit, they -- you know, it was silly. Today when I think about it, I look how beautiful it was. How beautiful, how generous it was. How humane it was, you know. In a community where, you know, traditions prevailed, and even the transition from, you know, Orthodoxy, and from piety, into modern -- into modern life, it was not a transition from piety and from scholarship to become heedens, you know, it is embracing a broader culture. Embracing, you know, a -- a greater set of values, although the set of values, I have never taken for granted, and I never give them up. The values that come with the life that was, are so exceptional, and so dear, and so extra special. You understand that it -- you -- sometimes I feel that I -- I shouldn't be talking, I should soak this up and swallow it. Because this is my -- this is my inner Shmoil. Just swallow it, because not everything you can put on the table.

Q: What does that mean for you to say swallow it? So that it becomes --

A: Internalize it.

Q: Uh-huh. And --

A: Internalize it.

Q: Right.

A: Because either it sounds that you are, you know, bathing and -- and -- and -- and you're wallowing in the ho-horribleness, or bathing in false worry, and neither is the case.

Q: Mm-hm. Let's stop the tape now, please.

End of Tape #4

Tape #5

Q: Miles, when you decided to leave Tomashev, which was wi -- did you stay just a few days?

A: Few days.

Q: Mm. How did -- how did you decide the next step? Where w -- where were you going to go?

A: These were times when you didn't plan ahead, you play -- you planned for the day, you know. All I knew is that I cannot remain in Tomashev, that you know, th -- I -- I will have nightmares, and then in particular since I was warned to leave, so I felt I had to leave. So I went into Lublin. And in Lublin, this was the time where the first Polish government was forming. You know, if you -- you ro -- you remember, the Poles divided up in Russia into two, it was an [indecipherable] army that went through Teheran, Israel, you know, and they stayed and fought on the side of the allies, and there was the -- the -- I have a -- a blank mind on the name of ma -- th -- the women. There was a Polish unit, a Polish army that fought -- decided to come into Poland, to liberate Poland with the Soviet army, and help establish a -- Vonda Rosherefska, it was her name -- and to help establish a new Polish regime, a Socialist regime, so to say. So Lublin became a very viable place, and -- and since in particular this was a time when people came back from every camp, from every corner, you know, and they were looking to find out whether someone is alive or not. So it became a very viable Jewish center. And I wanted to be there, hoping that maybe I'll find something out about my sister, about her children. About Mother I didn't have much hope, because I -- you know, I didn't think even if she wouldn't been killed, that she would have survived these horrors. And I settled myself in, I got an apartment, and -- and I needed to make a living, so I got into partnership with Leon Fellheldner. Feldhandler is the -- one of the two commanders of the death camp of Sobibor, that have broken out. It was Sasha Alexander Petroski --

Q: Right.

A: -- and Leon Feldhandler. Leon Feldhandler was a son of a rabbi of a small town called Ishbitza, not far from Tomashev. And we became partners in -- in selling soft leather, because this -- his area was an area where they -- where they were producing, you know, they were treating hides, and converting it to leather. And one night -- he was not active in any politics or anything, one night Polish extremists entered the house where he was, and killed him. Now, there were many killings after the war, you know that. But this killing was so painful in particular for the role that he has played. Here is a man, the son of a rabbi, who was able to enter a role of leadership in uprising, in rebellion, and revenge in a death camp. And to come out of it, and then be killed when he was hoping to start building his own life, a new life, very painful, very bitter. So we stayed in po -- in Lodz -- in Lublin for -- oh, I would say, three, four months.

Q: After his -- he was killed?

A: Yeah.

Q: You weren't afraid for yourself?

A: Where -- where was I to go? Where was I to go? You lived under -- you -- you lived, you know, with circumstances. You --

Q: Tell me something, did you two talk about each of your experiences? Did he talk about Sobibor?

A: Oh yes, oh yes. Yes, yes. A lot.

Q: And did he -- he describe the -- the -- the -- the uprising, did he describe what was going on in Sobibor to you?

A: Absolutely.

Q: What kind of a guy was he?

