

Unauthenticated
Interview with Matvey Gredinger
March, 1992
Brooklyn, New York

- Q: Interview done in March, 1992 by Tony Young through an interpreter.
- A: He was born in 1921, June 2nd.
- Q: Can you ask him a little bit about his family and what it was like growing up in Moldavia, just ask him how many brothers and sisters he had, what his family was like, what his father did for a living, that kind of thing?
- A: His father was a butcher. Kosher, chicken. Three children, he was the eldest. Two sisters and she's the youngest.
- Q: Does he remember anything about the town he lived in, anything striking, what the town was like, how many Jews lived there, that kind of thing?
- A: 500 families, Jewish families. He finished seven grades.
- Q: Did he go to public or a private school?
- A: Public school, they didn't pay anything for him.
- Q: Did he also go to a Jewish school or no?
- A: In public school they studied Hebrew and Jewish religion, everything.
- Q: Does he remember any instances of anti-Semitism when he was growing up?
- A: There were anti-Semitic groups.
- Q: Were there pogroms in the area?
- A: In those days, there were no pogroms, before war.
- Q: Tell him I'm sorry, I have to ask this but does he remember anything that they did to Jews like, I know in some places people threw rocks through windows and things like that. Did things like that happen?
- A: There were and some people were wounded. There were small pogroms.
- Q: Small groups?
- A: Not general. _____, incidents.
- Q: Was he ever involved in any? Did anyone try to beat him up or attack him?

- A: It was very small and there were no such incidents because mostly Jews lived there, but in big places, major places there were incidents.
- Q: Does he remember anything about when the Nazis came to power in Germany, did they know in the town, were the people aware of what was going on in Germany, the Nazis started many laws against Jews and things like that, did they know anything about that?
- A: They found it out like in 1938 --1939, but before that they didn't know if it was_____.
- Q: I know that I've interviewed people in Poland who said that German families, Jewish families, would come through, you know, trying to get away from the Nazis. Did they have any contact with people who were running away?
- A: No.
- Q: Let's see. As I recall, the Nazis, I'm sorry, the Russians, when the war started in Poland in September in 1939. The Russians seized Moldovia. Can you tell me a little bit about that?
- A: _____, Romania, she was working there. Moldovia was Romanian territory. In 1940 he visited his parents, in 1940 they lived in a different village. They moved from Vertujeni to Versoka.
- Q: So that's where his family lived, in Versoka?
- A: Yes. His parents were killed in this place.
- Q: Let me ask you, let me step back a little bit. He said he was working in Bucharest. When did he leave for Bucharest from his home?
- A: June 14.
- Q: What kind of work was he doing?
- A: Fabric, textile.
- Q: Textile fabric, so he was in Versoka when the Russians came in?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Can he explain what happened when the Russians came in. Did life change very much for his family?
- A: They were in Versoka in 1941, less than a year. They started doing things like they did, in Russia. KGB . People who had a lot of money, they sent them to Siberia, took away their property.
- Q: They seized property and nationalized businesses, is that what happened?
- A: Yes. Even now, no one knows where those people are.

Q: The ones they sent to Siberia?

A: Yes.

Q: Can you ask him, when the war started in September of 1939 when the Germans invade Poland, was he in Bucharest then?

A: Yes, he was in Bucharest, Romania, but they consider the beginning of the war in 1941, in Romania. The Russians were in Moldavia, Bessarabia, from 1940 to 1941, when the war started.

Q: But they weren't overly concerned that the Germans had invaded Poland? I'm trying to see if that worried them at all.

A: Russians and Germans, they divided Poland in half. The Russians took the Baltic States, half of Poland and they were not concerned about that. They knew about it. _____ apart between Russia and Germany, they would divide Poland. They were not concerned about it. They didn't see it as the beginning of the war.

Q: Can you tell me when the war broke out with the Soviet Union in 1941 between the Germans and the Soviet Union, where was he?

A: Versoka.

