

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/JACOB LEWIN page 1
Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley
Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:
(Beep)

Bob Silverthorne: Wentworth Films. Kovno ghetto
project. Interview with Jacob Lewin.
J--A--C--O--B--L--E--W--I--N. 5-7-97. 23 continued.
Camera roll 48 at the head.

C: Speeding 48, marker 1.

SB: First of all can you tell me the name you were born
with and when and where you were born?

JL: I was born in Kovno, Kaunas uh in Lithuania in
1932, February 19th. Uh my name is Jacob or Janco, uh
Lewin. Use to be Levin but uh recently got changed to
L--E--W--I--N.

SB: And tell me a little bit about the years before the
war began at least as well as you can remember.

JL: I remember that quite vividly. We were--when I was
born anyway, my parents were well off. We ran a tex-
tile business, wool textile. Every summer we use to go
to the Baltic Sea, a town called Palaga, and spent two
months of the--of the summer out there. Uh I had a
nanny uh and uh--uh we had uh I think a very affluent
type of existence in Kovno. My parents had the second
largest uh textile business in Lithuania. Uh, I went
to a uh Hebrew Gymnasia in Kovno. Everything was
taught in Hebrew uh and uh I don't think I lack for

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anything in the way of creature comforts and uh we
lived on uh Litvitz or Laya which was the uh--uh
main--uh streets through Kovno in those days. Uh and
it was a very uh kinda bubbling uh area where all the
businesses were and uh all the restaurants were and uh
we use to walk up and down uh the uh streets uh--uh for
relaxation and to go out to various restaurants and
stores and so forth. Uh, use to go to movies a lot and
uh basically uh very happy existence for me. Up in

'till the 1939 when the Russians came in and took over and uh in 1941, the Germans came in and started the whole Holocaust business.

SB: Tell me those changes in those couple of years. Tell me how the things that you remember; the things that you heard, saw, how you felt.

JL: Well, it was a big change when the Russian came in. Uh, obviously uh they felt that they were liberating us. And I remember something that apparently stuck in my mind a train load of watermelon was being shipped in from Russia for the hungry Lithuanians. There was a banner on--on the side of the train--uh the cars wh--which carried watermelons. Lithuania was an agricultural country, we never lacked for any food or watermelons at that point; for that uh. Everybody had to uh fall in step with the Russian philosophy of life uh because we were uh business people; my parents that is. Uh, we were classified as capitalists. Our business was confiscated and put into

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uh a uh retell and we were not allowed to hold uh any jobs. My father was the designer in the business. My mother was the uh mechanical guroo. Who use to run all the machinery. She went to Lipestik every year and bought the latest machinery and we imported wool from France and from England. And uh when they took our machinery away, they didn't know how to maintain it. And she was the only one who knew how to do that so they gave her a job. My father couldn't work but my mother did. And we were able to sustain ourselves uh okay during that period of time with my mother working. My father, in the mean time, cuz he had--couldn't get a job or wasn't allowed to work, uh, studied voice and uh sang in--in the Opera at least once and subsequently when we came to this country became a cantor. Uh, then of course when the Germans moved in, in '41, uh it wasn't very long uh--uh that we were told that we had to leave our home uh--apartment and only take with us, what we could carry. And we were moved uh mass from uh the main part of the town to a suburb and I'm not quite sure I remember the actual name of that suburb uh and we were put into a ghetto. Uh, the ghetto was then surrounded with barbed wire fences and Lithuanian and

German guards were standing around watching us uh with uh--uh machine guns and towers. And uh we were forced to live in uh this area uh. The uh--

SB: Let's back up a bit. Do you--did you hear uh anything when the Germans came in and did--were there any changes that you heard about?

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JL: Uh, well, uh--uh I was all of 9 years old at the time. And all I can remember is that uh--uh shouting going on about all the Jews must leave. Uh and masses of people, some wagons, some baby carriages with all the goods they could take with them. Couldn't take any furniture or anything like that, uh left behind, so they. We marched in like a long train of people uh moving out of the main uh part of the town into the suburb. Uh, basically that's all I can remember when he--uh anything that stands in my mind at that particular transition.

