United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Sigmund Strochlitz
February 25, 1999
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PREFACE

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SIGMUND STROCHLITZ
February 25, 1999

Beginning Tape One

Question: Can we begin with you telling us your full name?

Answer: My names is Sigmund Strochlitz.

Q: And when and where you were born.

A: I was born in Bendezin, on the first day of Hanukkah 1916. But my parents registered me February first, 1917 to make me younger.

Q: Can you tell us the full name of both of your parents?

A: My father's name was Herman and my mother's name was Rifka.

Q: Di -- your mother's maiden name?

A: Yes, Kermer.

Q: Can you spell that?

A: K-e-r-m-e-r.

Q: And do you know the names of your grandparents?

A: Yes. I know -- I know the first name of my grandfather, who I admired. His name was -- was Morchai. The -- my grandmother's name I have forgotten.

Q: And daw -- and these are your paternal grandparents?

A: Yes. It -- no, my maternal.

Q: Your maternal, okay.

A: Yes.

Q: And on the other side, do you re --

A: No, my father grew up as a -- after his par -- parents -- his parents died very, very early at his age.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about the town that you born in, and that you grew up in?

A: Yes. There were 31,000 Jews living in Bendezin. Of course there's not a trace of them today in that town. Life was very interesting and families were extremely close. My grandfather lived across the street from our home. Life was not abundant in riche -- riches, but somehow we -- we felt that we are destined to play an important role in the life of humankind, that we have given the world the 10 commandments, not in order to achieve power, but to set moral examples. To set standards of how to deal, how men should deal with God, how men should deal with -- with man. I went, as a youngster to a religious, Zionist school. I stayed there for about four years and then my parents transferred me into a secular [indecipherable] school. I remember Friday -- Fridays very well. My mother wil -- getting up very early, going to buy [indecipherable] chicken. And there was excitement of a Friday. Saturday morning I used to go with my grandfather, and sometimes with my father to pray. The town on Saturday was completely engulfed in silence. You see only Jewish people marching to the synagogue, quietly. The prayers were -- were [indecipherable] and you felt some sacredness in the air. I loved those Fridays and I loved those Saturdays. Furthermore, I remember that Jews from its -- Jews from surrounding towns were coming to our town in order to buy chicken, fish and bring them into the shochet, the ritual slaughterer. They were -- they were buying all -- always for the whole week and then came the next Friday again. I was extremely happy in school, learning about Zionism, learning about -- about Jewish religion, and developing an extremely fond love for the Jewish people. The city -- the cultural life in the city was on a very high level. There was a Jewish theater, there was a Jewish newspaper. There was a voluntary symphony orchestra. There was a -- was a big library.

And there were sports clubs, and we always were trying to participate in the sport events. The community, however, was divided. There were people who belonged to a very radical Zionist movement, the Zhabotinsky movement. And there were again [indecipherable] especially where some of my friends belonged to a socialist Zionist movement. And in the middle there was the mean, mean Zionist. People who did not try to define themselves as -- as right wingers or left wingers. The Orthodox community was also divided. There were strictly Orthodox groups, and then there were groups that did not only believe that prayer is the answer to our problems, but forming or creating, or returning to our ancient homeland is extremely important. My two sisters belonged to that general Zionist organization, and I, as a young man, felt that perhaps the Zortinsky movement, the movement that was teaching us to go and move to it -- to Israel and fight, I felt at that time that this is the only solution. In my town, I did not feel any anti-Semitism when I grew up, because there were not too many Gentiles in town, and there was no contact whatsoever between the Jewish community and the Christian community. We lived separate -- separate lives, not mingling with each other. I remember my teachers were -- who I liked very, very much, they really cared. I remember my uncles, merchants and [indecipherable], aunts that -- more pious than their husbands. School friends who were bookworms, and others who really didn't care. But the discussions among all those groups were very heated. We really believed in our cause, and tried to convince those others to join us. We did not have any luck. They were also convinced in their just cause. There was a communist movement in town. Their aim was to move to Soviet Union, create a state there. I remember the name of the state that they were trying to -- to establish, they call it Biro Bijam. Someplace in Siberia. I did not meet any of them after the war, and I don't believe that some of them survived in the Soviet Union.

Q: Can you tell me some more about --

A: About what?

Q: About the group that you were involved in --

A: Yes.

Q: -- that -- can you say the name again?

A: It was a revisionist organization formed by a leader, his name was Zeev Zhabotinsky.

Q: And to become a member of that did you have to petition in any way, I mean --

A: No, no, no, no. We did not have to do anything, you have to join them. [indecipherable] organization, and most of the people, please understand, were my age. Older people did not belong to those organizations, to those radical organizations. Most of them were part of the general Zionist movement.

Q: What did it mean to be a member, and how -- how did you get together?

A: We were getting together sometimes in the evenings, but mostly Saturdays afternoon, discussing events in the Jewish world, expressing our opinion, and participating in all events that were taking place in our town, whenever somebody came to our town to speak to us. Those were really wonderful years, really wonderful years. My two sisters did belong to the general Zionist organization. And I'm not sure that I remember, but it seems to me that m-mostly -- my organization, there were mostly men. I don't remember any women in my organization. But in the general Zionist organization, there were a lot of women.

Q: Can you tell us the names of your sisters? I don't believe you --

A: My older sister's name was Esther. My younger sister's name was Rushka.

Q: And at this point when you were in this youth group, or this group, now how old are you?

A: At that time I must have been 14. Around 14.

Q: Did your parents have opinions about the group?

A: No, my parents belonged to the general Zionist organization. This is perhaps one of the reasons that my sis -- two sisters joined that organization. They felt more comfortable. It may be also that most of their friends belonged to that same organization.

Q: Did anyone in the family have a strong reaction to the fact that you were in a separate group? What -- what, for instance, did your father or your mother say about that?

A: My father and my mother were very tolerant people, and they felt that if this is what I would like to do, this is the organization that I would like to belong to, they will not interfere. They will not interfere, as long as it is a Zionist organization. Did my uncles, who were very pious people object to it? I don't think so. I don't think so. They actually also belong to -- to radical Zionist organizations.

Q: What were the goals of the group that you were part of?

A: The goal was, first of all, as long as we cannot move to Israel, to develop a strong sense of Jewish identity, reinforcing the feelings that we had in school, reinforcing it in such a way that -- that we were more free to discuss things. And I don't [indecipherable] discussing events and problems that are taking place not only in Poland, but all over the world. We used to get newspapers, discuss articles, have -- have opinions. And all of it was very exciting. We were looking forward to those meetings, sometimes in the evening, but most of the time on Saturdays afternoon.

Q: How did -- how do you make sense of a kind of -- th-the fact that you went your separate way from the family, and that you were very passionate? How do you explain that?

A: I was young, and I was concerned with the rest of -- the rest of -- with the members of [indecipherable] who felt that -- especially the older [indecipherable] that felt that we should not hasten the arrival of the Messiah, that we have no right to do things like this. I was resentful of it.

And I strongly believed that only power will force the English people to let us come in. Only our determination and our willingness to fight and not wait for the goodwill of the English government, is the only solution.

Q: Did you imagine yourself perhaps, getting smuggled in there and becoming a -- a military --

A: Ye -- yes, yes. I know that some of my friends who still live in Israel came in 1936 or 1937 as illegal immigrants, being brought into Israel in a very clandestine way. I'm asking myself why didn't I go. It's a very painful question. Perhaps even though I felt that this is the only way, and to feel that way, you have to have courage. Could be that I did not have the courage to go along with, being 17 or 18 years old and start a life on my own. My family was a very close family, and I never developed a feeling that I can be alone. And that prevented me from making that fateful decision. In hindsight of course, I would have been much better off, and perhaps that bothers me, and perhaps convince my two sisters after I will be there, that they should do the same thing. It bothers me. On the other hand I have doubts that my sisters would leave our parents alone. They were not young any more, and I am not sure that they would have accept this idea of going to Israel, and abandoning -- I'm using that word because this is the way they felt probably, abandoning our parents. My two sisters, if we can go to a different topic, joined me in Kraków when I went to the university in 19 - nine -- 1936. In 1937 they joined me. I was transferring to the business academy. I went to the university only to be able to get into medical school. But the quota was very low and I didn't make it. I transferred to the business academy and my si -- two sisters came to Kraków to study. But at the same time, I'm not proud of myself, I'm proud of my youngest sister. We made a deal, all three of us, that every Friday one of us would go and spend the -- the weekend of the Shabbat with our parents. My youngest sister never failed to go. I had sometimes a -- an event that I wanted to attend in Kraków, sports event

or cultural event. On Friday morning I was turning to my youngest sister and tell Rushka, I am not going. It is my turn but I am not going, you better go. And she always went there. She never left my parents alone.

Q: Talk a little bit about what -- ca -- what a regular day was like in your home, I guess this is before you went to the university, but when you were growing up. What your mother did during the day, a little bit about your father.

A: My father was a merchant. My moth -- mother was a housewife, like in every Jewish family at that time, maybe even every Christian family. We had our store and building that my father built in 1929. We lived on the first floor and there were three floors above us. Was a very, very capable man, even though he grew up without his parents. He was a self taught individual who cared very much about the family. I was very close to him. My father, even though he had very little schooling, became in that city of 31,000 Jews, the vice president of [indecipherable] you can call it today the federation, or whatever you want to. That was very unusual because every two years were elections. This was not an appointed position, you had to win the election to -- to -- to be part of it. He won every election as long as -- as much as I remember. He had a very wonderful way of dealing with people, and my father became the [indecipherable] a representative of a big, big manufacturing firm in Lódz, and if people that are buying anything that were produced by that -- that manufacturing outfit, they had to come to us. And I also remember the recession. My father just finished building the house and all of a sudden it became very, very difficult to accept the fact that people are not paying their bills. And please understand that in most of the businesses, people were buying and mi -- and signing a note. And my father [indecipherable] those notes in the bank, all of a sudden he confronted the fact that they’re not paying their notes, and he has to -- he has to redeem those notes. It was a very difficult time

because he locked himself in one of the rooms, and did not want to listen to anybody. But as I told you, my father grew up as an orphan, and he had the -- he had three brothers and two sisters. The older brother raised the family, and was a very wise man but lived in a different city, about 15 or 20 kilometers from u -- from Bendezin. And he came and stayed with my father for a long time and convince him that not everything is lost, and you should get in touch with this -- with that manufacturer in Lódz and see if they will help him. And that what happened. They came and they bailed out my father, who later on, of course, became again a very, very successful businessman. And those were times that were really threatening. We -- we felt that perhaps we have to -- we have to leave school, and that was to me, to my sisters, unacceptable. But thank God for my uncle, and that -- that manufacturing company in -- in ro -- in -- in Lódz that saved us and our family.

Q: Do you remember the --

End of Tape One

Beginning Tape Two

Q: Just a -- a couple details. Do you remember the name of that manufacturing company?

A: Yes, Karl Eisert, E-i-s-e-r-t.

Q: Was it a -- a Polish, or German --

A: No, those are Germans [indecipherable]

Q: And the name of your uncle, the uncle that helped your father, the older uncle?

A: Liam. We called him Libish.

Q: Liam Stroch.

A: Strochlitz.

Q: And can you tell us a little bit about your mother? H-How your mother would spend an ordinary day.

A: Very good question. We had in the city two old age homes. The people couldn't afford to stay home, they came and lived in those two age -- two old age homes, supported by the community. We had also a very beautiful home for orphans, there were a lot of orphans. My mother spent most of her time volunteering in those old age homes, and in the orphan home. And she derived a lot of satisfaction from that. On top of it, from time to time I used to see her in the store, helping my father. And -- I was thinking of cooking, but it is not correct because we had a maid that was with us for many, many years. And she -- my two sisters and I, when we're youngsters, were more afraid of her than of my mother. She was a strict disciplinarian. We were afraid but we liked her very much because we probably realized that she is trying to do her best to -- to make us avoid getting in trouble. She was a Polish woman, and came during the war asking my parents to move. I as -- I tried many, many times to remember why my parents rejected the idea. I wish they would have accepted the idea. But there must have been some reason why they rejected the

idea. After the war, I met a neighbor of ours who survived in hiding, the age of my parents. They told me, they were convinced that on the same street, my parents are hiding with that lady that worked for us. But it is a mystery to me why they rejected to go into hiding. And sometimes I feel -- I don't know if I'm justified feeling that way, that they did not want to leave us alone, we were youngsters still. And sometimes I do believe, especially my father, who could not -- who could not perceive that people are going to be killed. He somehow looked at the German nation with admiration for their accomplishments, and he couldn't visualize, probably -- and I am guessing just -- that those people who he is holding in high esteem, who gave us Beethoven and Bach and Dieter and Schiller and Mendelssohn, are capable of committing such crimes, such heinous crimes. And he felt the war will end and on the [indecipherable] but I'm guessing, just. But he -- if he will go into hiding and we be discovered, he'll be shot. Am I sure about it? No, I'm not. But I was thinking many times about it, and those thoughts crossed my mind. I wish they would have listened to her. She was a wonderful woman, but it's water over the dam. It happened, and --

Q: Do you remember her name?