Q: Does he remember what happened when the invasion started? I know the war started June 22nd, 1941. How long after that did the Germans get to the town of Versoka? When did they enter the town of Versoka?

A: The Germans got there August 13th.

Q: August 13th. What did they do when they got there?

A: The Germans came and right away they began shooting people. Jewish people. Executing them. And the Romanian, normal people, that lived there.

Q: The non-Jews?

A: The non-Jews, they came with the Germans in every home and they were pointing out Jews so the Germans could shoot them. He was selected first. His family locked themselves in the house to protect and the Germans broke in and they took him and shot him and the bullet got in his neck, through his neck.

Q: What did he do?

A: He was unconscious. His mother came out of the house and she saw that he is lying on the street of the block and the Germans shot her outside the house, right away. His father was killed inside the house. Many Jews were killed. He pretended he was killed. They put matches in his nose to see if he was alive. He kept pretending he was dead and they put rocks on him to

bury him because it was raining. Non-Jews_____ took all their things from their homes.

Q: From their houses?

A: Yes. And when turned dark at night he got up and he was walking all night through the forest, all night, and he got to the village Guritz and the Romanians were not there yet, the Germans.

Q: The Germans hadn't gotten there yet?

A: He went to the doctor and he

Q: Helped?

A: Yes. On the same day, the very same day, the Germans came to the village, Guritza.

Q: Guritza. Can you spell it for me?

A: I don't know how to spell it. I think it is Sguritsa.

Q: I'll look it up, that's o.k.

Let me go back just a little bit. When the Germans came in and started shooting these people, did they somehow choose these people or did they just go around, find any Jews they could find? What I mean, did they have lists where they were looking for certain people or was it just random?

A: Just Romanians, not Germans.

Q: So no Romanians were shooting people?

A: _____ {can't understand} They didn't have any list. If they find a Jew, they shoot.

Q: Whoever they found. In Versoka, I know he told me about his hometown. How big was Versoka, how big was the town?

A: Approximately a thousand and a half. All the Jews, including his parents, were buried in the place where cows were buried, dead cows. And they don't know where it is.

Q: O.K. After he gets to Sguritska, what does he do after that? You said the Germans got there the next day, the Germans came to that town. What happened then, what did he do, the Romanians? What happened after that?

A: They gathered all the Jewish population and they chose girls and they raped them. Romanians.

Q: The Romanians did this?

A: Yes.

Q: What did he do?

- A: He was wounded and he was at this place where the Romanians gathered all the Jews. It was like in the yard.
- Q: Was it in a back yard, in a market place or something? Was that where they gathered them?
- A: It was like a bowie, like a home.
- Q: How many Jews were there approximately?
- A: A couple thousand. And the next day the population, they moved them.
- Q: So they were there all night?
- A: And the next day the Germans, the Romanians, began to move them through Moldavia.
- Q: Did they tell them where they were taking them?
- A: They didn't tell them. They didn't give them any water, any food, they were beaten and the ones who got weakened couldn't walk, couldn't move, they just shot them.
- Q: How long did this go on, how long did they march them?
- A: A week, approximately a week.
- Q: Without food or water?
- A: Yes. Romanians, the population wanted to help, to give them food and water but soldiers they just beat them and after a week they got to Soroka,
- Q: By this time they haven't seen any Germans, just Romanians?
- A: There were Germans but they didn't interfere.
- Q: They were just observing?
- A: Right.
- Q: So they come to this town, what happens then? Soroka.
- A: In Soroka, they were gathered in the synagogue. And from Soroka, thousands and thousands of Jews were marched to Vertajan.
- Q: So there were more Jews in Soroka and they were added to.
- A: In Vertajan there was a concentration camp.
- Q: Okay.