SB: Gunfire, anything like that?

JL: Uh, I don't recall, no.

SB: And what about Pogroms. What about uh killings or humiliation or anti-Semitism?

JL: Well there was plenty of anti-Semitism in Lithuania before the Germans came before the Germans came; obviously before the Russian came for that matter. Uh, I as a child uh was causted almost regularly because I looked very Semitic. And I used to be called all kinds of uh names walking don't the street. And uh we butted uh a uh a court yard where we lived where the veterans of the Lithuanian army and their families lived and they were throwing rocks at us and at one point uh I uh was hit by a brick in my head uh from kids on the other

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side. So anti-Semitism was rampant in Lithuania uh
they didn't need encouragement of Germans to act out
there anger or frustration or whatever it was uh or
hatred for the Jews. During the period I was--uh I can
recall, I--there were no Pogroms that I was aware at
least not in Kovno itself. Perhaps there may
have been in some of the smaller towns. But in Kovno I
don't recall any particular events of this type.

SB: And the moving in to the ghetto, do you remember
the things your family took or do you remember what you
took?

DL: I don't remember the details, no, but I--I--uh
since we could only take what we could carry; essen-
tially clothing, and whether jewelry my parents--my
mother had uh--uh we took with us and uh--uh that's
basically all we could carry. There were four of us;
my brother, my mother, my father and I and uh there
wasn't a hell of a lot we could take with us. Whatever
we could wrap up in a blanket or something or a sheet
and carry on our backs. And so we managed to take
uh--but the--the--the uh--some of the jewelry that my
mother had helped save our lives a little bit because
my mother use to uh sneak out from the barbed wire
fence through the--at night and barter with the peas-
ants for food and bring food us uh because the food
rations that we got in the ghetto were very minimal.
And uh and she was able to bring in substantial amounts
of foods every time she went across the barbed wire

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fence. Uh so it's the first time, by the way, uh I ate
pork. We were Kosher up to that point. And it was
uh--uh change. Uh but uh we were in the ghetto for 3
years before we were evacuated when the Russian front
came closer uh and uh I attribute my mothers ability to
support us with food, beyond the bread and--and the
marmalade or whatever we got for rations. Uh, that
allowed me to survive what came afterwards which was uh
a one year trek through various concentration camps.

SB: Do you remember the how--the what you moved into?

Do you remember the room or the...?

JL: Uh, well, we moved in--a couple times during the ghetto stay. We were in what was used to be that time was a small ghetto at first. We live in a house and apartment and a house. Uh we weren't there too long. I don't remember exactly how long were the dates but we were--

SB: We have to put another roll of film.

(Cut)

BS: Go to sound roll 24. Camera roll 49. Slate 2 is up.

(Cut)

C: Marker 2.

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SB: Okay you were going to describe to me the first place that you live in the ghetto.

JL: Well I said uh we were there for a relatively short time. Uh and then one uh morning uh there's a commotion. Uh we heard the Germans shouting that we all must leave and it came around running up everybody from the houses uh and we were taken uh I don't recall precisely the route, to a field. I think in afterwards we were moved into the uh part of the ghetto which was the major part. Apparently there were two parts because of the road it ran in between. And as we henced off and uh there was a bridge connecting the two halves or something like that. And uh they wanted to consolidate us in--into one area so we were all made to move. There was one building that was a hospital building. Quote unquote uh it wasn't a real hospital. It was just a hospital where pe--sick people were kept. And I remember seeing that was on fire. Uh I thinking in terms that uh some of the people that were in that hospital were not allowed to leave. So they might have been burned in the building alive. But that's my surmise. I didn't actually see that other than I saw the building burning. As we walked by uh to go to the

assembly area and then moved over to the new--uh to--uh the major part of the ghetto; main part of the ghetto. Uh there was a lot of shooting and--and uh shouting going on. Uh and that's about what I recall at this time, uh about that particular event.