A: He was a marvelous man. He was a marvelous man. He was a learned man. He -- he -- there -- he wasn't religious any more. This war, this experience turned him off, but a scholarly type of a guy, but not a scholar. He was a -- an every day guy, and a good guy, a good looking man. And he started dating a girl, she was a beautiful, beautiful girl, and when he was assassinated, she had a nervous breakdown. She wound up in an institution. What happened to her later, I don't know. But I left Lublin, and went to Warsaw, but in Warsaw you couldn't stay anywhere, because all of Warsaw was destroyed. So, it -- it was a rebel -- a rubble. So we went to Lodz. Lodz was not destroyed.

Q: And who's we?

A: That's a good question. No, it was I, for the time being. It is in Lodz where I met Chris.

Q: Right.

A: No. You see, because I am thinking of Lodz, I am beginning to think in terms of we. No, to Lodz I came by myself. I mean, I had friends, I had people that I dealt with. You know, there was Reuben Russet who was in -- in Brazil, you know, that we tried to get out of, you know, and tried to regroup, and reconstitute, and -- and do something with our lifes. And I met Chris --

Q: How did you meet?

A: I owned a restaurant.

Q: A restaurant? You got to Lodz and you opened a restaurant?

A: A nightclub.

Q: A nightclub, really?

A: With dances, and with music, and with food.

Q: Well, before you meet Chris, tell me how this happened.

A: I had to do something.

Q: Well, I know, but this is a -- this is really very different from anything you've done before.

A: It started off that, you know, there was a need for places to eat, because no one had households, everybody came in, you know. So Reuben Russet, my friend, said, "Let's open a restaurant." I said, "Let's open a restaurant." So we opened a restaurant.

Q: Yeah.

A: And it went off very well, you know, it -- you know, it was good, you know.

Q: Who was cooking?

A: We hired people.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: I didn't cook. He -- he shopped.

Q: He shopped?

A: Yeah.

Q: And you ran it?

A: I ran it, but then we discovered that in the back of the restaurant is a big hall that used to be something, I don't know what. So he turns to me, and he says, "This would be very good for a dance hall." So we combined it, and we called it Little Hell.

Q: Little Hell.

A: Pigelko. And it was quite good. So Chris, with her sisters, came back from -- you know, from being liberated and sent to Germany.

Q: Right.

A: She came back and -- and, you know, she found her uncle --

Q: Right.

A: -- who was in Lublin.

Q: You mean Lodz?

A: In Lodz, excuse me. And we -- and one night she came with a -- a friend of hers from before the war, that he took her out for -- th -- he wanted -- basically he wanted her to have dinner, and she didn't want to eat, she was too proud to tell him that he -- that she is hungry. So she said she ate before she came.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. She was gorgeous. She was gorgeous looking girl. And I -- I was a good dancer, so I asked -- I asked her partner whether I can invite her to dance, and of course, he said yes. And we danced a lot that night, and we got to know one another, and we kept on knowing one another for awhile. And she brought me up once to a gathering of people that were in camp together -- you know, probably this story from her testimony, and I came up and some of her friends said to her, "Don't marry him. He -- he is not for you, he is too -- too smart, too -- too -- too -- too slick."

Q: Really? This I don't know.

A: And -- however, I liked her a lot and she liked me, and her uncle liked me a lot. Hanya was for me, Rainya was against me.

Q: Really?

A: And we got married, and I'll tell you something about getting married. Ev -- everything has a story.

Q: Yes?

A: We were in Warsaw. We went in to see a couple of friends of hers with whom she was in camp together. And walking the street I come across Rabbi Kahanna, who was the chief

rabbi of the Polish army. He was -- he had the rank of colonel, I think, at that time. And he was in Lvov, the professor that taught me Hebrew literature. And he was very happy that he saw me, and I was delighted to see him, because he came back from Russia with that -- the advance for the Polish army. So I told him, I say, "Professor," [indecipherable], I don't know how to translate it, but Sir Professor, you know. "Chris and I are getting married, and I would very much like you to give us," -- you know, "to perform the ceremony." And he thought for a moment, and he said, "I'll do it." Joan, this was the first marriage in Lodz performed by a high ranking officer of the Polish army, my professor, Ted [indecipherable], it was a modern -- it was not like the old rabbis, you know, [indecipherable] around three times, and you know. It -- it had meaning, his sermon had meaning, you know. He talked about what we have just gone through, and what we are facing, and you know, how the future needs to be looked. It was a very meaningful -- very, very meaningful marriage ceremony. Very meaningful. And I managed -- I managed to establish myself, and with -- I dealt with all kinds of things. Among the most important thing is I have established a contact with the Polish government where they were paying the raberats with [indecipherable] you know, before war prices, and for prices from before war, you couldn't -- a cookie, you know, cost as much as a day's work. So I made a proposition to him, I say, "I will supply you food for the workers, on pre-war prices, because you must pay them in pre -- in -- but you don't pay me in dollars, or in zloty, but you pay me in goods, in textile goods."