A: Yes. Antosia, A-n-t-o-s-i-a.

Q: And she was also from Bendezin? Where was she from?

A: From the same town, or a neighboring town [indecipherable] I'm not sure any more.

Q: What language was spoken at home?

A: We -- I mean, my sisters and I were communicating in Polish. But my father was a Yiddishist, and there was a newspaper in Warsaw by the name of Hient, on a very, very high level. I always compare it with the New York Times today. And we were getting that paper every day, a Yiddish paper, and if during the luncheon my two sisters and I did not know what a very famous

journalist was writing today in the paper -- his name was Margoshis, my father used to be very, very upset with us. And he enjoyed having those discussions in that -- at the table in the Yiddish language. There is [indecipherable] something that I will never forget. My youngest sister, before going in the room for lunch was telling around to me always, Sigmund, did you read Margoshis' column today? You told me what it was. Sorry.

Q: When do you remember becoming aware of a change in your life, o-of being apprehensive in any way about the future? That possibly something was going to change? Or would -- perhaps hearing about Hitler, or Nazism?

A: Yes. We were glued to the radios, listening to his speeches, and we were frightened. But at the same time I do remember that there was a feeling among a lot of people that he is talking about it only in order to gain power, and to exercise power. But perhaps it's empty talk. And still we were frightened. Now of course, on the first of September 1939, when they came to town, we immediately realized that it is not just talk. There were two events the first two days of -- after they came to town that I will never forget. One were a family by the name of Schlesinger, father and two sons, running to the synagogue to rescue the Torah scrolls -- from the burning synagogue, the Germans put fire on -- on it -- burned the synagogue. They were able to run in and bring out two Torahs. When they emerged from the burning synagogue, the Nazis shot them on the spot. That was one event that of course frightened us. The second, han -- in hindsight, it was a policy probably, to frighten the people. On the second or third, or fourth day, and I don't remember any more, they came to -- to -- they entered homes and took out some leaders. And I don't remember -- remember today how many, but must have been at least five or six, and hanged them in the middle of the market. For nothing. For the fact that they were Jewish. That frightened us quite a bit, quite a bit. The people were really naïve in '39. They lived during the

first World War, and they felt it's going to be a static war. And what my parents did is to move part of the business to a town by the name of Jarolsitsa around 30 or 40 kilometers from my town, believing that the war will not -- that the Germans will not come as far, and they will survive and return. Of course, it turned out to be an illusion, and my sisters and I were -- were in the -- together with my parents in that town, that all of a sudden you realize that the ger -- Germans are moving very fast. And the young people were trying to hitchhike and go east after learning that the Soviet Union have entered the war, and occupying east of Poland. We strongly believed that we can survive there. I was one of them, and my sisters did not join me. Again, I was thinking why, why did it happen. And then I remember -- I -- I remembered that -- that in all those seven or eight or nine days that it took me to hitchhike to eastern Poland to the city of Lvov, I don't remember seeing on the roads -- the roads were crowded -- too many young ladies, too many young women walking and trying to hitchhike and -- to the eastern part of Poland. Why? I don't have really a good answer. I don't know why, but those were the facts.

Q: Can we just go back to the first day that the Germans arrive in your town. If you can remember where you were, h-how you knew they were there. W-What it looked like, even smelled like?

A: How it looked like?

Q: Mm-hm. When they arrived.

A: We were at the windows. They came in in tanks, just shooting around indiscriminately. We are afraid to leave the home -- our houses. And then, I remember the ger -- Germans breaking into stores, taking whatever they wanted as though it's -- it's theirs. Breaking into homes, and taking paintings or whatever they found, and cutting it away. Of course, that was really frightening, our age, to understand that people can come -- just come in and take away something

that my father worked all his life, without any -- any consideration about anything. Was perhaps a moment when we felt that life will not be the same any more, that life has changed. I also remember that when they ever -- when they saw a Jew on the streets with a beard, they were cutting it off, and laughing, and kicking people. I don't remember all those -- all the time that they occupied Bendezin [indecipherable]. I don't remember to confront or being confronted by a German who showed sympathy for us, or gave us a piece of bread, even though my wife remembers that there was a German in Kraków who helped her. But I don't remember. All my anger at the German people blocks my -- my willingness to accept there could have been a good German. Of course I changed my mind lately. But that could have been behind me not remembering that there were at least one German who tried to show sympathy or tried to help.

Q: What did you do in those days, did your -- did your father sort of give you orders to stay in the house, or were you trying to have contact with your youth group?

A: Oh no, we did not have any comfort of the youth group any more, everything was -- came to a standstill. In the first few days I stayed home, but I went with my parents to the city of Jarolsitsa, where as I told you before I was hitchhiking to the -- to eastern -- to eastern Poland. But after being in Lvov, and I don't remember, three or four months, my father sent a mi -- a mis -- an emissary to tell me that I should return home, that things have calmed down and life is almost normal. My faith in the wisdom of my father was absolutely boundless. I went back. I had a difficult trip. I was on the floor -- i-in the city of [indecipherable] that were only about 10 miles from my town, on the floor of the railroad station. They run -- came running in, trying to find Jews and drag them out. I was on -- I was somehow lying between two or three Gentiles and they missed me. Within the next day or two days later, I came to town. As I told you, my father was a -- was the vice-president of [indecipherable] and he were very close to a -- to young people that

were in town form -- they formed a kibbutz that they were together trying to emigrate to Israel, waiting for certificates to Israel. And they were -- they were involved in -- in -- in producing -- in -- in -- in planting, I'm sorry, not producing, planting food, potatoes and tomatoes. And that was very important and my father, on behalf of the Judenrat, this is the way they called that federation that I mentioned before, was supervising that kibbutz. I was -- my father brought me in and I stayed for awhile, also helping. And then something very unusual happened. I got hold of a book with certain laws that the German observe, and I notice that there is a law saying that people who work in defense industries -- and we had three enterprises working for German defense industry in town, they're entitled to additional meat. They call them sverarbeiter, people who work hard. I took advantage of the law. I went to the authorities and I was successful to convince them that those people over there are entitled to more meat. And I used to get every week meat designated for them. There was a sausage factory in town [indecipherable] in the nearer -- neighbor town -- neighboring town, Sosnowiec, where we worked hard and produced sausages. Of course it was much easier to distribute sausages and to cut meat for [indecipherable] and this is where I worked from 1940 or '41, until deportation of the -- in sep -- August of 1939 -- 1943.

Q: I just want to go over a few details, just -- just to k-kind of clarify a few things. So within a few days, your parents packed up a few things and moved to a neighboring town, correct?

A: Correct.

Q: The name of the town?

A: Jarolsitsa

Q: The day after that, it was agreed upon that you would go to Lvov.

A: I'm not sure it was a day after or three, four days after.

Q: Just tell us if you can, just briefly, a little bit about what you did in Lvov. You were there for three or four months, what -- what was it like at that point? Was it a refuge center?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: I was able to find a family. They were butchers, and they said to me, alright, we will give you a place to sleep. So basically what I needed is to earn enough money to buy food. The soldiers, the Russian soldiers were absolutely obsessed with getting a watch, getting watches. This was their mean -- mean d-desire, to get watches. I used to go out and try to find out who wants to sell a watch and sell it to them and buy food. This is the way I lived for the -- for those three or four months.

Q: Were you comfortable there with the Russian soldiers versus the German soldiers?

A: Yes, yes, I was much more comfortable until all of a sudden the Russians were transporting my friends to Siberia. And -- and that bothered me. I thought they might be able to come and pick me up, too. And as I said to you before, when my father sent somebody to convince me to go back, and I said to you that I had boundless faith in the wisdom of my father, sitting here just now, I also believe that I was afraid, especially that I came from a family that was a wealthy family, that I would end up in Siberia. It was hard to realizing what to expect home.

End of Tape Two

Beginning Tape Three

Q: I wanted to think back, when you returned from your three to four months in Lvov, what did your hometown look like? Had it changed in any way?

A: As a matter of fact it did not. Life all of a sudden became semi-normal. The Germans putting men, they called them the [indecipherable] who was now [indecipherable] together with my father. Not giving anything to us, not -- being guided by my father. And we -- life became semi-normal. We were walking the streets. I am not sure that I remember if our youth group met. I had doubts about -- I have doubts about it. But people worked, as I told you in those defense factories, and the illusion that we will survive the war became much stronger. That was 1940 - ’41. And furthermore, young people were -- were taken away by the Germans to Germany to work there. And here the -- the image of the man who was in charge of all those communities, all those Jewish communities, a man by the name of Merin, M-e-r-i-n -- perhaps was a visionary. Perhaps in this -- that feeling came to me only after the war, because during war I was very unhappy with the fact that he is cooperating with the Germans. But he understood that people who work are being sent to Germany to help in their defense industry, may have a much better chance than others. Even though I remember discussions in our groups at that time, quoting a very fa -- very, very famous saying of the philo -- Jewish philosopher Maimonides, that if the enemy comes, and he is asking to hand him o -- hand them over one person that they are going to kill, the community should never accept it. Yes, we should all -- all of us should go. But Merin felt -- felt differently. He felt on the contrary that this cooperation with the Germans and imbu -- imbued young people -- not imbued them, but forcing young people to -- to accept the fact that they are going to be deported, and they are going to be working in Germany, was perhaps a very good idea. Most of them, most of them survived the war. [indecipherable] the war, we young

people couldn't accept his decisions of cooperation with the enemy. On the other hand, again in hindsight, they had -- if he would not have, the Germans would have taken over everything and massacred us, like they did later on when they invaded the Soviet Union in June of 1942. They came to towns and just took out people and killed them, massacred. And maybe we avoided that fate. Maybe. But of course, that he will found that he has a good relationship with the Gestapo, and he can do many things. But again, misleading people. He couldn't -- yes, he could get somebody out of a transport to Germany, but he was really fulfilling their wishes. If he had not have done it, would there be other people in town who would have taken over the function? Perhaps. I don't condemn him any more like I used to during the war, and immediately after the end of the war. He fulfilled a certain function in the life of the Jewish people in Bendezin, Sosnowiec and [indecipherable]

Q: You -- you're talking about Moshe Merin?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Wa -- was he in your town before the Germans came, or -- how was he a part of your town before that time?

A: He was not a very highly respected person before the war. I don't remember anything about his family, but I know that he was not among the people who gained the respect of others. How he emerged as a leader in 1939 is to me a mystery. Maybe there are others who lived closer to him. Maybe they know the answers. I am unable to remember and tell you why he emerged as a leader of the Jewish [indecipherable]. He was not elected, of course, there were no elections. Something must have happened that the Germans either agreed or appointed him to be the head of the Jewish [indecipherable]. Not only the Jewish community in his town, Sosnowiec, it was this -- it had a -- probably the same [indecipherable] we had probably between 30 or 31,000 Jews

and next town [indecipherable] other small surrounding towns. He became the leader. Why? I have no answer.

Q: Can you talk -- we're talking a little bit about their being discussion within the community and some people felt that Moshe Merin was -- was collaborating, cooperating with the enemy. What did people who disagreed with what he was doing, what did they think should be done? And then of course, what did you think? You disapproved at that time of him. What did you think he should be doing?

A: What he should be doing?

Q: Well, you spoke about disagreeing with the fact that he cooperated in some ways.

A: Yes.

Q: In many ways, with the Germans.

A: Yes.

Q: What -- what did you think he should have done instead?