- A: They marched them there, to Vertajan.
- A: In Vertajan, hundreds and hundreds of Jews every day they died. They were buried in big holes.
- Q: I'm sorry. How were they killed? Were people just taken out and shot or were they killed because they were working? You know what I mean, the Jews that were in the camp? He said that hundreds of people died --.
- A: From hunger.
- Q: And these were still Romanians that were guarding the camp?
- A: These were still Romanians but after that Germans came. He said that in these walls there were more than 20 thousand people.
- Q: When he gets to the camp, about what period are we talking about? Is it still in August of 1941? What's the date, does he remember?
- A: End of September. He has a sister in this camp.
- Q: Can you ask him, if he remembers, if he can explain to me in a little bit of detail what the camp was like, how it was guarded, was there a fence around it, what kind of fence, what kind of barracks they lived in, that kind of thing?
- A: There were many guards and metal cord.
- Q: Like barbed wire or something like that?
- A: Yes, I think so and a lot of guards.
- Q: And these were some Germans and some Romanians?
- A: Mostly Romanians but some Germans. They made them carry rocks to build a road.
- Q: They had work details, is that what these were, they made them go out to build roads, is that what they were doing?
- A: Yes. They didn't give them any food and they were beaten all the time. The Germans were_____, they commanded everything. The Germans told the Romanians what to do.
- Q: Were there barracks there, did they keep them in barracks or were there any structures for them to stay in or did they stay outside?
- A: Just like a ghetto. So there were houses. In one house, there were 60 people.
- Q: Okay, so this was in the city. It was like a camp but more like a ghetto.
- A: Yes, labor camp. They didn't build any structures, so they kept them in the houses. 60 people in one house. Then they began sending them to the Ukraine, march to Ukraine.

Q: Were they all sent at once?

A: They went to the river. In Ukraine, they were on_____.

Q: Did they take them all at once or were they group by group?

A: Group by group.

Q: Where did they take them to in the Ukraine, does he remember?

A: To Manyorka.

Q: And what year was this?

A: 1941.

Q: Still 1941? Does he remember the month?

A: September. First he was sent to Peryonmisk, and then to Manyorka.

Q: How long was he in Peryonmisk?

A: Three weeks. And then he and his wife were marched to Manyorka.

Q: Can he tell me about Demanyorka, what was it like. Was it a camp or was it a ghetto, what was it like?

A: It was a concentration camp.

Q: And Germans were there, no Romanians, right?

A: Only Germans. He was working on a farm.

Q: What was the camp like? Was there barbed wire around it? Were there barracks, where did they stay, that kind of thing?

A: Thousands of Jews were thrown in holes.

Q: They were shot and thrown in or?

A: Just thrown in. 1,000 Jews were killed in Demanyorka. And it was with wire and they lived in a place where swine used to live.

Q: And the pigs. Were they the only people who were in that camp, the people who were marched from Romania or were there also Russians there? Who else was in that camp?

A: There were also Romanian Jews. Moravian Jews, Ukrainian Jews. And even political prisoners who were against the regime of Hitler.

Q: Does he remember if there were any Soviet prisoners of war there?

A: No, just Jews.

Q: When he worked on the farm, what did he do?

A: In the field.

Q: Was the farm close to the camp?

A: They had to walk a couple of miles to the farm. The ones who couldn't walk, who were weak or sick, they just shot them.

Q: What did they feed them here?

A: They fed them once a day and for instance, a cow that died on the field, just died by itself, they cooked it.

Q: Was he able, because he worked in the field, was he able to get any food and take things and hide them in the camp?

A: Just like wheat.

Q: How long was he here, in this camp?

A: Two years. And then he was taken to Vervaris. Nickolias. The beach.

Q: And this was when, in 1943?

A: 1943-1944.

Q: Before we get to that, let me ask you, did people try to escape from Demanorka?

A: He doesn't know. He was so weak that he couldn't think about escape, from hunger. They were taken to build bridges across Borg.

Q: It's in Poland.

A: It's also in Ukraine. And they were put in barracks. They slept in barracks, like a grass and if someone wanted to go during the night to the bathroom, the guard would say, o.k. you can go and then he shot them.