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SB: So shooting and shouting and the hospital was burning--all of that was going on at the same time?

JL: Yeah, yeah. That's--

SB: Did you walk close to the hospital?

JL: I don't recall but there--there was--there was no uh--there was no uh kinda of--I don't really recall the detail. I just remember seeing the building burning. And uh--uh the whole thing's a bit hazy so uh those are the things that stand out of my mind at this point uh.SB: And so you went into the big ghetto and then where did you go?

JL: Well, we were forced into a house where uh there were like uh three rooms in the house and the main area on the second floor of the building and there were three families living in the house. Uh my brother, mother, uh my father and myself and there aren't maybe a total of like uh maybe 15 people in that uh one floor or apartment that we were in. And I believe we stayed their throughout the remainder of the ghetto, uh period. Uh (pause) it was uh no particular uh situation that I can recall uh while we were there except that uh eh--I should not--not--uh--uh put it that way. Um, uh while we were in that apartment, I remember there was some kinda of uh commotion going on and the German soldiers came around and asked for jewelry and gold and

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uh my brother uh had an old broken down watch in his pocket and he forgot about it and then didn't hand it over and the German looked and found it, he was going to shoot him, right there and then in the spot. Uh--uh and my brother said to him that it's an old broken watch, it doesn't work, you know, it's worthless. Uh he talked him out of shooting him and took the broken down watch and left but uh there was uh--uh quite a commotion. It was one of the first big commotions that uh in the main ghetto. As I recall, when they went from house to house looking for uh jewelry, gold and valuables.

SB: Did you mother keep some hidden then?

JL: Yes.

SB: Did you know where it went?

JL: No, no. I don't recall where. But uh obviously she had some--it wasn't just jewelry she was trading with the peasants uh the farmers. Uh it was clothing and uh--whether it was small piece of fur she was able to bring in from uh the home that we have.

SB: Tell me about the--there was a time when everyone had to assemble from the ghetto. Do you remember that? It was pretty early...in October--it was the end of October, in 1941. Do you remember that?

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JL: Uh, not by date. But there were several assemblies that we had to attend to. Uh, there was one area which was a main square like where the gate from the ghetto uh was uh. And people use to have to assemble there to go into work brigades. My brother, my father being one of them. They uh assembled in the morning. They were marched out and uh--uh we were standing at night--in evening rather waiting for him to come back and hoping that they would come back and in some cases they some of them did not. Uh there were assemblies for work details as far as I can remember--remember. Uh there may have been assemblies for other reasons and but uh I my family and I were not impacted by that since we all

managed to get back to our apartment, at the time. There were other assemblies subsequently. Uh we use to call it the Big Action or the Big Actia where we were woken up early in the morning and marched to a big field and uh people were being selected; uh the typ--typical left and right uh kind of situation. Uh but that came later. Uh, my father and my mother and my brother and I uh we were work--worked as family unit. If you were a uh--a uh woman only without the man--uh without a husband or someone uh you were vulnerable because they would select you to what was perceived at the time to be the wrong side. Uh so as we walking towards the field where this action took place, uh my brother who's eight years older than I, and he's uh robust young man and a woman came by with a child and she grabbed his arm and latched on to him and just to be part of the family unit. Uh, and another

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one came in, grabbed me and I was only like about what about 11 years old? 12 about I think. Uh, fortunately for us because what my brother and my father who were young and robust people uh were redeemed to be of work--of labor quality and so the whole family unit including the two strange women, heh, that latched on to us uh managed to be selected into the side that survived. The other side were apparently taken to uh--uh what I understand is to be a Fort in where they were shot. At least that's the story that I--I recall. Uh so that was uh very trying time for us and a very dramatic experience. Uh, there was another time when we had an assembly uh were all of us were forced to gather around a big place and there was a uh a scaffold, a hanging scaffold and there was a man being brought out and we were forced to watched uh to the scaffold. And the reason presumably that he was going to be executed, hanged. That they uh was that they found some kind of a weapon on him. And uh I remember uh being made to watch this uh where they put him up on a box I believe with his hands and legs tied, I think. Uh and they kicked out the box from under him. A German soldier did that and he was hanging. The things you remember as a child is that uh--uh urine was coming down his leg as he was wriggling on--on--on the noose--on the rope. Uh, so uh that's another one of those uh assemblies that we were made to go to.