A: He couldn't do anything instead. I suppose that, as I said before, they would have found another man, another substitution to making [indecipherable] and cooperate with them. You know, I used an expression that I learned someplace, that Moshe Merin and we are confronted with choiceless choices. There was no way to -- to change anything. We had no choices. And again, I do believe that -- that his -- his cooperation saved a certain number of Jewish people who were sent to Germany and survived. There is nothing, no justification for cooperating with the Germans, and preparing lists of people that are going to be taken to Auschwitz. No. No, it is not. But he may have thought, as I said before, that we are going to be exposed to massacres, that nobody will survive. Those are feelings that I had after the war, not during the war. There were other leaders in Poland that took upon themselves to cooperate and save. Perhaps under the

illusion that time is -- will be on our side, if we will drag it out, the war will come to an end. Of course, that was an e -- just an illusion. That's illusion, and before the war, when we listened to Hitler, I thought it's just talk. It was not just talk. He meant it.

Q: Did you ever meet Moshe Merin or hear him speak?

A: Yes. When you say meet, I hope you're not implying that I was sitting down with him and having a discussion, no. But I met him, perhaps several times, when he came to town and was speaking and again everything -- people to follow him and to leave and be -- to accept the fact that they're going to be shipped to Germany, and convincing -- trying to convince people that that is -- that they will survive, they will have -- they will work under completely different conditions, that they -- they will not die out of hunger or disease. But I was never involved in any -- in any conversations with him.

Q: When he spoke at a public rally like that, saying those kinds of things, what were people saying in the crowd? Did you every overhear anything?

A: No.

Q: What were they thinking?

A: Not that I remember. Not -- I assume that there were those who believed him, and those who had doubts about what he is saying. But this is natural, it is normal. If a majority believed him, or a minority believed him, who knows? Who knows? But again, as I said before, it turned out that most of them survived.

Q: Can you describe life at this point in the town? Tell us a little bit more about how your father's shop is run. You mentioned a German being there to help him.

A: Not to help him, he -- h-he -- he -- he was there to help them.

Q: Your father was there to help the Germans?

A: Yes.

Q: What -- what was the atmosphere in the shop like, and again what was daily life like? Was there enough food? [inaudible]

A: I don't believe that I -- I thought that I was ever hungry. How did we get food? Yes, there were some stores open and -- and I do remember that Poles, they come to town and send food. When I say that my father was there to help them, even though -- even though he was not paid, but I do remember that permit -- perhaps with their permission or with none -- no -- not -- not get -- getting their permission, he used to take out from the store certain things from the store and sell them. And that was a blessing, cause we could buy food.

Q: And when the Germans came to town were there any new laws they passed, that insisted that you give them personal items?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you know if you were present for any of that?

A: If what?

Q: If -- if -- if you experienced any of that.

A: Well, they came to town, and after a few weeks everyone had to wear that yellow band and the sign Juden here. Of course this was already demeaning, and something [indecipherable] and such a state of mind, you are losing your faith, yeah. Your world is sudden start to feel that you are something that is -- has to live on a much lower level. And, as I told you, we are in school -- there's a school, we -- we were very proud of be-belonging to the Jewish people. When they came, immediately brought us down completely, taking away our confidence. And perhaps [indecipherable] they -- they took away a -- our faith and resistance, even though in my town there was a group of young people who somehow were able to secure a gun or two guns. They

killed a German in the street. Of course, they later, the Germans came in and of course they took most of the young people and killed them. I'm not sure most, but a certain number of people that they killed on the spot. That what I remember.

Q: You've mentioned two situations now of being -- sounded like they were asking people to go to Germany, and then in this case rounding up people after the resistance attack. How did you escape those two situations?

A: First of all, I hope you don't mind if I will correct something in your statement.

Q: Not at all.

A: Not asking people to go to Germany, deporting people to go to Germany. I hope you don't mind --

Q: Not at all.

A: -- but I -- I am correcting that.

Q: Well, let me clarify. So at that point when Moshe Merin, it's -- it's not a sign up, he's not -- he's just justifying. He's not telling people that they should volunteer to go to Germany.

A: No, no.

Q: Okay.

A: No, he was the per --

Q: He's justifying a certain deportation.

A: That's right.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: And preparing the lists of people that should be deported.

Q: Okay.

A: What was your question?

Q: I-I wanted to know in those two situations, how were you able to avoid, in the first one being chosen, in the second being rounded up perhaps if I'm -- if I'm imagining it --

A: Yes, yeah, I avoided it because of the influence of my father, and the fact that I was working on that kibbutz and being protected that way, being healed that way. That was [indecipherable] that I was not deported.

Q: Will you tell us a little bit about the influence of your father at that point in the town?

A: Oh, his influence was diminished to a great extent, but he knew the members, all the members of the Judenrat, and he was kept in very high respect, perhaps he avoided, or he was able to -- to convince them not to put me on the list, that somebody else go in -- in my place. I'm sure somebody else went and took my place. Did I think of it at that time? No. But after the war, you know, you are going back, you are trying to determine in your own mind what happened. And I came to the conclusion that somebody else was deported in my place. It's not a very comfortable feeling, but again, that expression that I used, choiceless choices, comes to my mind.

Q: At this point -- at this point, is your father -- you're a young man, is your father talking to you in any way about the future or choices that may have to be made? Perhaps even a strategy of how to deal with danger, I guess is the best word for it. At this point people are being deported, people are being rounded up, they're being shot in the street. Are you and your father having any discussions about what may come for you [indecipherable]

A: I don't remember any specific discussions, but a lot of people in town were building hiding places in the basements that were really difficult to discover. And by -- and my father, of course, built such a place in our home. No, he build that place of hiding only after they brought us into the ghetto. In our home he did not, but after they brought us into the ghetto, he build a place of hiding. And that was perhaps the best indication how bad the situation is.

Q: Can you describe where the place was, or how it was hidden?

A: The place -- yeah, the place was in our basement, and the entrance for the -- to the -- to the hiding place was -- was -- was done in a way to disguise it, how? By putting a -- putting a big credenza, or whatever you call it at that time to hide the entrance. And there were no signs, if I remember correctly that there is a [indecipherable] even if you moved out the -- the -- the furniture that was there. At the same time, the Germans learned, especially in homes of more important people that they build hiding places in there, and they found most of them, or all of them. It was again only another illusion. But you have to live with illusions in times like this. Life becomes unbearable if you don't have any illusions. We lost faith, we lost confidence, but if you lose illusions too, then -- then you are hopelessly paralyzed.

Q: What do you mean when you say you lost faith?

A: We lost faith in ourselves after they put those yellow bands and wearing that sign Juden. It was difficult for us to understand. If you are referring to faith as faith in God, I am not sure at that point that we lost faith in God. We lost faith in man, but I am not sure that we lost faith in God, but we lost faith after arriving in Auschwitz, completely in God, seeing what is happening. And there's a very interesting change of minds among people who arrived in Auschwitz and were my friends or acquaintances. Maybe after the war I understood it. People who were in my town who I knew were very pious people, very pious people. [indecipherable] starting to challenge God, mocking. Maybe mocking is a too strong word. And on the contrary, my friends who are atheists in town, who belonged as I told you before to that left wing organization and communists -- I'm not sure about communist, but who belo -- belonged to the left wing organizations, and were atheists, all of a sudden became belie -- they became believers. Why? And again, after analyzing it, I have one answer. Here I have an answer. I think that the atheists

became more believing, blaming themselves for creating that situation and forcing the wrath of God. And the other group, the religious group couldn't understand that God is not interfering. They learned in Jewish history that God interfered in many instances in Egypt or -- or Persia, whatever. Why is He all of a sudden becoming invisible. Why is he not interfering? Seeing small children that are innocent being thrown into the fire. If I am innocent -- if I am guilty, fine. But how can you permit small children being th-thrown into the fire? But again, a change happened in me too, later on. I realized that without faith in God, or faith in a human -- in entity that is -- that is managing the world, it's very difficult for this, very difficult for this.

End of Tape Three

Beginning Tape Four

Q: At some point in all of this, you -- you get married.

A: Yes.

Q: Can you tell us about that?

A: When I came back to town, I -- perhaps several months later, either it was the second part of 1940, I got married. I got married to somebody who was in my class in school, and with whom I was very close all those years. We were what you call today sweethearts. And even though we accepted that we should not bring -- and we should not bring people -- well, you should not raise a family, that -- perhaps that was the expression, to have children, we wanted to get married.

Q: Why did you -- why did you think that you should not raise a family?

A: Because I thought at that point that perhaps there's an uncertain future, and perhaps also it -- it will be easier to survive without having to shield or protect small kids. And we were young, we thought the war would end, and we can have children at that time. We felt it's irresponsible for people getting married to ha -- to try to build a family, build a family into a very uncertain future and having to protect those children, that is no way for us really to protect. And it is a mistake, a big mistake to raise a family.

Q: Can you tell us your wife's name?

A: Sabina, S-a-b-i-n-a.

Q: And her maiden name?

A: Koninski, K-o-n-i-n-s-k-i.

Q: And can you describe your actual wedding, were you able to have a -- a -- a ceremony?

A: The ceremony took place at her home, only family were invited. Was it a happy ceremony? I don't believe so. It was a ceremony with lack of enthusiasm, even though we were deeply in love

with each other, but how could you become happy in to the [indecipherable] times when you knew that things are going very, very badly, that who knows if you will survive. So why did we marry? We married -- when you are 19 or 20, you are -- and you went out with your future wife for six, seven years, a desire to get married -- the desire to get married is stronger than logic. Much stronger than logic. Her parents were pushing, even though my parents were reluctant. And we got married. I don't have any regrets. I was in love with my future wife for many years. I do believe that I made that -- at that time, the right decision even though my parents were not very happy about it. And they participated in the wedding, together with my sisters, and never mentioned anything to anybody that they are uncom -- not that I know of, that they are uncomfortable with the marriage. I'm -- I don't believe that I am -- that I know more about it, or I remember more about it.

Q: Where did you live?

A: We lived in the same town that our parents lived.

Q: So you had your own apartment?

A: No. We lived with an aunt of my wife at one point.

Q: And can you tell us a little bit about what work you were doing? You've mentioned it, but if you can just describe it a little bit more. How many days a week, where was it, how did you get there?

A: Well --

Q: Where you were working at that time.

A: Yeah, I was every day there. I was every day in that factory or trying t --

Q: You were what?

A: I were -- I was every day in that --

Q: Every day, right.

A: -- sausage factory.

Q: Okay

A: All trying to go to -- to Katowice where the headquarters were, of the German region. And trying to get again, permission to -- to get some meat. And that was my function.

Q: And were you assigned to that job?

A: No, I -- I read the law and it -- and all of a sudden I realized that maybe I can help.

Q: So after you read the law and brought it up, who -- who put you in that job?

A: My father helped me to put into the job.

Q: And what did you actually do? Were you managing the sausage making?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: I was managing and trying to be fair in distribution. It's not easy to be fair in situations like this. Even though I don't remember being accused of treating people -- one group of people more favorable than the other, I don't remember being accused of that. Was I unfair? I am sure that I was trying to be fair.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about people in town who were ha -- you've -- you felt were collaborating or you had evidence that they were collaborating with the Germans?

A: When you are saying people in town collaborating with the Germans, I don't believe that I used that expression before. We were talking about Moshe Merin collaborating with Germans. Were there others? Of course there were others. I --

Q: I'm talking about someone who might -- might s -- tell a German that you had -- that a person had taken an extra sausage without asking, or inform, or spy on people.

A: Yes, unfortunately that happens. There were some who were informing on neighbors, leading some Germans to -- to homes where they could take more -- take -- take out valuable things. This is very -- was very regrettable. Do you have to be informer to survive? I don't believe so, but there were informers, and not only there were informers, the Germans have insisted on having a police force, a Jewish police force in town. And those police officers, whenever there was a day that they were trying to round up people and deport them to Auschwitz or any other place, they were -- that Jewish police force were working with the Germans. This I wish would have never happened. And again, would it have led to a massacre? Could very well be, if they would not have -- if the Jewish police would not have cooperated with them, that could very well be. But -- but perhaps, same thing, who am I to judge somebody who has -- who wants to save him and his family? Difficult, very difficult.

Q: Did you have -- can you tell us when you first heard of the idea of the ghetto?