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So I got textile goods for pre-war prices, and I supplied him with pork belly, with -- with onions, with beans, with all kinds of stuff. And all I needed is an official document from the Polish government, that I am buying that stuff for the use of the Polish government, because I bought this on the black market, I bought it on the prevailing prices of after the war. So I bought it for -- for black market prices, sold it for har prices, and got in return, textile on har prices, that I could sell on the open market and not be afraid that it will be confiscated, be -- I -- I don't think I -- I -- yo -- you are with me, I probably confused you by now. But this is the way it -- I do wa --

Q: Well, you bought low, and -- and sold high, essentially.

A: Right.

Q: Right? Sort of?

A: Well -- no, it's bou-bought legal and sold legal --

Q: Bought and sold legal.

A: -- this is the important thing.

Q: Okay.

A: This is the important thing. And things were going very well, until some local guy I was ready to load up a -- a boxcar with pork belly, and attach it to a passenger train to take it into Lodz, and he stopped me, and I gave him the documents, and he said, "I need to check them out." He was a bureaucrat. And in the meanwhile the pork belly was standing with 90 degrees outside, and maggots start crawling over it, and I needed to hire people, and pay them to bury it. And also, the government was a little uncomfortable, and they started to distance themself from it. To make the story short, I had to stop this. This was a very, very profitable business, I started making money. And again I was told, it's time for you to move on.

Q: Let -- can I go back a little bit?

A: Sure.

Q: Did you -- do you think you fell in love with Chris the first time you saw her?

A: Oh yes.

Q: You did?

A: Oh yes, oh yes.

Q: That one night, that first night was [indecipherable]

A: Oh yes, without any question. Without any question, it -- yeah.

Q: Did you end up convincing Rainya that this was an okay thing?

A: Finally she -- she became -- she became my best friend, because we raised Rainya, Rainya was our daughter.

Q: I know. I know, I want to ask you that question, cause I thought that was very interesting. Hanya has a fiancé, and she went to school, right?

A: She went to school, Hanya -- Hanya was -- Hanya was a scholarly type of a person, and they needed intelligent young people in the party.

Q: Right.

A: And the party send her, you know, for schooling. And if she wouldn't have left Poland, she would have remained in -- on a high level in the political hierarchy of Poland, you know.

Q: Right, right, this was the elder sister?

A: Right.

Q: Right.

A: And Rainya, when we were ready to leave, we gave Rainya a choice, she can stay with Hanya, and Hanya will take care of you, or you come with us, and whatever we will do, we will do with that -- there's no stabi -- stability with us, because we are on the go, and you know, we want to get into Berlin, because we want to leave from Berlin. I wanted to go to Israel.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: To Palestine.

Q: Right.

A: You know. So we gave her the choice, she can come with us, or stay with Hanya, and she decided that she didn't care much for Hanya's husband, and she, you know -- and she stayed with us, and we educated her, and we brou -- I -- I look upon her as a daughter today. You know, she --

Q: It's interesting, she tells the story a little bit differently.

A: I'm sure of it.

Q: Well, it's interesting because her version is that she thought she would be a fifth wheel once you got married, once you were together with Chris, and you said to her, "No, you're not -- you're not leaving us, you'll stay with us, until you're ready."

A: True.

Q: So I think she felt that she had two parents in a way.

A: It's true. It's true.

Q: Yeah. And you had no hesitation about this?

A: Bear in mind, number one, she was Chris's sister.

Q: Right.

A: Number two, we came out, we all were orphans, we all lost everybody, we all were lonesome, we all were alone. You ask me how come -- you asked me before, did I fall in love with Chris immediately. Of course. She was a beautiful girl, and when I started talking to her, I saw the roots, you know, that wa -- became very obvious, because the war was over, you know. You were not looking for partisans. You were looking for a life companion, you know.