SB: Okay, I think we're about to run out. Why don't we change. (Cut)

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BS: Camera roll 50 is up. Slate 3 is up.

(3rd stix)

C: Third stix, three.

SB: Um, after the Big Action, the ghetto--the ghetto sort of settled down and there was a period where there was relative routine. Um, can you describe to me what life was like in those periods? Do you remember having any schooling? Do you remember playing games with your friends? Sports? Getting into trouble?

JL: Well, uh I remember that uh we were as children, hanging around a little bit in the streets. Uh, I remember that uh there was a cobbler who use to make uh boots and uh the German officers to come to uh have boots custom made for them and the uh we watched that and uh it was uh an impression that made uh me, was that even in the ghetto, if you had any kind of skill or craft, uh you could survive better than anybody else. So that gave me the philosophy in life that uh what I have in my brain, and my skills and my abilities, nobody can take away, while all material things can be taken away. Obviously the cobbler is getting additional rations of food and for--for services for making boots. Uh, I for a short while there, before we moved, uh from another house, uh had a garden that I grew vegetables in the spring and never made it uh to

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uh--uh reap they were wards of my labor because we were

forced to leave the place but I had potatoes and other vegetables that I don't know where I got the seeds or--or--or--or I got the uh all that and planted them. My father worked in a work shop and because his grandfather--my grandfather's father use to be a wood carver--he knew how to carve uh shoes--wooden shoes. Cuz there's of course wasn't any leather--any cows weren't available. So the--the wooden soles, you know, were carved to uh--to fit my particular uh size and shape of a foot. And he was very good at it. I had no--there was no schooling at the time, however since I had not had any uh training in--in--in the Torah, the Bible, there was a Rabbi who had no skills in that he could apply, my father's taught him how to carve the sh--the shoes in return for which he taught me the Bible. So I uh spent uh--that was the extent of my schooling during the ghetto period for a period of some months where I uh got lessons on--on--on the Bible. That was my upbringing in Religion if you will, uh from the age of about uh 10/11 years old uh thereabouts 12 years old. Uh, I worked in the bakery and the uh bakery was obviously was baking bread for--for the ghetto residents. And on weekends on Chapeaus Day, women use to bring the pots with uh stew, potatoes and whatever else they could find and uh stick it in the hot oven uh so that uh on--on Chapeaus, they could have a hot meal and since I was in the bakery handling all that every so often, so of the pots got uh raided (Giggling) and we ate uh couple of boys worked in the bakery with the

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pots uh and took some food that we ate from somebody else's pot, uh it was uh a relatively quite period at the time in terms of any action or any thing of that type going on that I recall. Uh--

SB: What about--was it cold? Was it--what other kinds of things besides food were a problem?

JL: While we were in the ghetto, I think uh we as a family unit seemed to have uh managed quite well. My father was able-bodied. My brother was able-bodied. My mother--they were all able to work and or gather enough food and whatever else we needed which was not a hell of a lot just to get by.

SB: And what about getting along with all the other people that you lived with?

JL: Uh well, uh I recall specifically the apartment I mentioned I mentioned earlier where there were like uh whole bunch of us--three families in it. And it was a little bit touch and go there. The nerves were kinda frayed and people were screaming at each other but uh, I personally don't recall any major outbreaks of uh any fighting or violence that went on. Uh, other than the inconvenience of everybody being on top of everybody.

SB: And um do you remember an orchestra in the ghetto?

JL: Not really. I vaguely remember something like that

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but I don't think I took much note of it or if I did,
it's uh long forgotten.

SB: And tell me a little more about your mother. Uh, the things that you remember that she did during that time period.