A: It must have been at the end of '42 or the beginning of '43. That's -- again, we heard about the ghettos much earlier, because they have -- the Germans established ghettos in different towns before they did it in my town. Why? Maybe because my town was incorporated into Germany, and the others were in Poland, were the -- where they could -- where there were no publicity. Even though there were no publicity, nobody really was trying to inform the western world at that time what is happening. But the fact that we were incorporated into Germany must have been a factor, that we were living to the ghetto only at the end of '42, and perhaps even ni -- perhaps -- perhaps not in '42, but in '43. I don't remember the exact date.

Q: So you remember the ghetto coming towards the end?

A: '43. Before we were deported to -- before the -- there was a complete liquidation of the ghetto that took place on August 1943. There was no -- there was -- we knew that there are -- that there

are qu -- establishing ghettos in different towns, and perhaps that one day it would happened in our town too, and it happened. But again, I remember people who were -- who were terribly disposed to Merin, saying that he is avoiding it, that he is trying to avoid, the he is trying to convince them not to -- not to deport us into a ghetto. Did he have so much power? I doubt it very, very much. I doubt it very, very much. But people -- some people believed in his good relationship with the Gestapo and that we can avoid it. But the decisions were not of local Gestapo people or even district Gestapo people. Decisions were made in Berlin. They get -- they got the -- got the letter, or whatever. Building has to be a ghetto by the first of June or whatever it is. And they were just fulfilling the wishes of the main authorities in Berlin. So I have doubt that he could influence local authorities to postpone it. They would have been probably put into jail or killed, you know, there was no ob -- not obeying. Not obeying a decision made in Berlin would have cost them their lives. So I have great doubts that Merin was able to postpone our being deported into the ghettos.

Q: Can you describe what it wa -- what actually happened when you went to the ghetto? I mean, how much warning were you given, did you just walk out of your house and leave most everything there, your parents --

A: Of course.

Q: -- did you try to find your parents that day?

A: No, I don't remember, but must have been -- has -- had one or two days warnings that we have to go into the ghettos, and again that Judenrat assigned different apartments. It's extremely crowded. We got, I believe, two rooms for the entire family.

Q: So this --

A: But on the other hand, and again it's hindsight -- not hindsight, but thinking about it later on, we may have felt that at that time, '42, or the beginning of '43, that this is the way we will survive. If they are creating or building ghettos, they are not going to take us to annihilation camps. And that was a comforting -- comforting th-thought. But again, an il-illusion.

Q: So you had heard of annihilation camps at -- you remember hearing about them before you actually went -- went to Auschwitz?

A: I would say that in '43, we knew, much more than in '42. We knew from emissaries who came to us, warning us that -- that there's an Auschwitz, and there's a Birkenau, and there's a Treblinka and they are sent -- shipping those all -- deporting those people those camps, and the older people, and the kids and children and women are being immediately sent to the gas chambers. But there was one -- one event. One of the people who were in the train to Auschwitz from my town, were able before the train stopped in Birkenau to jump out of the train and made it back to town. And he came back and he was telling everybody that -- what happened, and that we are going to be all of us shipped to Birkenau and that we will not survive. That was a warning that came very late, must have been '43, maybe June or July of '43. But what could we have done? We were dealing -- or living in a country with a population who are very hostile to us. When I say the population, I am referring perhaps to about, I don't know, I will guess 85 - 90 percent of the people very hostile to us. They were taking some money, promising to -- to sell out -- bring out guns, never happened. They were denouncing us, pointing out to Germans if they saw somebody who looked like Jewish and was trying to -- to go to -- to another town without that yellow band. They -- they had a way of recognizing Jews, and denouncing them. So what could we have done in June, July of 1943? Very little Very, very little.

Q: You say when you went into the ghetto that that -- it was crowded. Who at that point were you living with?

A: With my --

Q: In -- in the ghetto, when you went into the ghetto.

A: Yes, I know. I was living with my wife with my parents.

Q: So then at that point you and your wife did move in with your parents. And your two sisters were there?

A: Yes.

Q: Was your grandfather there?

A: No, my grandfather died before the war, and my grandmother died before the war.

Q: Describe the room -- the rooms that you had.

A: They were in a part of town they call it kamyonka. Very poor people lived there, very poor people, so you can imagine the rooms. I do believe that we had a toilet. I do believe that we had to go outside. But as I said before, and that -- I am reinforcing it now in my own mind. It could very well be that we thought at that time that being in the ghetto will shield us of being -- being deported to a death camp.

Q: How were the sleeping arrangements? I mean, were -- did your mother and father have one room, or were you in --

A: No, I think -- I am not sure that I remember, but somehow we managed to sleep on the floor, whatever. We managed. We did not let our parents sleep on the floor, but we were probably lying down on the floor, and I can't imagine beds for so many people in those small rooms.

Q: What happened to your house? Your house, your parent's house?

A: Yeah, the German took it over, it was a very nice house. The Germans took it over. There was one Polish family living in that town, he was a doctor, his name was Bialy, B-i-a -- B-i-a-l-y, with whom I was close. I used to spend some evenings in the 40's in his apartment discussing -- discussing events. Was he also removed from that -- from my father's -- or from our ho -- house, I don't remember, I don't remember. I only remember that my father gave him -- we had some paintings. I'm not sure how valuable those paintings were, there were no -- not Picassos. But he gave him some paintings in order to -- in order to preserve them and give it -- give them back to us after the war.

Q: Was there anything else that your family did take with them into the ghetto? What else did your father take?

A: Yes, I am -- yes, we took certain things -- will I be able today to describe them, no, absolutely not. Of course we took certain things with us. Yes, I do remember that we were wheeling something, and everybody was. But what can you take, you know? You don't have anyth -- any buses or -- or trucks to -- to transfer. You took something that was -- that you felt -- our parents felt it would be absolutely necessary to have. Pretty sure it was things like this.

Q: Were there any family items or religious artifacts that -- that were included in the things that you took?

A: I doubt that there were religious artifacts. The family, I am not sure any more. I am not sure.

Q: And also, money, what -- what -- was there anyplace that you hid money, or hid money on -- in your clothes, or jewelry --

A: M-My father hid money in a garden. It was not far from our home. Yes, I am positive about it. But after the war, a friend of mine who I told exactly where the money should be, went back to

Poland, finally to dig -- dig the money out, didn't find anything. People knew probably that my father is trying to hide certain things.

Q: I-In -- what were you -- were you able to cele -- you know, honor the Sabbath i-in the ghetto? Ho --

A: My father was not a religious person.

Q: Really? Can you tell us a little bit about that, because --

A: Yes, I will tell you, my f -- we celebrated Friday nights with our families. They were very happy Friday nights. He observed most of the rituals, all the holidays. He observed very s -- very strictly, with one of us. But he -- yes, during the holidays he was going to -- to the synagogue, but every Saturday morning, my mother was taking me to my grandfather, who was waiting already on the outside, and leading me to his synagogue. And I will never forget the moment, I'll never -- I loved my grandfather, I loved him very dearly. And I will never forget those moments sitting with him and he putting his tallit over my head. I was so secure, must have been six or seven or eight years old. I was so secure sitting next to him with that tallit. You know, I saw him in the morning, this is very -- sometimes praying, almost by heart, and I said to myself, I'll never be able to do that. But the best part was -- and he was -- he was praying the grace after meals. There's one sentence that stuck into my mind when he was pronouncing loudly, I will say it in Hebrew [speaks Hebrew here]. I was a young boy, and now I'm an old man, but I have never seen a righteous man begging for bread. That was very reassuring. I di -- always waited for that sentence.

Q: So then, in the ghetto, did you continue to celebrate Fridays?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: We never gave that up. We were a singing family. I mean singing not professionally, but we all loved to sing, and he loved it and we were singing Friday night until late into the night. Even in the ghetto.

Q: And was it --

A: He was able to -- to separate his Friday nights from everything that happened during the week. This is again an afterthought. I never thought of it at that time.

Q: Were you able to separate the Friday night from the events [indecipherable]

A: You ask the very good questions, I'm not -- I don't -- I am not sure. I am not sure. I am not sure. Having said that, I have to tell you that I enjoyed very much those Friday nights. Was it the singing? Perhaps. Was it the fact that we all are together? Perhaps. But I have fond memories of those Friday nights.

End of Tape Four

Beginning Tape Five

Q: I need you to think back to this time in the ghetto. How are people treating each other? Are they acting as a community and trying to support each other? What were you able to observe?

A: I think unfortunately, everybody was living for himself. Everybody was trying to survive in a situation where survival was very doubtful. It was difficult in [indecipherable] to create a feeling of -- of having a common cause. Any one of us had the one aim, to survive. I am sure that people today, if they will read all the books and all the diaries will really be -- they will be unable to understand what indeed took place there. There's an impossibility. So, for me to say that there was a sense of a community is wrong; there was no such thing. And you may ask the question why. I told you why. Everybody lived for himself. We have to understand this. You will not be able to really know exactly, or know what was life about in those dreadful times.

Q: Who did you trust at that point?

A: I trusted my father, and I later discovered that I could trust my instincts. I discovered in Auschwitz, and for certain reasons I did certain things without realizing why I am doing it, but by doing it I survived that moment. So yes, I -- I have trust in my instincts.

Q: Some of the youth movements in your town were actively resisting. What -- what did you know about that, and were you ever able to observe any of that activity?

A: I was not part of it, so I could not observe it, but I believe I mentioned it before, there was a grou -- small group of people who were able to secure a gun or two, and killed a -- a Nazi in town. But that was all the extent of it -- there's -- that's all we have done, nothing else. [indecipherable] can you visualize those -- that -- that situation? You cannot. Impossible. [indecipherable] resistance was possible.

Q: Did you know of any activity that went on on the -- the kibbutz?

A: Yes. They were already determined to resist, those were young people determined to resist, and they were able to secure a few guns, and in August of 1943, they were shooting out from the kibbutz, and if they did some damage at all, nobody ever was able to discover. But they were -- they were defending themselves. All of them, of course, were killed on the spot there. But they were trying to follow the example of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. They had some connections with those people. And one woman in disguise was able to go to Warsaw and convince them to give us also a couple du -- a couple gu-guns, even though they had not too much either, not too many guns either. And they resisted. That -- that -- that I -- that I know.

Q: Is this woman Frumka Plotnicka?

A: Fr-Frumka.

Q: Frumka Plotnicka.

A: Yes, Frumka.

Q: Was she from your town?

A: No, she was from eastern Poland someplace.

Q: Did you ever meet her?

A: Yes.

Q: What was she like?

A: Wonderful person, very idealistic. Very idealistic, very devoted to the Jewish people. And I'm going to contradict myself here. I don't believe from talking to her that she ever lost faith. She still believed in the cause and she still believed that somehow they will be able to, even during the war, to smuggle themselves to Israel. Another illusion.

Q: It's interesting, when you said that this woman was able to go to Warsaw and convince them to give us some guns, you put yourself in the group of resisters, in a sense.

A: I shouldn't have.

Q: Well, I think it's interesting because I -- I -- and I wonder if -- if you'd want to explore it a little, that there was a part of you that felt that -- that you were part of that.

A: I am very little. They were hiding everything, not talking. Maybe when I use the word us, to bring guns for us, maybe I thought of them representing us. I was raised on the belief that we are a very tight community. And by using the word us, I [indecipherable] to have some conscience, but at the same time I felt probably that they are defending us, or they are work -- or they are fighting for our dignity or something like this.

Q: Did you talk to them, did you admire them, or were you frightened to be seen with those young people?

A: Whi-Which ones?

Q: A-At the -- the kibbutz people.

A: No.

Q: The young idealistic kibbutz --

A: No, I was not frightened, I was not frightened. But young people who shot the German in town were much younger. They were the generation of my youngest sister, very idealistic, very idealistic. And what did they think? What are you trying to accomplish? What did they think would -- they would accomplish by shooting or killing a German? I don't know. I really don't know. But [indecipherable] those young people were so -- so strong that they felt that I'm going to give my life, but I'm going to take a Nazi life, too, with me.

Q: Were you ever asked to join that --

A: No, I did not.

Q: You were never asked to?

A: I was never asked to. Would I have joined? Perhaps. I am not sure. The thing is, I said to you before, I did not have the courage to smuggle myself to Israel. I am not sure that I had at the time the courage to do something like this. It required a lot of courage, a lot of determination. Those four or five young people had it. And they also were students of that gymnasium that I -- that I attended.