Q: How did they get to Nickolias? Did they go by train or did they march them?

A: They march.

Q: This was in 1943. Does he remember what time of year it was? Was it spring or summer?

A: October.

Q: What exactly did he do, oh go on.

A: In the _____ the brook got frozen, the water got frozen and some small ships were stuck in the water so some Germans sent some to break the ice but the ice was still very thin and he got under the ice, he fall. And they took him out with the hooks.

Q: So they reached down in the water and got him with the hooks.

A: The Germans didn't care about them. There were only Germans.

Q: Go ahead.

A: When they got him out of the river, he was all wet and he went to the barber shop to dry his clothes and himself, and the barber gave him a piece of bread. When he got back to the camp, very early in the morning, they got them out of the camp, they gathered them together, surrounded them with dogs and they were ten people that wanted to go home and they took them and hung up all of them. And one person, the thing,

Q: The noose?

A: Yes, it broke -- the second time it broke and the third time.

Q: So he fell twice before they actually hung him?

A: Yes. These dead people were hanging for a couple of days so everyone could see what would happen to him if he wanted to go home.

Q: Did these people ask to go home? I mean did they request to be sent home by the Germans? I mean, why were they chosen out?? How did the Germans know they wanted to go home? Obviously, everyone wanted to go home.

A: They chose them.

Q: Let me go back a little bit. You said they were building a bridge there. Exactly what did he do in his job?

A: It was a wooden bridge. He was carrying blocks. One of his friends fell off the bridge.

Q: Into the water?

A: Fell off the bridge on the rocks and he broke both legs and the Germans shot him. He gets swollen from hunger. He was sent back to Denamorka.

Q: Again, was he marched back to Denamorka?

A: He just walked by himself.

Q: Oh. He escaped from the camp, from Nickolia?

A: The Russians were getting closer.

Q So the Germans were with him, they guarded him?

A: He was given to Romanians.

Q: So they took him back to Denamorka?

A: Yes.

Q: How long was he in Nickolia?

A: Four to five months. The beginning of 1944.

Q: He came to Denamorka? Okay, and what was he doing there? What happened after that?

A: He got some kind of_____.

Q: In the camp?

A: Again, the Romanians were there, not Germans, and as the Russians got closer, the Romanians treated the Jews better and they put him in the hospital. They were afraid of the Russians, they wanted to go on their side.

Q: Did they retreat at all because the Russians were coming? Did they move the camp away?

A: No.

Q: So what happened after that in 1944, he was in the hospital?

A: He went to Veramisk to his wife.

Q: So they let him go from the camp?

A: Yes. The Romanians. They just released him because the Russians got closer and closer.

Q: And when they got to Veramisk, what happened?

A: He shout. In 1943, their daughter was born.

Q: In 1943? In Veramisk?

A: In Veramisk.

Q: When were they married?

A: In 1943t ,hey got married officially, she took his name.

Q: Did they stay in Veramisk in 1944?

A: The head of this farm, he was a Romanian, and as the Russians got closer he wanted to go to Romania he wanted to go to Romania and take all the Jews with him. He wanted to please both sides and Russians came first, he would show them he is very kind but if the Germans come first, he would say that he didn't release them.

Q: So they were with this man, this farmer?

A: He wasn't a farmer, he was a head of the farm.

Q: Like an administrator or something?

A: Yes. He took them across the Anesta and didn't tell Germans they were Jews, because Germans were in Anesta, because Germans control Anesta. He took them to Moldava. And from there, they escaped.

Q: They escaped from him?

A: Yes. They didn't release them. He didn't let them go, three of them. They changed their name, last name to Moldana and they were hiding in homes so everyone thought that they weren't Jews, that they were Moldavian.

Q: Did they just move into a house or did they know people there they moved in with?

A: He asked this man to stay in this house, it was where he kept food for his cows and all and they stayed there. He thought they were Moldavians, until someone found out they were Jews.