JL: You know it's interesting that you bring that up because I don't recall exactly what she was doing during the time. So obviously she had to get into some kind of work uh unit but I don't recall exactly at what she was doing. Remember my father was working in the workshop. My brother was working in the workshop. I don't know exactly what my mother was doing at the time.

SB: And do you remember the day of the Kinder Action?

JL: Uh yes. That was the day when I was uh ignorantly running around playing and hanging out with uh--with a bunch of kids. My mother came around screaming. She grabbed me by the arm and ran as quickly as we could. And she got me into the workshop where my father and my brother were working. I didn't know at the time what it was all about and uh other than there's some kind of uh--um drastic or--or--or life threatening event taking place. Uh, and I worked alongside my father and my brother in the workshop during that day. And there was an awful lot of commotion outside uh but for some

reason rather, they never came into the workshops uh

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the Germans and whoever else were helping them. Uh,
afterwards when it was apparently all over, and my
mother came to fetch me, I found out that the children
rounded up throughout the ghetto and taken away and for
some reason or other they did not bother to go into the
workshop; perhaps thinking that there wouldn't be any
children inside. But that the workshop was not at all
effected by the particular Action. (Cough)

SB: The commotion--the commotion that you heard...

JL: Yes.

SB: Can you describe that to me?

JL: Well a lot of screaming going on and Germans shout-
ing. Uh, mothers, I guess, screaming, trying to hide
or protect their children. Uh but we all ran in all
directions and uh those of us who were lucky enough
or--were--had the wits about them, like my mother did.
She got me into the workshop and I was untouched. I
don't think others faired as well even if they were
hidden because from what I understand, the Germans came
around looking through the houses and dragging out all
the children that they could find.

SB: Do you remember that night and the next day? Do
you remember sounds?--things that you heard that were
sounds.

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JL: No, no that's not vivid in my mind. I was rath--

SB: How did you feel? Were you terrified?

JL: I was scared, yes of course. I didn't know what was going on and my mother literally dragged me into the workshop. She ran as fast as you know I could barely keep up with her. Uh so the fear was there, very much so and tried to stay out of sight as much as I could in the workshop and--and--you know try and keep up with whatever work they gave me. So my brother and my father handed me some things, some tools to do. And I looked like I was belonged there. But I don't remember uh any of the specific details as we were running, the surrounding shouting and screaming and running of people, sort of like uh ca--coming past me. Uh without my having an opportunity to focus on anything because we were just looking to where we we're running to. Uh it was panic but that's basically uh all I can recall of that particular event.

SB: Okay, we have to put another roll--

(Cut)

BS: Sound roll 25. Camera roll 51 is up.

C: 4 marker.

SB: The ghetto changed toward the end after that Kinder

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Action. Were you aware of much of--were you aware of
how different it was? Can you describe that to me?

JL: I'm not quite sure uh to me it was a sequence of blurry scenes that went one place to the next to the next. Uh--

SB: There were fewer people at the end? JL: Really, there were several Actions that took place and people were taken off and shot at the uh I forget the number of the Fort it was supposed to have been. So there were clearly fewer people yes. But things seemed to have moved along where people mustering every morning to go out to work brigades and coming back at night or working at the workshop where my father uh subsequently--my brother subsequently worked. Uh, as far as I remember, that was the uh a uh ongoing routine, if you

will. Until one day uh we're made aware that we're gonna be evacuated and then move to place all over again. Uh, we didn't know where we were going to go. We didn't know where we were being taken. Apparently the adults had heard something. As a child I don't recall what uh having about the extermination camps of uh that we subsequently learned about. But uh a bunch of us--us, me and my parents and my brother as bystanders sort of, made arrangements to prevent being evacuated by hiding out in a sub-basement if you will of one of the large buildings that was there. Like a concrete building of some sort. Uh, where they dug up the dirt under the floor and uh when it became clear that uh