Q: These were the four or five students that shot the Nazi?

A: Yeah, yes.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But they took their example from the Warsaw ghetto uprising. And again, let's look at that -- at that part of the war, or that event in Warsaw. Did those young fighters really believed that they can conquer or defeat the German army, the most -- the mightiest ar -- army in Europe with having some homemade bombs? No, they never believed it. But they believed in -- in exacting a -- exa -- exacting a -- a -- a price. And they did. They did. It took the German army longer to conquer the Warsaw ghetto than to occupy France. They did. They paid with their lives, yes, but they felt at that point I -- they had nothing to lose. [indecipherable] I'm going to be taken to the [indecipherable] and killed anyway. And let's at least die in dignity. I wish that the population, the Polish population would have been more cooperative and helped us. And helped us to secure arms and to join us -- or to join the Warsaw ghetto in -- in a quiet uprising that could have changed history, could have, if the Polish resistance that had enough arms, and was well or fairly well organized, mostly officers of the Polish army. If they would have joined the uprising, I wonder what would have happened. I wonder. Why didn't they? Maybe they thought they are not ready, that they aren't going to accomplish too much, that the Russians are at that time already in Poland and will be in Warsaw in a month or two, and at that point they will -- they

will stage an uprising and -- and join the Russian army. That they have no more to lose than to gain. I have doubts that -- that this was their thinking, but maybe. But I know for sure -- not for sure, I know and I believe that if they would have joined the Warsaw ghetto uprising, things could have taken a different turn.

Q: Y-Y-You're talking about more formal resistance. I wonder if you could talk a bit about whether or not you or your family or anyone you knew resisted in an everyday way, living in the ghetto. And this could mean a lot of things. But were there ways that you felt you were resisting the situation?

A: I know that some of the activities, before we went to the ghetto, were activities where somehow we were saying that not losing faith, taking part in those activities as though nothing is going to be happening again -- around us. And that what was to some ene -- some extent, a form of resistance. It was -- I said I lost faith, and most of us lost faith, but those activities for --- for a moment, restored faith that -- and gave us -- gave us a reprieve of not thinking of the everyday miseries. That was, to some extent, a form of resistance, resistance to survive. And that was, you know, writing poems or taking be -- children, or coming to meetings, if there were meetings, gave us a feeling that not everything is lost. That we are still on a higher level than our enemies. That part, I consider resistance. But we didn't really [indecipherable] faith or comfort in ourself, I doubt it, but for the moment it was good for our soul and our well-being.

Q: So a-at this point you're living in the ghetto, you're still working. Your father has a hiding place. Are -- tell us a bit about the deportations that are continuing. How are they being done, and how -- how are they being done?

A: Are you referring to deportation to Germany or deportations to camp -- to -- to death camps?

Q: I think now to death camps. At what point does that start?

A: Start what?

Q: When did the deportations to the death camps start? Is that after you went into the ghetto?

A: Oh.

Q: Or when do you become aware of them, let's say.

A: Of what? Of the deportations?

Q: The deportations to the death camps.

A: I think in the beginning of 1943. Most or maybe all of the deportations were to Birkenau Auschwitz. That -- there were no more deportations to Germany to work in the defense industries. And we were aware of what has happened in Auschwitz, perhaps late, even though we were only several kilometers from that town -- not several, but perhaps 20 or 30 kilometers from that town. But we were aware of it late, perhaps not before -- and I'm guessing here, not before April - May of 1943. Poles were informing us what is happening. But we were also thinking at that time that the world must be knowing what is taking place here. And aren't they going to warn the Nazis that -- that after the war, they will all be responsible for what they are doing here? Another illusion.

Q: You mentioned the emissary coming back who had jumped off the train. Did you yourself hear him speak?

A: Yes.

Q: What -- what -- what was he saying? How did he describe the train ride, and getting there?

A: Train -- he described the train ride as a -- as a -- they were very crowded, they couldn't even move around. And the train did not stop anyplace except Birkenau. He jumped out almost -- almost [indecipherable] the camp. He jumped out maybe -- maybe a minute or two before the train went into the camp. And he -- and I am not positive about it any more -- I think that he was

able to see the chimneys. I don't remember any more, but I think that what happened, he came back and he saw the chimneys and he saw the people being driven, you know. And convincing us all that we will all be brought there and to expect the worst.

Q: Do you remember his name?

A: Yes. Rosensaft, R-o -- R-o-s-e-n-s-a-f-t. Josul Rosensaft.

Q: What happened to him?

A: He survived the war. He survived the war and did something that I admire him for. After the war -- he survived the war on the same camp as I did, Bergen-Belsen. He immediately -- or a week later, formed an organization to take charge of the camp. That was really very reassuring and he develop good relationship with the English army. He used to get as much as -- as much as he could from them for us, and again reviving our spirit. That was so important, reviving our spirit. He's responsible for that, and I -- and we should be grateful to him. Imagine same way as -- that Moshe Merin was not a known entity in town, he was also not a very well known entity in town, but he turned out to be a real leader, a real leader.

Q: Can you tell us about the liquidation of the ghetto, or are there -- excuse, but I don't know all the details, were you deported before the liquidation of the ghetto?

A: No, I was deported --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- the first of August 1942. A day before, we felt that something unusual is going to happen. And there were rumors and whispering around that the Germans are going to liquidate the ghetto. My family -- I saw my father on that day, very early in the morning, and he said to me, "I'm going into the hiding with entire family. Maybe you should stay outside. Maybe you'll be able to warn us, or protect us." And I stayed outside. The Germans surrounded the ghetto early in the

morning, shooting and shouting and creating in [indecipherable] fear in everyone. I was taken to the railroad station with the first transport, the first train, so I did not see too much in town after I left, must have been 10 - 11 o'clock in the morning when they were taking me to the s -- to -- to the train station. I arrived in Auschwitz the same day. And when the train stopped, I saw an unusual scenes. Dogs barking and jumping, SS men shouting and shooting, and one SS man standing in the middle, he looked to me like a very high officer. And people are being asking to jump out of the train. It was complete chaos. Mothers looking for children, and we looking for our fathers. It was complete chaos. Cha-Chaos designed by it -- wha -- by th -- what -- chaos -- designed chaos is what I wanted to say. I jumped out of the train too, and I was brought before that SS officer, like everyone. And I saw that he is -- he is directing people to the right and to the left, to the right, women with children, older people. To the left, young people. At that point I realize that what is going to happen to those older people and children is immediate death. And I'll never forget that. There were inmates that were coordinating everything. A [indecipherable] inmate walked over to us and we said to him, "Where are those older people going?" He pointed out to the chimney and said, "You see? See that smoke coming out from both chimneys? Those -- in that smoke your parents will be in, and the children and older people." I couldn't believe it, even though I knew. But I couldn't believe that this is happening in such a way, so fast. Why didn't I believe it? I don't know. I don't know. Of course, two or three years later, when I realized that they did not mislead us, that this is what's happened. I was [indecipherable] to a barrack with people from my town, but before coming to the barrack they brought us to a place where we were tattooed, taking away everything and giving us those concentration camp uniforms. And marching us to the --

End of Tape Five

Beginning Tape Six

Q: Okay, you were describing the food that they [indecipherable] I think you were describing the food.

A: Yeah, in the evening we got a piece of bread and a -- and a soup. We were at that time already very, very hungry. And I stayed in that part of the camp either two or three weeks. Then we were brought into another part of the camp. And in the morning -- in that first camp we did not work at all. In the morning they were dri -- you were driven outside and standing there for sometimes two, sometimes three hours before they led us into our units to work. I was assigned to a unit where we were trying to clear weeds on the river, the Vistula River. It was so difficult. We were standing in the water, hungry. And in the evening we returned, waiting for that piece of bread and soup. And I made at that point that -- a decision that I'm going only to eat the soup and keep the piece of bread for next day. That was of help. I worked, and I don't remember again, several weeks, or maybe only two weeks. And luck started to play an important role in my life. The Germans established a group of tailors all -- established tailors who were -- who were mending uniforms, correcting uniforms and -- I mean, fixing uniforms. And sometimes bringing in certain items that they took away from survivors, like shirts and shoes and if they were in good shape, or they needed a little mending we did it. And trucks were coming once a week or twice a week and carted away those -- that good stuff. I suppose they -- I suppose or I am almost sure that they took it to Germany because -- because consumer goods were not available, not too much was available. People could not, during the war, go out and buy new shoes or -- or had difficulties replacing the worn jackets or shirts. And a cousin of mine was a tailor before the war. He was able to bring me in into that group. So I was relieved from being on the outside -- outdo -- being outdoors and being under a roof all day long. He was helping me in that production 60 or 70

percent because I wa -- I did not know what to do, but he was -- everybody had to fulfill a certain quota, he was doing it for me with his brother. But I guess the -- the kapo, after awhile, realized what is happening and he was singling me out many days and kicking me and hitting me. But interesting, he did not -- he did not remove me. He did not remove me, I still stayed under roof, and --

Q: I'm not sure what you mean by on the roof.

A: Under the -- under a roof.

Q: Under a roof, okay, mm-hm, yeah, okay, under a roof.

A: I -- I didn't say it correctly?

Q: No, I -- I -- I --

A: Und -- under --

Q: Under a roof.

A: It was under a roof.

Q: That's right, okay.

A: In -- in closed surroundings, in a building, not exposed to nature. That was going on for awhile, but then for certain reasons, they closed that place. And I was again -- that must have been already in '44, either February or March '44. I was distressed, but I know that they are going to assign me to another commando. Walking in Birkenau, all of a sudden, a man turns around to me and saying to me, "Are you Herman Strochlitz' son?" I said yes. "I was a friend of your father. What are you doing?" I told him the story, that I'm going to be assigned to another commando in the morning, that don't know where I might go assign -- be -- where I will be assigned to. He said, "Listen to me something. I am working in the berklidinkskomer." That was an outfit that was sorting out everything, and responsible for giving survivors if they came in,

and they really needed very badly to [indecipherable] we had a cruel kapo, he never gave anything to anybody. But again I was under roof, and what was more important was the fact that I had smuggled out a pair of shoes and give it to the people who work in the kitchen and they, in turn, gave me a piece of bread. And that was extremely important. I was in that commando for a long time. But again, luck, what happened? One day a Pole came in, and -- who was bleeding, his feet -- didn't have any shoes at all, and asked the kapo to give him a pair of shoes. The kapo threw him out. You know, it's interesting that those kapos were very eager to hit or to abuse people who in their eyes are weak. Let me finish this guy. I was able to throw out a pair of shoes. The door was open because he threw him out, and he was sitting not far from the door, I was able to throw out a pair of shoes. Those shoes were my salvation, and I'll tell you what happened. What happened was that I was shipped or deported to -- first to Stutthof, the camp in northern -- north -- north -- north Germany, where we stayed, my friend and I with whom I survived Auschwitz [indecipherable], and with whom I was very close, stayed in Stutthof, and I don't remember if a week or two weeks. It's always a mystery to me why they moved us around back and forth. They shipped us to another camp, Hiflingen. We also stayed there for a short period of time, and in Hiflingen, the head of the SS walked on the end, we were standing still, he looked at me and pulled me out and say, "You are staying in the barracks, you don't have to go to work. I will tell you what you are going to do. If people come in and say to you they are sick, if you have anything to give them, give them, but if not, tell them we have nothing to give them." He brought a -- a bottle of aspirins after a day or two. That was -- that's the o-on thing -- the only thing that I had was that one bottle of aspirins. But again, I was protected because I was inside. Maybe the work inside is better than under roof. After awhile we were shipped, my friend and I, to another camp [indecipherable]. We were shipped to that camp, and we were assigned to a commando, it

was already probably February, or January or February 1945. It was in s -- in the south of Germany. The weather was miserable, absolutely miserable. Snow and rain and cold. We were assigned to a commando that was going on every day and time to divide rocks, you know? Why they needed it, a mystery to me. We were all day long standing and hitting rocks, hitting rocks. After one or two days, my friend was a little older than I was, and very wise. He was able, in Auschwitz -- yes, in Birkenau to take with him a razor. We hardly made it back, we couldn't walk, we hardly made it back to camp. And he said to me, "Sig, there's no way we will survive one day, what is the difference? Let's finish it tonight." I walked in, I saw the doc -- the man that I gave the pair of shoes.