Q: How did he find out?

A: When someone asked where they were from, they named a village where everyone, all the population was moved away by Germans because line of front was in this village, so they named this village so they named this village because everyone was moved from this village, they chose this village. And there were many people from this village and one of them began asking questions, where did they live and they couldn't answer them. So she decided they were Jews and she went to police.

Q: What happened?

A: They came and arrested them.

Q: These were Romanian police?

A: Romanian police. The Germans were there, in command.

Q: I don't think we ever established where in fact, we knew they came from out to Moldavia but what was the name of this town that they were in at this time?

A: Larga.

Q: So after they were arrested, what happened?

A: They thought that they were spies, they were searching them for weapons. They thought that they were spies. They were threatening that they would shoot them. Then they were marching them to some new organized camp with stops in every office, police office.

Q: To Bulgaria?

A: No, to Bolgard. It was a temporary camp.

Q: This was in 1944, do you know the month?

A: March. It was a temporary camp. Jews from all over. Romania. That escaped from different camps. As the Russians got closer, they were marched to Comrat.

Q: This is another camp?

A: Yes, yes. And then Russians came and liberated them.

Q: When was this?

A: April, 1944, they don't remember exactly. They didn't know where to go. They decided to go to Soroki.

Q: Why did they decide to go there?

A: Because it was close to the place where he used to live before the war. In Soroki he met his sister. She was in a camp too. She was in_____. The Russians wanted to take him to the army. He got sick, he had malaria. He was ready to go but suddenly he got malaria and he didn't go. And the Romanian people, these people who pointed out Jewish population, when the Russians came, they escaped to Romania and Romanians, they were on the side of the Russians, they sent them back to Moldavia. And there, he found out about it, and he went to Russians and he said that these people were shooting Jews and there was a big trial and he was a witness and these people were sent to Siberia.

Q: When did this happen?

A: 1945. It was like a military trial.

Q: So. In April 1944 they were released, liberated by the Red army and so they remained in Visoka after that?

A: They were liberated in Comrat and then they went to Soroka.

Q: And then they stayed there?

A: In 1945 they moved to Chanofsy, and lived there until they moved to_____.

Q: And you came to America in 1990, right?

A: Yes. In 1947 there was a big hunger, they didn't have anything to eat. He had a few packets of cigarettes so he wanted to sell them to buy some bread for his family. He got arrested. He was sent to Siberia for three years, He was cutting down the trees for two years. It was 40 degrees below zero in celsius, Fahrenheit, more or less. Very cold. On his way to prison, on the train they fed them with salty fish, very salty. They went to one camp and the Germans went to other camps with Russians. He was still very sick. He got swollen again. He was put in hospital in_____. He stayed in hospital for months. And when he go to Siberia, they were put in barracks and he was working 1-1 hours a day. The work was so hard that many prisoners would cut off their hands.

Q: So they wouldn't have to work?

A: Yes. These woods were going to other countries, across the border. They were exported to other countries. Many prisoners, they would write with their blood about the life in_____camp. Some foreigners would read it. It was no better than German camp. Except there were not Jews but everyone, Russians, Ukrainians, from Baltic states. He was there for two years and then he got back to_____, worked in textile factory for 32 years.

Q: And then he came to America in 1990?

A: He left for America in 1989.

Q: And they said they went to Austria?

A: Austria, Italy.

Q: And then they came here?

A: First Czechoslovakia, for a couple of hours.

Q: You came also (to the interpreter), you came at that time?

A: Yes, me, my mother. Austria, Italy, Czechoslovakia for a couple of hours. In Austria, we were two months, in Italy, we were two months.

Q: Do you remember what month it was in 1990 you came?

A: April, April 3rd. In December 22, 1918, I left America (?)

Q: Tell him that's all the questions I have, if he wants to say anything else?

A: They are happy in America. He goes to synagogue two times a day, he can do it freely.`