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people were being rounded up to be evacuated. My mother, my father and myself wound up in that basement, if you will. The basement had a trap door through which you--we came in, uh under a floor in the building. And had an exit door that was covered in dirt from the outside so it couldn't be seen. And we were, a bunch of us, families, children, whatever few children were there wound up in that uh--uh bunker, if you will--whatever you want to call it. Uh, that was a very--not only frightening but very difficult environment to be in. We were there for days. How many, I don't recall. There's no uh air. It was very hot. It was in the summer I believed. We stripped our clothing off, intentionally to be able to stay there. And the air was foul and uh there was no toilet facilities. Uh, it became very very difficult to just exist in that environment. We heard commotions outside; Germans running around shouting the Uden Roust, you know. Worstatefect and Verchaust and uh there were some children who were crying in--in the basement uh, I guess the mothers or fathers tried to shut them up so that they wouldn't be heard but apparently somebody did hear commotion or suspected one, found a trap door and dropped a grenade down. Uh, at that point everybody started screaming and uh shouting that, you know, don't shoot we're gonna come out or words to that effect. Uh, so we were all taking out from that hole in the ground, under the sub-floor of the building and uh I still remember, you know, I had barely any clothing on. Uh and we were marched off to eventually a railroad

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siting where there's some cattle cars and we're all
loaded up in the cattle cars. My father, my mother and
I--my brother was still running around somewhere in the
ghetto and we didn't know where he was and my mother
was very worried but uh just before the train was about
to--those who were about to be shot on the cattle cars,
my brother showed up and jumped on--on the train. He
was a quite, you know, a young robust guy. He was able
to maneuver quite well. And he got joined us in
the--in the train.

SB: Was the ghetto burning when you came out?

JL: Uh frankly, I don't recall. So that it does not
seem to have made an impression of me if it was because
at that time we were just worried we were going to be
shot any where from the time they got us out of the
bunker to the time they go us to the railroad siting.
It wasn't until we were essentially loaded in the
trains that uh, you know, we felt uh somewhat safe. At
least, temporarily. And everybody was looking forward
and not looking to the sides, not to make any eye-
contact with the Germans or anything like that. So uh
I don't recall my surroundings other than I was very
miserable, uncomfortable and uh half naked and uh going
into uh marched--be marched to the railroad siting.

SB: And the grenade? Had it gone off?

JL: Yes, uh at least one person was injured. But I

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/JACOB LEWIN page 21
Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley
Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:
don't know what happened to that person. Chances are
they were shot or left behind or something, don't know.

SB: Tell me more about that hiding place. Was there
light in there? Could you stand up? How big was it?

How many people were in it?

JL: From what I recall it was almost elbow to elbow full of people. Everybody who could and who knew about it and people who worked in the workshop knew about it, wanted to hide out and they ran in and there's no way to keep them out. Uh so it--it was very very tight. Uh I remember my family unit of claiming a little corner in that uh basement and uh we sort of stuck together uh close b--because there was no really room to move around. It was almost like everywhere you took a step, there's a body there. The people there with there families. As I said there was no toilet facilities in that hole. And that there was one corner where everybody relieved themselves--if they could find it and get to it in time.

SB: It was a very big hiding place.

JL: Yes it was a very large room--uh something in the order of this room here uh in size. Uh it was uh quite--quite a big--well it was prepared--it was dug up uh to make it uh house many people as possible that were on the in group of that workshop--that knew what was going on and what was being worked on. So they

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/JACOB LEWIN page 22
Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley
Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:
brought there families in there and some families got there earlier than others and so on.

SB: Do you have any idea how many people were in there?

JL: No, uh not really. If I were to guess, I would say maybe between 50 and a hundred.

SB: How could you stand up?

JL: Just in your place where you--where you were.

SB: Just sort of like a cattle car?

JL: Just like a cattle car, exactly.

SB: Was there light?

JL: No. We didn't want to put lights on a case. That

would spot it. Uh, we tried to stay as quiet as possible but I imagine there was at least one child there who was crying and eventually uh wound up having uh detected. Uh so, it was--it never intended to be of such a long term stay. We thought the Germans would come, take everybody out and in a day or two they would be gone and we would be freed. But it was we stayed over much longer than anybody had anticipated and that was not prepared for that kind of a long stay.