Q: The Polish man you gave --

A: Yes.

Q: -- the pair of shoes to?

A: Yes. He winked as he recognizes me, but he's -- I saw that he has an armband as a doctor, so I realize that he is a doctor in camp. Couldn't help too much as a doctor because [indecipherable] medicine. After we came to our barracks, I went to see him. This is exactly what he said to me, "Look sir, I cannot help you with bread, because all of us are getting one portion of bread. But one thing I can do for you. I can convince SS men with whom I am friendly to let you stay inside, not to go out." And here I said something and I did something, very, very proud of. Very proud. And here I had courage. I told him, I am very grateful to you, but I will not stay inside if you cannot -- if you cannot do the same thing for my friend. He threw me out and shouting to me, "Here everyone has to survive. What are you going to gain? You're not going to sur -- both of you aren't going to dri -- I cannot do more. I cannot do -- I cannot save your friend, too." In the morning he walked in and they called my number, 132407 out. I am not moving. A second,

or couple seconds later, I see the doctor whispering something to this SS man, he called my friend's name. And we were inside til about the middle of March if I remember correctly, we were shipped to Bergen-Belsen. I have to go back a little bit.

Q: Before you do that, if you just say the name of your friend?

A: Romek Vineweich. I have to back up a little bit.

Q: Okay. You were go -- you were going to go back.

A: Yes. For a short period of time, I was working -- September or was it 19 -- oh, it couldn't be that. No. In -- in -- no, it must have been '43, and I'm working in a commando of -- only for a short period of time, where a transport came from Kraków. And I was working there with my friend, and a woman ap -- we approached some -- some people who came from Kraków to find out what they know. Then, we always ask people who came in later what they know what is happening. And I said to one of them, "And you are from Kraków? What is your name?" Greenberg, she said. I said to her, "Wha -- did you have any family in my town?" She said, "Yes, I had an uncle by the name of Bookwhites." A very prominent family. I said to her, "You know, your cousin is working in a commando where she can send you some -- some clothes. I will get in touch with her." So people who are working in that camp with that -- where they were working on clothing. "I will try to get you something." And I did, I got her some clothes. And we spoke two or three times again probably, and I lost track of her. When we came to Bergen-Belsen, my friend Romek Vineweich, who was standing once at the -- at the -- at the wires -- at electric wires -- I forgot [indecipherable] and he noticed her, and he noticed that she is dressed well. He started to shout to her and the first question she said to him is, "Is Sigmund here?" He said yes. She said to him, "Look, I am the schreiberin in -- in camp. That means I have to report every day in the morning how many people died during the night and how many are still alive.

But I have access to food because of it." This -- you know, they don't know, the Germans if during the night 200 people died or 50 people died. They have a little [indecipherable]. "I will arrange that he has to come because we need here certain materials that only the men's camp have, and he will come with some -- some -- with a big glass, or something like -- big -- some container." Oh, that's better. "And I will give you -- give him food." And that what happened. And I was going to her every two days or three days and she give us food. And what is even equally important, she became my wife. I said equally important, that's more important. Have to correct myself. Much more important.

Q: What -- what is her full name?

A: Her -- her name is -- is Rushka. Rose we call her here, Rose -- Rose Strochlitz, but her maiden name is Greenberg.

Q: I want to go back to fill in some of the details of --

A: Yes. You know, I don't want to forget it. I mentioned before that I ha -- I was guided, or had confidence in instincts. What did I mean? There were, in Auschwitz, every few weeks or a month or two months, selections. And even though we're young people, again they looked at their faces because they were exhausted or -- for the gas chambers. And we never knew, because it's the same young people, if the left is good or the right is good. And we were pushed to the left or to the right, I don't remember. After a minute I turned around to Romek, and I said, "Let's see if we can go better to the left. I somehow don't feel right here. I don't know what it is, but I feel that this is no good here. I don't why I feel that, or I think that way. Let's move to the left, not to the right. Let's try to -- to smuggle ourself to the left." I was right.

Q: I don't completely understand how Romek was your friend, was he a friend from your town?

A: No.

Q: How did you meet him?

A: He went to the same gymnasium that I did, but he was five or six years older. He came, not in ’43. He was in hiding, and they brought him in 1944. And they assigned him to the same barracks, and I got attached to him and he to me. Why? Who knows? Attached very much so. And who knows why? He was protecting me all the time and I was protecting him. In Hilflingin, on that camp, I was kept inside. I had -- I could get more bread. I never ate it until he came. Yeah, I ate my portion, I always kept the second portion -- and I was hungry -- for him. He has described that relationship [indecipherable] 1946, he described it in an article that he wrote for an Israeli newspaper, and to my great regrets, I was looking for that article many times and I cannot find it.

Q: I wonder if we -- you can go back to when you first arrive, you described arriving. Can you tell us a little bit more about when you actually are given your uniforms and tattooed? I mean, what actually happened and did you know that was going to happen?

A: No. We didn’t know it was going to happen. We knew only from the statement made by one of the inmates that those who were the people and the children are going -- th-they showed us these chimneys, you see that smoke coming out. But we did not know. But the fact that they tattooed us led me to believe that it’s not our end, it’s not my end. Why would they go through the trouble of tattooing us? So it was reassuring. You know [indecipherable] they shaved us completely. And I walked out and I had problems recognizing my friends and they recognizing me. You look so different, you know? You look so different not in your clothes and -- and your head shaved, you know, that it was really difficult to recognize each other.

Q: At this point, wh-what do you know of your family? Di --

A: Of my family?

Q: Yes.

A: You know something? I knew that my family was brought to Birkenau on the third day. Why? Because on that transport were also people who were -- who were not -- who were not sent to -- to -- to -- to -- to the gas chambers, but to camp, and they told me. No, that is not correct. No, that is not correct. Now I remember a little more. I was trying to find out where's my family. I know my two young sisters should be in the -- in the camp with all the rest of the women. They were not there. I didn't count on my parents, but my two sisters. After awhile I found out something. Found out that there was a young man in the train who had a gun, and he was shooting out of the train and he hurt an SS man. And the people were -- who were there when the train arrived, you know, there were always some sof -- some -- some inmates, you know, coordinating everything, told us that on that day, one train came in that the enti -- there were no selections, entire train was taken immediately to the gas chambers. So I found out very early that I lost my parents. And because my wife was in the bunker with my parents, she was also taken immediate to -- to the gas chambers.

Q: And your sisters.

A: And my two sisters, yes.

Q: Were -- were you able to say kaddish for them?

A: No. No. Why? I cannot visualize staying -- or saying kaddish in the -- no, I did not. Cannot visualize saying kaddish in the barracks. Why? I really don't know. I really don't know.

Q: What [indecipherable]. We have to change tapes.

End of Tape Six

Beginning Tape Seven

A: Sitting here I'm thinking why I did not say kaddish. I don't have any guilt feelings about it, because I was taught that the prayer of kaddish is a reaffirmation of life. Could I at that point re -- reaffirm and praise God and reaffirm that life is -- that life is -- is -- is beautiful, or whatever you want to say? I couldn't. Did I think at that time, what I'm saying just now? No. But I have to analyze things later on and try to determine in your own mind what was -- what were you thinking unconsciously. And I could have thought unconsciously that there's no reason for me to say kaddish. Am I sure about it? No, I am not. But it could have happened.

Q: Did -- do you remember having any -- what were your thoughts at that point about God and your faith?

A: I know for sure that at that point, I couldn't believe that there is a God, a merciful, compassionate God who let tho -- whose [indecipherable] let things like this happen to his chosen people. Difficult to believe.

Q: What were you reactions then? Was it anger, or sadness? To -- to that thought about God?

A: Perhaps no sadness, but anger. Anger. Even though I was not a religious person, I still felt that -- that God, or any -- that God could permit those things to take place. So anger was the right reaction. And as I said before, it's very difficult to live without faith. Very, very difficult to live. Very difficult to justify things without faith. You must live with faith.

Q: Talk about that at that point in your life, you -- you had talked about losing your confidence in the ghetto, you were questioning your faith. How -- how did you keep going?

A: Where? In camp?

Q: I-In -- in -- in -- yes, in Auschwitz, in the camps.

A: Luck. Luck was my -- my biggest friend. I described to you four situations where luck played a very important role in surviving. Don't believe that anybody will tell you -- any of the survivors will tell you that they were smart, that's the reason they survived. Oh, that is nonsense. Luck, being young, or coming to Auschwitz late, at the end of '43 or -- or '44, end of '44, not '43, where -- where the war was coming -- we knew that the war was coming to an end, and that kept you going.

Q: You -- you were still there an awfully long time.

A: In Auschwitz?

Q: Yes.

A: I was from -- first of all [indecipherable] the 26th of October 1944.

Q: So more than a year.

A: Yes. But most of the time, I was working inside, not exposed to -- to wind, rain and snow.

Q: Can you describe your -- your barracks and the kapo in charge, I don't know if you remember him in any way, the name and how he ran your barracks.

A: Of course I don't remember the name, I never spoke to him because he was god, you know. You don't talk to god, you know. He was god in that barracks, that's a ver -- he could kill you or -- or deny you the portion of bread, whatever he wanted to do. I never spoke to him, I don't remember his name. He was cold. The Germans had a knack of selecting those -- those -- those kapos or people who they felt will fulfill that function that they want them to fulfill. To make our life absolutely miserable, to kill us and to -- to abuse us, all right? They had a knack for choosing those people. It was not only in my barracks, in all the rest of the barracks.

Q: Was this kapo German?

A: Hm?

Q: Was he German or Polish, or -- do you remember?

A: Yes [indecipherable] he was German. He were a criminal.

Q: I want to go through some of the details of the -- of the day. Can you tell us about roll call?

A: Yes. I mentioned to you before that that roll call was either five or six o'clock in the morning. We were standing outside for hours, and waiting to go out. And was very difficult, especially in the wintertime. Even though I knew that I will not have to go outside, that I will be able to go into the -- the [indecipherable] and be inside, those two or three hours -- it's all by -- it was all by design, because I remember people after an hour or two just giving in, falling down and that's all. They would have died anyway, you know, cause they were already that weak, you know? But even to make the strongest weaker, it was by design.

Q: So da -- when you --

A: They were trying to -- the reason for that roll call was that they were trying to determine how many people are on the barrack. And that was --

Q: When you went to roll call, did you have a strategy in your mind for surviving? Were you standing next to your friend, were -- were you ever holding each other up?

A: We were -- I was standing next to my friend, holding each other up, but no strategy. Don't believe that something like this could exist in the camp. What kind of strategy can you have? What -- what can you do? You are at the whim of people who are -- whose aim is only to kill you. How can you prevent it? You have nothing to -- to defend yourself. You cannot run out because you are -- you have the electric wires, and it's powerless, with SS men all over, they will shoot you immediately. Even though, I have to be on record that one of my school friends was able to run away from Auschwitz, but he's -- I believe is not the only survivor among the two or three survivors who were able to run away from Birkenau Auschwitz. I can tell you that he lived

in Israel, and he passed away. We were trying -- every time I came to Israel, all my school friends invited me in. We were spending an evening together reminiscing. We were trying for a year or two to convince him to tell us how he survived. We couldn't get it. One day -- one evening, I turned around to him -- I was very close to him before the war. I said, "Shumek, you have to tell us. Just for history's sake, you have to tell us." He was thinking for a moment and he said okay. I can tell you he was talking for a couple hours. You could cut the air, it was such a silence in the room. And he told us that he had a friend who was working outside the wires, and who hid some clothes for him in a hole, and he described him -- where the hole is. And he will -- he will try to get him into that commando to be outside, and then somehow during the day, watching, he should disappear. And he disappeared. And, you know, most of the people that tried to run away were hanged the next day. We didn't -- and we were forced to watch the hanging, of course. Within a day, two or three, four, they didn't bring him back, I said to myself and to my friend, he escaped. And he told us how he escaped, and what he did. After two days being in that -- in that hole -- but he took with him some food, being two days and two nights in that hole, he realized on the third day that the search is off. In the middle of the night he slowly crawled all out and went to town. And he saw a light in one of the homes. He entered. He entered and the woman became very scared. He reassured her, and she kept him for another two or three days. And then he said to her, I have some friends -- again, the woman became his wife later, who are -- who look like Aryans not Jews, who are working in Warsaw on false papers. Take me first to Bendezin. We will sit together, we will look like a -- a son, a mother driving, you know, you look -- nobody will pay any attention to us. And he was successful. She brought him to Bendezin. In Bendezin he had a friend, a Pole, with whom he was very close. Very unusual to be close, but he was close with him. You -- he came from a very fine family. As a matter of fact, the

family lived in our -- in our house on the second floor. And the son was in town, and they decided, you have to bring him to Warsaw to be -- to -- they will infor -- in Warsaw they will find for him false papers, and he will survive, together with his sisters. With the Pole's sisters. Now, we will survive together with -- with a -- a -- a family that he knew very well, that -- that he knew -- he knew that they are in Warsaw and where they are in Warsaw. That Pole was very smartly shrewd. He took with him on the train, some bottles of liquor. And they were sitting in the train and trying to pretend that they are drinking. SS man came in and he became friend of them, let's have a drink. They all became drunk and they didn't realize anything, they were drunk, completely drunk. And they came to Warsaw with him, and found the -- his friends, and they prepared false papers for him, and he was working in a cinema. He didn't look [indecipherable], but here is again something that is unexplainable. In the Warsaw ghetto he was rounded up with other Poles and taken to a place. He wound up place on the floor. An SS man walks in, and looks around and turns round to him, "You were the one who run away from Auschwitz." He knew that this is the end. At that moment, and artillery shell is exploding in front of -- of the place, and everybody is running away in the [indecipherable]. Was he smart? No, was luck.