Q: [indecipherable] yeah, it's different.

A: Of course, the criteria was different, and she was the right person. I regret deeply that I never met her mother, because she was a very, very unusual, very special human being. Of the stories that I heard about her, you know, so --

Q: And you see it in the three daughters.

A: Sorry?

Q: And you see it in the daughters.

A: Oh, absolutely --

Q: You s -- you see the result.

A: Absolutely.

Q: Yeah.

A: And we -- we came to Berlin, we stayed in Frapensai, and we -- I wanted to go to Palestine, but you know, Cyprus came about at that time, and the pictures of seeing Jews behind barbed wire was just repulsive, and -- and Chris told me, I -- you know, she says, "I think I'm pregnant, and" -- which she wasn't -- "and I am not going to go to wind up in Cyprus behind wi -- barbed wire, I had enough of barbed wire." So we went and we applied to the American embassy, and the guy who interviewed her, saw Chris's number, and he was very moved, and very -- and he was a very nice person, and he expedited it, and --

Q: Really?

A: Yes. And we left in February of 1947, we left for America.

Q: And you came to Jersey?

A: No, we came to New York.

Q: No, it was New York, New York, right.

A: We came to New York. We lived in New York for about eight months, nine months. I had a good job, too good, and one day I came home and I said to Chris, "I'm quitting." She says, "Why are you quitting?" I said, "The job is too good. I keep getting raises, and raises, you know I'll wind up working for him. I don't want to work for anybody. I want to be in business for myself." You know, so he was a very nice person, you know. He was an importer of Italian olive oil, and provolones, and you know, a lot, shiploads, very large import, and I was in charge of his warehouse. And I quit, and I was going to start looking what I'm going to do, and I visited a friend in Vineland, and it was springtime, and it was green, and it was beautiful, and serene, and I liked it. And I said -- this was the time when Jewish Agricultural Society helped the survivors settle themselves in on -- on -- you know, on farms. And I applied, and they approved it, and I bought a farm, and I farmed for about -- '48 - '49 -- about four years. And -- but I realized that this is not for me, and you know, I'm not going to spend my life being a farmer, so I established myself in the fuel oil business, in the heating business, and from it I got into the gasoline business, and the gasoline business is where I really made my business career in the United States.

Q: So you go back to petrol, which is how you started in world --

A: You got it.

Q: [indecipherable] in 1939, right?

A: You got it, you got it.

Q: How interesting.

A: And -- go ahead.

Q: No, I was -- there's nothing more to say about that, I was going to -- you go where you're going to go, and then I'll come back. Where were you going to go with that? You enjoyed doing that?

A: I -- I enjoyed doing it because I was my own boss. But I did recognize that, you know, farming is a lifestyle, it's not -- it's not our -- it's not a vocation, it's not a business, it's a lifestyle. It was not my lifestyle. I, you know, lived in Vineland, and I organized the farmers. I formed the Jewish Poultry Farmer's Association.

Q: Really?

A: Yes. And -- but I got out of it, and let me say this to you. Ever since I came to the States, I always was active in something. Even in Berlin yet, you know, I was active, you know,

in organizing [indecipherable] and -- and acting in unison, making us, you know, a more decisive factor, and so on, and so on. And I was very active in [indecipherable] you know, from day one, I was very active in our town, [indecipherable]. And Yets Greenberg was the first one in America who organized a -- a small group called the Hora, to remember. And I became part of that, and when Carter asked [indecipherable] to organize, and -- organize a -- a group of people, and come back to him with a proposal as to what we are recommending as a means of remembrance of the Holocaust, I was invited to be on the advisory board, because it was too late already, to get into the original board. But a few months later, when the cun -- the United States Holocaust Memorial Council was organized, I was appointed by Carter to the council.

Q: Right.

A: And the rest is history.

Q: Is history. Let -- let me -- and -- and for those people who don't know, who are watching this tape, there is a very long interview with you about your work with the museum, so people wouldn't be deprived of that. But I -- I want to know when you first contacted Jonah, and when you found out about your sister, and your brother being alive. At what point --

A: Good question. Jonah I contacted immediately when I came to Lodz, because I learned -- I knew that he is alive because he was in Palestine, but I got his address. And there were people that came back from Siberia, the resettlement was a prolonged process.