SB: Was there food?

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/JACOB LEWIN page 23
Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley
Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

JL: No. Whatever you had with you is what you had. Literally came with your body and whatever you had in your hands and pockets. That's it.

SB: No food, no water?

JL: No.

SB: Do you--do you ever remember having a run in with any uh of the Jewish police, the ghetto police or did they ever help you?

JL: Neither help nor run in. I was kid just staying out of trouble as much as possible.

SB: And was your mother sort of a hero to--did she put all of her energy into saving you and your brother?

JL: Yep. (Crying)

(Cut)

JL: Anyway.

(Cut)

JL: She was the brains in the family, essentially. Uh, she was able to sustain all of us.

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/JACOB LEWIN page 24
Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley
Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:
SB: Let's wait for a minute and get another roll on and
talk a little about--

(Cut)

(Sound Roll 25 Next)

BS: Wentworth Films. Kovno Ghetto project. Sound roll
25 continued. Camera roll number 52 at the head.
Interview continued with Jacob Lewin. 5-7-97.

(Cut)

C: 52, marker 5. SB: Can you, as if you haven't already
told me about that hiding place, describe to me the end
again and the hiding place and what happened there.

JL: We...I was mentioning, that hiding place was pre-
pared ahead of time as uh when--when we got wind that
there's gonna be an evacuation. The Russian army was
getting close and the Germans were going to evacuate
all of us out of Lithuania. So in preparation for it,
dug this sub-basement uh--uh and the entrance to it was
through a trap door in the building. It was hidden.
And uh there was one other--a door in the uh basement,
in the side of the room but it was covered on the
outside by dirt so that it would not be detected as a
door. And uh when things became more imminent or
families uh all those that were in on that particular
hiding place were uh came over--and came in there and

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/JACOB LEWIN page 25
Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley
Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:
uh we wound up uh--uh in a room full of people--fairly
large number of people at that. My father, my mother
and I--and my brother was not with us at the time uh I
don't know where he was but he was somewhere in the
ghetto roaming around on his own. Uh we were in that
room for a number of days uh perhaps a week or longer.
It was extremely hot uh and uh foul air. There was no

toilet facilities in there. People use to have to relieve themselves went to one corner and relieve themselves there and uh cover it up I guess the with the--the dirt in the basement uh. Uh it got so hot that everybody took their clothes off, just about. And we were uh half naked in there. It was uh dark uh I guess the primary reason was because we didn't want to be detected some how by a crack of light coming out at night so the Germans could spot us. Uh and we sat there for uh days I said. Uh shouting going on all around. Uh the Germans uh shouting at uh all the Jews, all the Udenroust. Uh and uh we heard shots outside and uh--uh we stayed there until--you know the baby but it starts crying and the parent tried to shut the baby up but apparently uh a German cause whoever heard it, and they found the trap door and dropped a grenade and uh when the grenade exploded it injured one of the people who stood nearest the trapdoor. Everyone started shouting and of course we were discovered. And uh we opened up the side door and started coming out. We were--were was it semi-dressed or uh. Uh and uh we're rounded up--lined up and--and marched off from that uh place, eventually to a railroad siting where we were

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/JACOB LEWIN page 26
Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley
Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:
all loaded up in cattle cars. Uh, my brother--my brother was still not there but uh my father, my mother and I were in one of the cattle cars and uh--and my brother showed up and ran from cattle car to cattle car looking for us and when he found us, he hopped on and we were all on the cattle car being take out of Lithuania. Uh that was basically one of the uh scariest times, if you will, for me personally. Uh, although I've been scared before in the actions that we spoke about earlier. Uh, this was very frightening especially when the grenade went off and we thought we were all going to be shot. Uh, that's basically all I can remember of--of--of that particular event. But it was uh perhaps the most dramatic event for me, at the time, as a child.

SB: And do you think you could talk a bit about what you're--how you mother worked to save the family?