Q: What was his name?

A: Levinstein. Shumek Levinstein.

Q: How -- how was your health after several months of working in Auschwitz? Wer -- were you underweight --

A: The moment I went --

Q: -- could you -- how -- how was your health?

A: Not too bad. Well, I was sitting all day long and being able to -- to -- to -- to -- to -- to -- to smuggle something out again here as I did in the berklidinkskomer, and getting a little bit -- and getting a piece of bread. Was not too bad. I was young. You know, I had typhoid. And again, it will sound too heroic, but I'm going to tell you about. Maybe I should be on record, and maybe not. As I told you, I worked several weeks in a camp where I met my future wife. I worked not doing anything really. But we had to get our food from the kitchen. That was a kitchen run by half women. The head of that kitchen was a miserable person, and if the commando was -- consists of 12 people, she gave only 10 -- 10 pieces of -- something like this, in order to preserve and give the SS men [indecipherable]. One day I turned around to the kapo who was the one kapo that I know that was not so cruel. Said to him, "Look, today I would like to go with my friend to -- to get our soup."

Q: Is this with Rose?

A: No, no, no.

Q: No, with your friend.

A: Shumek.

Q: Okay.

A: With Romek.

Q: Romek, mm-hm.

A: We went there and she did the same thing. I said, we are 12 or 15, whatever it was. Out! I kicked the soup completely. And she had a cane in her hand with a iron. She took that cane an- and was standing straight. It's too heroic, but I have to be on record. She took that cane and she lifted it, and was standing straight -- all of a sudden she let it down, and she started to shout, clean it up, give him 15. So next day in the morning we are walking again into that camp, she is

standing at the gate, and -- with SS man, and the SS man is calling my number out. I said to Romek, that's it. The SS man and -- together with her brought me into the kitchen. And she turned around to me and said, "You are going to work here with me." I stayed in the kitchen with her. And when I got the typhoid and my friend also, we knew that they are going to take us to that [indecipherable] that we were going to be one day because after one day there they were taking people to so -- after two days to the gas chambers. I got in touch with her somehow, and I told her what is happening, and if she can get me, not into the [indecipherable], but to the unit on sil -- on my block, and I can survive there, because -- and she did it. A day before I left -- before they deported us from Auschwitz she came to the -- to the electric wires, and she threw out a gold -- a piece of gold and she said to Romek, "Give it to Sigmund, gold -- this is the only way to survive." If you are going to -- you are able to buy something for the gold wherever they were -- they're going to ship you. And it helped. But I have to tell you, again it sounds too heroic, but I have to be on record. She was trying, after the war -- she was a Dutch woman, to get in touch with me. She was sending people and letters. I never responded to any letters of her. I never -- I said to -- to the people, I will never see her. The fact that she saved me and my friend does not justify what she did by causing to have tens or hundreds of people to die by not giving them enough food. I never wanted to get in touch with her, and I didn't. [indecipherable] sound too heroic, I was already in love with my future wife.

Q: Per-Perhaps you're saying she might have also liked you.

A: She what? Might what --

Q: Might have liked you?

A: Yes.

Q: Romantically?

A: Oh yes.

Q: The -- the woman in the kitchen.

A: Yes.

Q: Yes, yes. [indecipherable]

A: Yes, yes, she want probably to marry me.

Q: I see, yes.

A: I don't know, I cannot prove anything.

Q: Right.

A: But I never, ever responded to any letter. Never wanted to see her. My friend was one day in Amsterdam and he saw her. She was crying bitterly. Why doesn't -- at least let -- let him answer a letter? I said no, she is not entitled to it. Does it sound too heroic? No?

Q: Tell us a little bit more about were you ever able to steal a moment here or there with -- with your future wife, with Rose? How were you able to see her, other than the time --

A: Yeah, because I was working on their camp.

Q: Yeah, okay.

A: And I could see her, and spend the -- and as a matter of fact, I have already the typhoid and she was able, and -- with the permission of my kapo to let me go into their barracks and not be outside to sleep all day. That was of help, too. Again luck played a role.

Q: Did you know you were falling in love with her?

A: With my wife?

Q: Yes.

A: Not in camp.

Q: Not in camp.

A: Not in camp. But we were liberated together and somehow the fact that she told Romek, is Sigmund here too, indicated to me that she cares.

Q: I want to return to the moment, the time when you were very discouraged, and you and your friend were considering suicide. Can you tell me a little bit more about that? Had you thought about killing yourself before your friend showed you the razor, and why at that point were you considering it?

A: There was no way out. I knew that I will die the next day or two days later, that we cannot walk even. It was a terrible winter. And I said to myself, or my friend said, why, why, why still suffer? There's no way out. We cannot walk, even. We cannot walk. We have to all day long try to divide those rocks and we cannot do it, so somebody will shoot us anyway there. If an SS man walked by and say we cannot do it, he will shoot us anyhow. What is the use? I am positive that we would have done it. Positive, if not for the doctor. I have no doubts about that, that we would have done it. As I said before, and I hope I'm not offending anybody. There is no way for anybody to imagine, or to try to -- to -- to understand the feeling and the mood. It's impossible. It's impossible. Only people who were there are able to describe them. And you have to be in the same position, the same situation, to be able to understand what was -- what -- what is happening, and how our mind worked.

End of Tape Seven

Beginning Tape Eight

A: You know, I always thought --

Q: Just a few more questions about camp. Do you have any memory of what it sounded like?

A: What it sounded what?

Q: Imagine yourself in the barracks. What were the sounds that you would hear in camp? At Auschwitz.

A: I'm not sure I understand the question.

Q: What would you have been hearing?

A: You see, when could I hear anything? When you are standing at the appelle in the morning, we didn't talk. Nobody permitted us to talk. When we were coming back in the evening, we are so tired. Nobody think -- we li -- nobody was thinking about trying to talk or to -- to be nostalgic. No. We were waiting for the piece of bread, and lie down, that's all. There was not real talk except when a new transport came in and we wanted to know what is happening in the world. At that time were talk, and being encouraged, you know? Believing that the war is coming to an end. I remember -- I remember when the allied troops landed in Normandy, and there was a transport, I'd forgot from where. They came and told us that the Americans are in Europe already. And that was very, very reassuring, very. It inspired confidence again that maybe, maybe the tragedy is coming to an end. But to have just -- just empty talk, that was no such thing. I don't remember ever having any empty talk during the appelle, or during -- or after we came ho -- came back from -- from our work assignment. I don't remember.

Q: Was there ever --

A: I-I don't remember, and I understand it.

Q: Was there ever a time, either in camp or when you might have been marching somewhere, that you were allowed to sing, for instance? Were -- were you ever allowed to sing when you were in camp? Or did you ever sing?

A: Could very well be, but I am not sure, but in one of the camps it could have been Hiflingen, when we were mar -- they were marching -- wo -- marching out, I'm not sure that the SS man was trying to make us sing a German song or something like this, but I'm not sure about it. I don't remember.

Q: You've talked about your faith some, and -- and -- and the questioning of it, did you ever -- did you pray once you were in the camps?

A: No. No.

Q: So what ke -- what kept you going?

A: The will to survive is a very strong will. The idea that I will survive and tell the world what happened always was a very, very important element in that feeling of survival. And the feeling or the statements of those who were taken to the gas chambers, don't forget us, was also very important. Don't forget us. This was also very important to me. And that was kep -- kept me going. That what kept me going. You are talking about singing, and I would like to share something that to me was to some extent understandable, and to some extent I couldn't understand it. The sonderkommando came one day back and they told a story of an old rabbi who was with a group of people taken to the gas chambers, the rabbi started to sing, and asked them all to sing. We are dying as martyrs, and don't be afraid to die. Singing and dancing before they entered the cha -- the gas chamber. It's good to be on [indecipherable] like this.

Q: You talk about people saying don't forget us. Did anyone directly say that to you?

A: What?

Q: You said the people that were going into the gas chamber --

A: Mm, no.

Q: Okay.

A: No, but I know that people were saying things like this. I don't remember somebody saying it directly to me, but I'm sure that there are people who were told by those who were taken to the gas chambers, don't forget me, tell the world what happened. Oh, I am positive about it.

Q: How aware were you of the daily functioning of the gas chamber and the crematorium?

A: We saw the sonderkommando, they were in a special block, every day. And they told us that the people are being taken to showers and telling them they have to be clean, and after they will come out there will be food for them, and misleading them completely. When the entered the showers, of course, an SS man was throwing in a -- a gas can Zyklon B, and they heard in the -- for a couple -- for three or four minutes people shouting and then, all of a sudden everything was silent, they opened the doors and everybody was dead, of course, holding to each other, and the scene was incredible, they were -- always used to say. Mothers holding children tight to them, their [indecipherable]. And of course they were immediately -- they were in -- SS men started always to shout at them, take them out and bring them to the -- to the -- to the -- to the chimney, that's all, or whatever.

Q: But how --

A: So we knew exactly what was happening. We knew what transports are coming in, from where.

Q: Di -- were you ever one of the people to inform the new transports what happened to --

A: No, I was not --

Q: -- the people that went to the [indecipherable]

A: No, I was not, because I was not in that commando, there was a special commando.

Q: Yeah.

A: I believe they called it Canada or something like this.

Q: What about s-sanitation, when -- were you allowed to bathe, and when were you allowed to go to the bathroom?

A: In the morning. And my friend and I were keeping it up, they were alway wa -- wa -- people stopped after a week or two weeks to wash themself.

Q: People stopped washing themselves?

A: Yes, washing themselves. We never stopped. But having said that, and I don't remember why, in Bergen-Belsen, or even maybe before, we never had the place where we could wash ourself. And when I was liberated, they had to use a special oil to clean me. The dirt was in -- in my -- my entire body, in -- in -- in my flesh almost, you know? They took a special oil to clean me.

Q: When you and your friend, were you aw-aware that you were purposely trying to continue to bathe a-as a way to --

A: Yes.

Q: -- to -- to stay --

A: Yes. And that is an indication where we thought we can survive. The clear indication that we are young we will survive, as the war is coming to an end. Would I have done the same thing if I would have been taken in the beginning of '42? I doubt it, because the situation was so gloomy, the ger -- the Germans were in Moscow almost, in Leningrad, all over the world, you know? There was no reason for me to believe that the German army can be -- can be defeated. There was no reason whatsoever, they -- they occupied all Europe and they are now next to Stalingrad and Moscow and Leningrad, and how -- and again, how do we find out? New transports come in.

Q: One more question on sanitation, you said you were allowed to go to the bathroom in the morning, just once a day?

A: Of course in the evening went -- went again. But during the day, I doubt it very much. I doubt it very much. First in Poland, in the place that I was working, inside, there was no rest room. There were no such thing. No.

Q: Can -- can you tell us -- I'd just like you to tell us a little bit more about your friendship with Romek. What did you tr -- were you able to be with him most days and how did that --

A: All -- every day, all day long.