Q: Right.

A: That told me that my brother is in the southern republics, in Toshkint, and my sister is in -- somewhere in Siberia, I don't remember now the name. But I got both addresses, and I wrote them letters to tell them that Mother is gone, and Esther is gone with her family, that I am the only one alive. And my brother send me the address of -- Froma send me the address of Jonah. This is how it worked.

Q: Uh-huh, I see.

A: And they came back here, and -- and unfortunately they came at a time when I was packing rather rapidly to get out of Poland. So they followed to Germany, and --

Q: They did?

A: Yeah.

Q: And both Peshe and Shlomo came to the United States? No.

A: No, Peshe came to Israel.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And Shlomo remained in Germany because he had a son-in-law who developed a very, very serious case of Parkinson. And L-dopa was very restricted in the United States, where in Germany, you know, they gave it out rather freely. And so he was stuck in Germany. And he died there.

Q: I see. And was he in -- in West Germany?

A: West Germany.

Q: He was in West Germany.

A: West Germany.

Q: So when was the first time all of you met? Did you meet as a group, did you just -- did you meet individually?

A: No, we -- it -- when I came to -- to Israel, we met together, and then Jonah came here, and Jonah has a son, you know, a polio child.

Q: Right.

A: And he was hoping that they will be able to do something for him, but they didn't. It's an unfortunate thing, this is --

Q: Right.

A: So there were sad occasions, and there were happy occasions, you know.

Q: Right.

A: And as I told you I -- I -- I kind of felt that I owe it to myself, and to those around me to be active, to do something, to -- t-to give back a little bit. And I gave back a little bit.

Q: I think you gave back a lot.

A: Thank you.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to say that we haven't talked about?

A: No, I -- I -- I think that i-if anything, maybe what I would like to talk more about, and you were chastising me for stepping away from my personal story, I think that the world that was, is not sufficiently known in America. And I think that we need to find ways and means of documenting it, of writing it down, of discussing it, and making it part of our heritage. The world that was, I -- I'm talking about the pre-war Europe.

Q: Right.

A: Has so much richness, so much positiveness, so much creativity. Again, let's not get carried away with -- you know, with Don Quixote stories. There was a lot of poverty, there was a lot of struggling, there was a lot of bitter life in the eastern European countries. There were -- there was more poverty than richness. But you take the traditions, you take even the -- the world that started crumbling, you know, the Hassidic world, the ultra Orthodox world. A world, you know, that went back to the 19th century, to the 18th century. Even as they were being diminished in their importance and size, they carried a crescendo, you know, of elevations, you know, that were fantastic, fantastic. And they were -- they were not the leaders, but perhaps they were the inspirers of those that stepped in into new life, into modern life, and trying to become part of the civilized Europe, playing a very major role -- a very major role in civilizing Europe. Jews have played so many important roles, and paid such a handsome rent, wherever they lived, that we cannot talk enough about it. But I'm talking about a handsome rent, I am not talking about money. I'm talking about contributions that are made in the field of science, in the field of arts, in the field of judicial -- judicial progress in organization. You take the countries, you know, first of all, of course, the ones on the front [indecipherable] Kalitsia was ripe for it because they encouraged. They were more liberal, and they were receptive to Jewish involvement. But even the -- you know, in the Soviet Union? You take the period when the Soviet Union came to be, and you go through the leaders, and you will see that the people that really, you know, introduced Communism to the world, with a dream that they are carrying a better tomorrow, were Jews. You take Germany, the Weimar Republic, and study it, and who were they? Jewish intellectuals. You take the creation, the -- the -- the -- the writers, and -- and -- and poets, and philosophers of Hungary, of Czechoslovakia, you know, of -- of -- of Germany, and it moved to Poland, and it came from Poland -- you know, I mentioned to you Vilno before, Vilno was a center not only of modern Jewish literature, a very strong center. Vilno was also a -- center not far from Vilno, the [indecipherable] the great [indecipherable] scholarship that have set levels for the Jewish people, of world -- world prominence. World prominence. We d -- we made a bad mistake in my opinion. In building the museum, you know, we have done many wonderful things, but we made a bad mistake by not going down two stories deeper, and allowing space for telling the story of the world that was. We must do that. It's -- it's something that we missed. You can't understand the importance of today unless you are capable of evaluating and giving credit, and discredit, whatever comes, to the world that was. It was a beautiful life, of Jews that struggled, didn't have it easy, but in spite of this, you know, what they have done, what they have done for Poland.