JL: Yes, my mother uh--uh was pretty much uh the brain in--in--in the business and in the family. She was not

Semitic looking. Uh light haired and uh spoke uh Russian, Polish, Lithuanian, German, and uh she was able to sustain us uh by sneaking out of the barbed wire fence in the middle of the night and visiting farmers in this outskirts of the ghetto. (Cough) And uh bartering and trading clothing and or pieced of jewelry for food. Nobody had butter for example. Uh we had butter cuz she was able to get it from uh the peasants, the farmers. Uh, uh nobody--I shouldn't say

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/JACOB LEWIN page 27
Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley
Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:
nobody but uh we wound up having uh pork, for example uh cause there was hardly any meat in the uh ghetto and from the rations that I recall. We were getting bread and maybe some margarine and maybe some marmalade or something and some potatoes. Uh, so uh she was uh--she did uh--quite often at the risk of her life and managed to come back every morning with a bundle of food for us. Uh she was uh--uh obviously awaring--alert to us what was going on and able to uh win over quite well under the circumstances. Uh and I believe that uh from a physical stand point and health stand point uh she was responsible for us being in reasonably good shape. At the end of the ghetto period, when we were taken to concentration camps, subsequently, still survive the concentration camps. Many people uh didn't quite make it because of poor nutrition, poor food and health reasons in the because the way we were able to sustain ourselves, I think we made it to uh--uh perhaps we had a little bit uh--uh my father, mother, my--my brother and I all survived uh the Holocaust and were liberated in Austria and Germany. So that uh I believe that she was the main contributor to our well being.

SB: She sent you uh packing with cotton in your boots or something?

JL: Yes. She uh--I was small stature. As a kid, I was not very large and I'm only 5'5" now. Or I was 5'5" a few years ago. Uh, so uh she felt if I looked bigger and taller that I would uh do a little bit better. So

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/JACOB LEWIN page 28
Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley
Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:
I had boots, ankle boots and she made me put cotton in
the boots--in the heels to raise me by a couple inches.
And I wore those boots throughout the concentration
camp and I believe that eh at least in one of the
concentration camp help me survive.SB: And you were on
uh--riding down the road on trucks to the boats when
you reunited with your brother.

JL: After liberation in Austria, there were--there were
a hundred and fifty Lithuanian kids who wound up uh
from the Kovno ghetto uh in--in Lansbury which is near
Dakaw and taken from Dakaw to Auschwitz and subsequent-
ly--matter of fact there are about 50 of us survived
out of the hundred and fifty. Uh most of us found
ourselves in the uh--uh town called Welles, Austria.
And we were rounded up by the U.S. authorities and uh
put into a barracks--it use to be a German barracks.
And a couple months later the Haganah showed up and I
says, 'We want to go to Lithuania,' or Palestine at the
time . And of course we had no knowledge of any family
relationship or existence or anything. We were all on
our own, uh we were--we said fine, you know, let's go.
So they pull some trucks, in the kind of a maybe six or
eight military trucks with the tarp over the top but
the front of the tarp was open and I was standing at
the head right over the driver's uh cabin. And uh the
convoy had stopped on a highway in Austria. I believe
there was a problem with a woman who had fainted or
something. Uh, so the whole convoy came to a halt and
as I was standing there uh looking down the road,

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/JACOB LEWIN page 29
Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley
Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:
(Crying) I saw my--I saw my brother coming and I spot-
ted him. He took me off the truck and I didn't know
that either he or--or my father or anybody survived so
that uh he took me off the truck and took me back to
where my father was which was Munich at the time. Uh,
the rest of the convoy went on to the uh ships like the
Haganah. Now the uh the edge of the ship--the famous
story uh to uh immigrate legally into a Palestine.
That's why I wound up in Munich and eventually the

United States, instead of winding up in Israel. Uh, my mother is still not know of at the time and uh we lived in--in the Falofin DP camp for a while and then we had an apartment in Munich, afterwards. About a year or so later, a knock on the door and I open up the door and there was my mother. (Crying) So anyway all were (Cough) reunited in '46 or so and the rest is history. As they say.

SB: Thank you.

JL: Okay.

(Long Beep)

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