Q: How --

A: Every day all day long. You see, and again, probably subconsciously, when you know that you lost everything, that you have no family, you are trying to forge a friendship with somebody who'll be with you, giving you the feeling that you are not alone. And that cemented that friendship. I can lean on him, and he on me. He could watch my -- my -- my -- my piece of bread, and I can watch his piece of bread. And you are as eager to make sure that he will survive as you, and he is eager to make sure that you are s -- you are going to survive. That creates a lifetime friendship.

Q: What about the very minor contact you'd had with Rose also, was that something that gave you a bit of hope for the future?

A: Mm, I don't [indecipherable]

Q: I mean, you had lost a wife --

A: You had what?

Q: You had lost your wife.

A: Yes.

Q: Was that something that at -- in some part of your mind you hung onto also?

A: I am not sure about it. I am not sure about that I was thinking at that point of a marriage, but that was unthinkable, incredible, you know? It never entered her mind or my mind. But on the first day of liberation, I was outside with Romek and we saw her sister. I asked, "Where's Rushka?" I asked. She said, "We have to take her from the barracks, she has typhoid, to the krankenhaus." I said, "I will go." I will -- I had to crawl before I a -- was able to reach the barrack, she was already taken. I couldn't walk there at that time too fast, you know, I had to crawl, you know, almost. So I didn't see her. But I do believe -- I do believe that I saw her in the hospital four or five days later. I do believe in that, yes.

Q: Go back just a bit in the -- the weeks before liberation, you're describing liberation that you have to crawl. Obviously you've deter -- your health has deteriorated, so --

A: Oh, of course.

Q: -- what state of health were you in right before liberation, and then sort of bring us up to liberation.

A: I mentioned to you that I had typhoid in Auschwitz. There are two types of typhoids. I had the second type [indecipherable] had in Bergen-Belsen. My future wife saved me. She was able to get hold of some medication and send it over to me. That helped me.

Q: So in the weeks right before liberation, were you recovering from typhoid, or --what was your state of health?

A: Before liberation?

Q: A few weeks before.

A: I am not sure that I remember when I discovered that I have typhoid.

Q: Oh, oh.

A: I am not sure.

Q: Oh, it was after liberation that you had typhoid?

A: No, before liberation.

Q: Before, okay.

A: Before liberation, but I cannot pinpoint.

Q: Well why -- why were you in such bad health that you had to crawl? Not why, but describe your state of health.

A: Because -- because -- because I wa -- it was ’45, I was exhausted, tired. My weight was 88 pounds at the libera -- on the liberation, 88 pounds. I was weak, extremely weak from all those years. And of course I do believe that on liberation day or two days -- a day later, I -- my typhoid disappeared. But I was extremely weak, weighing 88 pounds.

Q: Well, what was it like to be in the camps, like the week before liberation, what were the Germans doing?

A: It’s interesting. A day before liberation on April 14, one day before we were liberated, we all knew or felt or sensed that the war has come to an end, that we are going to be liberated in a day or two. The Germans were in a hurry. We saw it that they are in a hurry, that they are trying to escape. And in the morning when we opened our eyes, we saw that the towers are empty, there are no SS men any more. And then we heard some shooting, artillery or something like this. In an hour or two -- hours later a single tank rolled into the camp. And we heard -- and this was so reassuring, y-y-yo -- you are free. We are here liberating you. I saw it, and I think that perhaps I was not sure that this is true, but in another tr -- ‘nother English tank rolled in and I saw them distributing chocolate to people. That was a terrible mistake, people were dying like flies, taking two pieces of chocolate, they couldn’t -- their stomachs couldn’t take it, they were dying like

flies. Again my friend saved me. He did not let me take anything. And here I have to tell you a very interesting moment at night he was afraid that the -- that the hunger will -- will force me to go out and take some food that I cannot digest. He tied his feet with my feet all night long. I couldn't move. He was much more experienced than I. We were -- he tied with a rope my feet to his feet. This is what friendship is all about. You care. You care for your friend as much as you care for yourself, or more.

Q: What -- what did you think and he think you were able to eat?

A: Soup.

Q: Just soup.

A: He was constantly saying, take two soups, five soups, as many as you want, but soup, a soup, a warm soup. And I followed his advice.

Q: So what did you do when you realized there were no Germans in the tower? There was about an hour before the first tank. What did people do --

A: Something like this.

Q: Okay, there was time. What did --

A: We were -- we were waiting. We knew that we -- we knew that something is happening. We were waiting. We greeted those liberators as though they are angels from heaven. It was a lot of excitement, euphoric. We were all euphoric. But I have to mention here something. That feeling of happiness, after awhile, and I cannot pinpoint it to two weeks or four weeks or six weeks, completely faded away. All of a sudden, most of us es -- I, an-and I would say most of us felt that we cannot return to our homes. We have no families, but all those liberators will go back to United Kingdom, the United States, and -- and live a normal life, but we are alone. [indecipherable] we have to start from the beginning. What will I do? And how will I be able to

cope with that fact that I am alone, or only with one friend? That was a depressing feeling. Very strong, depressing feeling. And that lasted for awhile. But then, after that Rosensaft organized of com -- organized th-the -- all survivors, we became more active. That feeling was replaced by a belief that we will manage. It was interesting also that most of the survivors, and of course including me, were trying to get married, to create life again. That was a -- a crucial point in our liberation, to prove to the world that we are going to bring life again. And that we will be able to find a place, someplace, where we will be able to restore life. And that what happened really. Those who were more courageous than I went to live in Israel. The rest of us went to the United States. And having said that, I must express my feelings here, that people who are born here in the United States don't appreciate at all what the United States is all about. We do. We do. We -- I am -- I am all for the United States, it's the greatest country that existed in all s -- all civilized life for the last two or 3000 years. We have to preserve it. Why am I expressing it in such a -- in such an interview? I guess because I need my children and grandchildren to know how I -- how I was in awe of the United States. Maybe they will understand it too.

Q: When were you able to come here?

A: I came January 1951.

Q: And in between your liberation?

A: I don't go to work on that. I stay home, I read hist -- American history or the Bill of Rights, I don't go to work on that day. This is for me a day of celebration.

Q: Oh, now you don't go to work on that day?

A: No, I don't go to work on that day now, it's a day of celebration and I sit home and I read American history or Bill of Rights, whatever -- whatever I can. But I never go to work on that day. This is not the way to wor -- not -- is not a day to work. This is a way -- a day to celebrate.

Q: And just briefly, after liberation, where are you relocated to? And I'm presuming that you're able to stay with your friend and also Rose?

A: Yeah, we were relocated -- the German -- the English army burned the entire camp because it was infested and they had to burn all the barracks. And they transferred us -- they transferred us to where -- about three miles from the old barracks and two German military barracks. They were, of course, completely different. We had the very nice room, there were restrooms around. And I lived, of course, with my friend in that room, and Rose lived with her sister in another building not far from that building. I saw her every day, almost every day.

End of Tape Eight

Beginning Tape Nine

A: Probably at the end of 1940 -- to Rose -- or not to Rose, in December of 1945. December of 1945, I'm sorry. We have one daughter, and we have adopted three children. One child was the child of Rose's sister, that she was able after the parents were taken to Auschwitz, Rose was able to bring her to a Polish family and she survived with that Polish family. After the war, we brought her back bi -- brought her back to Bergen-Belsen and she lived with us for awhile. But there was a little problem. She was so grateful to that Christian family that she was looking at us as people who are trying to take away her religion. And it was very, very difficult. But in 1949, Rose and I went to Israel. I had some family in Israel from before the war, and Rose had a larger family, two uncles, and she of course went with us. And here a dramatic change took place. All of a sudden she fell in love with the people in Israel and she didn't want to return. She wanted to live her life there. And she lives there, she's married, she has four children, we have how many? Four, five [inaudible] -- we have nine grandchildren there. No, we have four grandchildren and -- and how many did I say?

Q: You said nine.

A: Nine or maybe 10 great-grandchildren, you know. And we are very, very attached to each other. Wer -- I used to go twice a year with my wife to be with them for six, eight weeks sometimes. At least six weeks. And we are, as I said, very close. I love my grandchildren, and I love my great-grandchildren very much. They come to the States and stay with me, and we have a marvelous time with them. Then, in 1966, something happened. Rose had a cousin in Buenos Aires in Argentina, and they, husband and wife were involved in a terrible automobile accident and got killed. A school friend of mine who lived in Buenos Aires called me up and told me the story and he said, you have to come, because those are two children and nobody knows what to

do with them. I will take care of. I went. I spent several weeks in Argentina. I had difficulties communicating with them, but I was able to get some visas for them to come to the United States. They were tourist visas. They came to the United States and they stayed with me for awhile, and even though when I came to Buenos Aires their friends were trying to tell them -- their school friends that I came maybe to take advantage of them. After they came to the States and lived with me for a few weeks, I remember taking them to the airport because they had to go back to Argentina for me to get permanent visas. They were so afraid that maybe I will not get those permanent visas, they were holding my hand in the airport and I reassured them. And after -- and I don't remember any more, maybe two or three months later, I got the visas and they came to live with us. I love them very dearly. I don't make any distinction between my daughter and the rest of them. And they made me proud of them. One is a professor -- assistant professor in Boston. He was first at BU, and now he's in a different college. And one is a physician in -- in New Britain, who became the chief of neurology in the hospital. And the o -- his brother, extremely capable young man, who is -- wrote his story in a very moving way, and who gave us three grandchildren and the -- the younger son gave us also three grandchildren, they come very often, but really not often enough and we spend time together. I try to -- to -- to direct them, or to show them the right way of life and I perhaps am successful, perhaps.

Q: You speak about your grandchildren --

Q2: Give me one second.

Q: You speak about your grandchildren and great-grandchildren --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- children, and you're doing this interview today. What do you want them to know about Auschwitz, your experience?

A: I imagine in the beginning that I was reluctant, very much so, for the last 45 or 50 years, to tell my story. But I am doing it today for them. They should know the story. They should watch it and remember. I did not speak to them enough, or perhaps at all about my life in camps. Now, they will have a record, and to me that is extremely important.

Q: What was the relux -- reluctance?

A: To talk to them? I was reluctant to talk to anybody about it in the beginning. The main -- the feeling why not was based on a certain, if not arrogance, but a certain feeling, what am I going to tell them, they don't understand me -- they don't understand it anyhow. On that feeling disappeared. And as you probably know, I was the national chairman of the Days of Remembrance, appointed by President Carter, and then the -- reappointed by President Reagan and Bush. I was the chairman of the -- of the -- forgot the name of that committee. Yes, dealing with the [indecipherable] of the future museum. I was a member of the executive board, we worked very hard to make sure that the world cannot forget, and I became the national chairman of Days of Remembrance. That first year I reported to the council that I was able to convince three governors, the governor of Connecticut, New York and New Jersey to have Days of Remembrance in their capitals and invite -- and invite all the [indecipherable] and people to -- to be present and to remember the Holocaust, lighting candles. When I reported it, I got a standing ovation. The next year, and I don't remember the numbers any more, I probably reported 10 or 12. After four or five years I reported, I have every state having Days of Remembrance in their capitals. I have mai -- main cities. I don't remember -- don't remember how many cities doing exactly the same thing. I was very, very proud -- I am very, very proud of -- of accomplishing what I have accomplished. If I spent too much time, for me I did not. But I -- perhaps for my family I was too -- too many days away. I was in Washington very, very often, maybe five, six

days a month in Washington, and traveling to -- to o -- other states and making sure that there [indecipherable] done properly. But this is a legacy that I am leaving, leaving for my children and grandchildren, never to forget, to get involved in the cause of memory.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: Thank you very much for listening to me. Thank you all. When I came to the United States, my aunt, the sister of my mother's, had that picture. It was sent to her before the war. My parents are here, young, and to me they look beautiful. I keep that picture in my room, to look at it whenever I am there, and I revive memories looking at that picture. It's very helpful. That picture I received in Israel from my sister's friends. She had a -- she had quite a few friends, and I am not sure why my sister sent the picture to Israel. I was thinking many times that maybe she was thinking of going there, and she sent the picture to get her some papers or something like this, but I am not positive, I really don't know.

Q: Are those the only two photographs you have of your family?

A: Yes.

End of Tape Nine

Conclusion of Interview