Q: Well, I want to thank you more than you know for today.

A: Don't thank me.

Q: And I think that you -- maybe you don't realize that what you just said really fits with the story that you told about your family, and your parents. [indecipherable]

A: Well, if I have done that, then I am re -- very pleased.

Q: I think you have. And thank you so much.

A: Thank you. You said something about photograph?

Q: And who are these folks here?

A: This is a friend of mine on the left side, the blonde fella, his name is Hooberman, and we were members of a youth club, it was called shamare atsyere, and in this club, we also created a -- a chess team. And here I am trying to be -- trying to beat him. I wasn't too much of a chess player, I wasn't too good at it.

Q: And you're on the left?

A: What happened to him, I don't know. I am on the left, and I probably am here 16 or 17 years old.

Q: -- '35, I think.

A: Well --

Q: Think so. Yeah, so you're 15. Okay. This is 1936. '35, right?

A: '35. February the 10th, 1935.

Q: And who is this handsome gentleman?

A: That handsome guy happens to be me, more or less in the same period.

Q: And you're wearing a Jewish star on your --

A: It probably is an insignia, either from a sports club, or from the -- the shamare atsyere, either one.

Q: Now this is 1936, right?

A: I think so.

Q: Yeah.

A: 1936.

Q: Wh-What's this group now?

A: This is the group that I was telling you, the shamare atsyere group, and I -- some people that are in this picture are no longer with us. I am embarrassed to tell you that a good many of them I don't remember the names any more. But I remember each and every one of them, and I -- in my mind I remember stories of wh -- what -- what we did together, you know, or -- or certain segments, but if you ask me to identify the names one by one, I can't do it. You notice me, I am sitting on the first row on the left hand side, second from the left.

Q: And the picture on the left?

A: The picture on the left is my mother, and -- and we are walking in Lvov, on the main Ligiornof is the name of -- the main -- the main corso in -- in Lvov. It's -- it was a beautiful, beautiful city, and Mother came to visit me. I was studying in Lvov in those days. And I dressed up in my best, and took my mother out to -- you know, to visit places in -- in Lvov. The picture on the right is my mother, I think it's -- the picture is taken a little later than this one. Probably '39, maybe. It looks to me like this was a picture taken for a passport, and we lodged it, I think so. You notice that Mother is wearing a wig, Mother was a pious woman, very religious woman, but a fantastic, fantastic achiever. Great lady.

Q: And this photo?

A: This photo is a photo of myself right after the war, when I came out from the underground, and I came to Lvov, and I took the first picture for a kankarta -- for -- for a passport. And at that time I -- I weighed the least that I remember myself, 140 some pounds.

Q: And on the left?

A: On the left it's me again, in Lodz, 1946, and next to me is my beloved, Chris, a beautiful, beautiful person, in and out. Just as beautiful inside as outside. And we have a lot in common, we had a lot in common in memories. And she comes from a beautiful family and I regret very much that I didn't have an opportunity to get to know her family, and I'm sure that if my mother would have known her, she would have loved her just as much.

Q: And the top picture?

A: The top picture is a picture of me on the marine perch, as we are entering the harbor in New York, after a crossing that lasted 16 days from ha -- Hamburg to New York. If you look closer at the picture, you will see the Statue of Liberty is right smack over my head. The bottom picture is Chris and I again on the same boat, on the marine perch, as we are standing and admiring the constant flow of cars on th -- the west side -- west side highway.

Q: The shot on top?

A: The picture on the top is I'm standing with Chris, and with my sister-in-law, Rainya, this is Chris's younger sister. And the picture on the bottom is in Vineland, where, when we came there, we bought a farm, and I raised poultry for about three to four years. And you see the -- the collection that I have from the day, of a couple of buckets of eggs. We done? Good.

End of Tape #5
Conclusion of Interview